

## GHANAIAN METHODIST SPIRITUALITY IN RELATION WITH NEO- PENTECOSTALISM

---

**Doris E. Yalley**

**Abstract:** *Contemporary Ghanaian Methodist spirituality exhibits varied religious tendencies. A cursory look at some activities which take place at the Church's prayer centres reveals worship patterns of the historical Wesleyan Tradition, patterns of the Pentecostal and Neo-Charismatic. To understand how worship patterns promote harmonious religious environments for members of the Church, the study examined some of the practices which could have possibly informed such religious expressions within the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG). The findings revealed a religious disposition fashioned to reflect the Church's foundational heritage, tempered with ecumenical models integrated to address the Ghanaian cultural context.*

**Keywords:** Wesleyan Spirituality, Neo-Pentecostalism, Ghanaian Methodism

### **Introduction**

A careful examination of the contemporary Ghanaian Methodist religious scene reveals varied worship patterns.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon raises the question whether the contemporary liturgical praxis is a rebirth of the historical Wesleyan Tradition or a manifestation of the Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal waves blowing over the Ghanaian religious scene, or a 'locally brewed' spirituality emerging from Indigenous Ghanaian cultures.

This paper argues that the Wesleyan Tradition practised by the founding Fathers can be described as 'Pentecostal.' Furthermore, against the view of some Ghanaian Methodists, including a former Director of the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP), that the MCG has compromised its Wesleyan identity, a three-fold aim is pursued:

- a) To evaluate the nature of Methodism in contemporary Ghana;
- b) To examine the vision and mission of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS);

---

<sup>1</sup> The Church is one of the largest and oldest denomination in Ghana, birthed out of the early Christian missionary activities in the then Gold Coast in the year 1835.

- c) To analyse the orientation undergirding the Church's philosophy of being relevant in contemporary times whilst remaining uniquely Wesleyan.

Data for the study was collected between 2011 and 2013.<sup>2</sup> Using participant observation approach, three visits were made to the Abasua Prayer Centre (APC) during the annual pilgrimages and a visit each to the Thomas Birch Freeman Centre (TBFC) and the William de-Graft Memorial Centre (WdGC). The survey period was structured within a three-year study period. The time frame enabled the researcher to observe various activities carried out at these sites. The target populations were the MCG and the local communities where the prayer centres were located. The selected Methodist Churches were among those which regularly participated in 'Connexional' annual pilgrimages.

The methodological framework undergirding the research approach was Michael Downey's Appropriative Method, which offers the most essential tool for this discussion. The steps outlined in his methodological approach namely, understanding, interpreting the meanings, purposes and values of the views are in accord with the concerns expressed in this paper.

### **Understanding Christian Spirituality**

Christian spirituality in this discussion is understood as a godly quest, or desire to get to know God better and to live out the sense of the sacred in relationship with others.<sup>3</sup> The term evokes "a personal, intuitive, experiential involvement with the divine, the supernatural, or the universe." Geoffrey Wainwright in *The Study of spirituality* asserts that spirituality is the combination of praying and Christian living contrasted with secular life. J. Townroe from the same source also asserts that an individual's spiritual development means growth towards a fuller union with God through prayer. This is a development which is in conformity with God's will and ultimately leads to growth in our mutual relationships towards one another. These views, in their emphasis on closer

---

<sup>2</sup> The paper is based on the writer's PhD thesis. See D.E. Yalley, "Sacred Site Visitation and the Renewal Programme of the Methodist Church Ghana" (PhD Thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 30

relationship with God and cordial human interaction, are fundamental to the Methodist teaching on Christianity as social religion.<sup>4</sup>

In Methodism, Christian spirituality is a state whereby an individual is in a vertical relation with his Maker, builds a harmonious relationship with others, and makes Christ known. Studying the spirituality of Christians entails observing both their individual lifestyles and their public worship and sometimes how this lifestyle influences or impacts the lives of the observing community. In the next section, the lifestyle of the founding fathers is discussed as basis of their spirituality and lessons for contemporary Wesleyans.

### **Roots and Elements of Wesleyan Spirituality**

Technically, the term Methodist originated with the Oxford reformers during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century as a pejorative college nickname for a group which was characterized by rigid ascetic and methodical lifestyle. Beginning in 1729, the movement met every week, fasted regularly, abstained from most forms of amusement and luxurious life styles. Their style of worship was inspirational; bringing renewal and revitalization of the divine knowledge, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit into the inner life of the Christian community, and demonstrating gifting of revelation, prophecies, and miracles, among others.<sup>5</sup>

Those who became involved in this ministry were empowered to evangelize, and they established Methodist societies wherever they went. They organized “strong evangelistic revivals, which caught up like wild fire”.<sup>6</sup> An initial desire to seek reforms within the Church consequently spread over the whole of England.

### **Wesleyan Beliefs and Practices**

In terms of doctrine, John Wesley, the founder, wielded the Church with his evangelical faith. First as an Anglican, he was quite adept in his High-Church ideology. He also espoused some tenets of Catholicism, Lutheranism as well as some ideals of the Eastern Church Fathers,

---

<sup>4</sup> See Casely B. Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian. A History of the Methodist Church Ghana, 1961-2000* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> These practices were believed to have been present in the early Church but were either non-existent in the Church of England or considered irrelevant.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Boafo, *John Wesley on the Road to Aldersgate* (Accra: Methodist Book Depot, 2006), x

especially from Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocia fathers of the fourth century.<sup>7</sup>

On matters of religious experience, John Wesley was influenced in no small measure by the Cambridge Platonists (Neo-Platonists), who were mystics. Emerging within the first half of the seventeenth century, they balanced their faith with reason; but asserted that the two were not dichotomous; consequently, portraying some level-headedness in their spiritual lives. Their writings led Wesley to read St. Thomas à Kempis's *Imitations of Christ*, which he recommended to all Methodists.<sup>8</sup> Another great influence was William Law, whose 'ideals' and 'method' of Christian devotion he greatly espoused.<sup>9</sup>

The question has always been asked whether John Wesley was a mystic too, since both the Neo-Platonists and William Law were mystics. Wesley refuted any leanings with mysticism, but David Lowe saw the Methodists as mystics.<sup>10</sup> Though Wesley denied being a mystic he could not have denied being an enthusiast.<sup>11</sup> To say the least, John Wesley carefully balanced his emotional sentiments with reason.<sup>12</sup>

He was eclectic in matters of doctrine; sharing views that were in conformity with his own doctrinal position. Furthermore, through his versatility and rich exposure, he was able to bring to bear on Methodism a vast array of ideas. All of this indicate that Methodism under Wesley was a blend of diverse religious views, but greatly spiced by the religiosity of the early Church fathers, whilst Anglicanism remained the larger crucible into which all these traditions and doctrines were garnered. Could not all of this explain the complex nature of the MCG's spirituality today, if indeed they are to be shaped by their heritage? And

---

<sup>7</sup> W.H. Bevins, "A Pentecostal Appropriation of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 2 (2006): 229-246. doi: 10.1177/0966736906062134. See also, John Bailie, "The Impact of Liberation." Bailie shows the extent to which John Wesley as a scholar became influenced by the great institutions he was acquainted with.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald R. Craig, *The Church and the Age of Reason 1648–1789* (London: Penguin, 1970), 37–43. See also, John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd edn. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), I, 37-79.

<sup>9</sup> William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Albany, OR: Sage Software, 1996), 8. See also, G.W. Taylor, *Project Canterbury, John Wesley and the Anglo-Catholic Revival* (London: SPCK, 1905).

<sup>10</sup> David Lowes Watson, "Methodist Spirituality," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, Kenneth J. Collins, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 172–213.

<sup>11</sup> Bevins, "A Pentecostal Appropriation," 229-246.

<sup>12</sup> *The Works of Wesley*, 1: 170. There is evidence in the accounts of Wesley that the early Wesleyan Methodist were enthusiastic.

yes of course, Wesley insisted that all Methodists fashioned out ‘right belief’, ‘right practice’ and ‘right relations’. The holiness agenda was contingent upon these three Rs<sup>13</sup>.

The Wesleyan doctrine would not be complete without these other significant doctrines of entire sanctification, perfectionism and Armenianism. Entire sanctification is explained as an intense personal experience confronting the Christian with the presence of God; a post conversion experience that allows a Christian to live a sinless life.<sup>14</sup> It was the Methodist second blessing described as ‘perfect love’, ‘Christian perfection’ and ‘heart purity’ all in relation to the idea of an experience which perfectly sanctified the believer. John Fletcher, who deputized for John Wesley, referred to this experience as “baptism in the Holy Spirit” which brought power as well as cleansing.<sup>15</sup>

The question is whether all Methodists conform to this rich store of biblical insights. Were the Methodists found as true believers who continually worked out their salvation, built their faith, prayed in the Spirit, dwelt in God’s love, waited for God’s mercy and convinced others about the truth as spelt out in the afore-mentioned doctrines? Perhaps, they did this to a very large extent. That is why eventually the global missions began.

Related to the above is the concept of ‘Sacramental Means of Grace’, which form the basis of Instituted Means of Grace (IMG) and Prudential Means of Grace (PMG) in the Wesleyan practice. The IMG is identified with the Eucharist, prayer, fasting, scripture and Christian relation.<sup>16</sup> The PMG is considered circumstantial and contextual, intended to address direct needs as and when they occurred. They are opportunities offered beside the instituted means of grace to operate throughout the Methodist communities in accordance with the prevailing cultures. In observing these, Methodists would find grace and obtain blessings from God. But they needed also to know that the practices were not ends in themselves; they pointed out to Jesus Christ as the ultimate goal of salvation.

---

<sup>13</sup> The holiness concept will be taken up in due course.

<sup>14</sup> S.J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 133.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003), 206–214.

<sup>16</sup> *The Works of Wesley*, 8: 323–324.

The Holy Spirit operates through them to bring power in the souls of believers. They bring about full salvation even to those who are yet to experience salvation.<sup>17</sup> Scripture as an IMG for instance, spoke to life at all levels of existence, in its reading and proclamation. Whilst studying scripture, Wesley would first turn to divine guidance, compare a text with similar parallel passages, meditate upon it and consult other commentaries written by the more seasoned people. In fact, he was deeply concerned that in the study of the bible the meaning of each text would be accessible, so he wrote explanatory notes on each text.

### **Wesleyan Methodist Society (WMMS)**

The beginnings of the missionary activities of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), the movement that birthed the Wesleyan Methodist Church (WMC) in Ghana are briefly reviewed here. Doing so is basically an attempt to examine the goals and aspirations of the pioneering missionaries, and to show how impacting their aspirations have been on the Ghanaian situation.

The Wesleyan Mission (WM) before launching into the colonies of the British Isles was under the leadership of Sir Thomas Coke (1747–814). During the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, Coke launched a missionary support agenda which covered “heathens of all ethnic backgrounds.”<sup>18</sup> This was prior to the formation of the WMMS, birthed some thirty years later in a district meeting at Leeds in 1813. George Morley was the accredited founder of the WMMS.<sup>19</sup> It was the time in Britain’s history when the English Crown had issued a request for missions to ‘Christianize and civilize’ lands and territories under the English Crown.<sup>20</sup> It was a timely opportunity for the Methodists to fulfil their part of the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 18-20) and to realize the founder’s vision of social reforms as well as his missionary agenda.<sup>21</sup> In the light of this vision and mission, Methodists were to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 16: 1771.

<sup>18</sup> N. Allen Birtwhistle, “Methodist Missions,” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, eds. Rupert E. Davies, et al. (London: Epworth, 1983), iii: 1–116.

<sup>19</sup> School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, *Minutes of the WMMS Home and general, 1798–1837*, Box 1, 4 June 1828

<sup>20</sup> John Bowle, *The English Experience: A Survey of English History from Earliest Times to the End of Empire* (London: Phoenix, 1971), 358–361, 390, 430–433.

<sup>21</sup> *The Works of Wesley*, viii: 299. “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preacher called Methodists? Not to form any new sect; to reform the nation, particularly the

Wesley himself was an avowed social reformer. This is amply attested to in his sermons.<sup>22</sup> He set up orphanages, also boarding facilities which offered free education, free meals and lodgings for the poor in the society. Furthermore, to be effective in the missionary agenda of spreading scriptural holiness, Methodist missionaries were enjoined to be holy themselves.<sup>23</sup> Conversion then became the gateway to this agenda. Moral and Social reforms undergirded their immense operations across the globe. This historical account is being provided to help project the idea that throughout the second half of the nineteenth Century, Wesleyanism placed very little emphasis on enthusiastic worship patterns.

### **Wesleyan Missionary Society in the Gold Coast**

Arriving at the Gold Coast in 1835, the missionaries were preoccupied with social and moral reforms. For the most part, the ethos of the local churches in the Gold Coast relied on the pattern of the WMMS in Europe.<sup>24</sup> Churches were ‘planted’, and schools established, offering indigenous Christian education. Under the leadership of T.B. Freeman, who arrived in the Gold Coast in 1838, the Methodist mission expanded from Cape Coast to the adjoining communities along the coast and eventually to Dahomey and to Nigeria.

Freeman did not relent in his efforts to impact the local communities through agriculture and industry.<sup>25</sup> But he had challenges in Cape Coast, where fetish priests, who felt threatened about losing their personal prestige, incited the local chiefs “to acts of cruel repression.” However, the intervention of the Governor brought order and the local chiefs and majority of the traditional people came to accept and adopt the faith they initially shunned.<sup>26</sup>

---

Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” See also, David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 28.

<sup>22</sup> *The Works of Wesley*, xi: 167–170, 174–178.

<sup>23</sup> Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today* (London: Epworth, 1960), 167.

<sup>24</sup> F.L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 16.

<sup>25</sup> Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Archival Material, The Library of Victoria University Toronto. G. G. Findlay, D.D. W. W. Holds Worth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, vol. 4 (London, The Epworth Press J. Alfred Sharp First Ed, 1922), 161

The Gold Coast Methodist Churches organized revivals at prayer centres which lasted for many days. This, in fact, is the antecedent of the current practice in the Church. Southon explains this when he writes:

One reads of men who went into the bush, singly or in groups to wrestle for hours in prayer... the agony of soul lasting from a period of hours to many months, came from a truly Christian conviction of sins... men went without food or drink for days, so over burdened with a sense of sin that they were utterly unconscious of physical needs until they found relief for their souls through faith in the Lord Jesus.<sup>27</sup>

In the Mission Report of 1856, similar accounts were made about the Cape Coast Church that “sobs and prayers were heard in all parts of the Chapel. For several weeks in succession the chapel was crowded, and the boys’ school room was fixed up as an additional place of worship.”<sup>28</sup> Moister also wrote

Many were the strong cries and supplications for mercy which entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth... brought about a strong awareness of sin and then the clear sense of forgiving mercy... made men weep tears of adoring gratitude and rejoicing in God their saviour.<sup>29</sup>

Hans Debrunner reports that these revivals were features of the nineteenth century Methodism.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the case of Ghana was not unique.<sup>31</sup>

During the latter part of the twentieth century and the early twenty first century, some of these emotional stirrings which revolved around both the clergy and lay were not countenanced by the Ghanaian Methodist Church leadership. For example, Joseph Egyanka Appiah, the founder of the Musama Disco Christo Church was expelled from the Methodist Church.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> A. E. Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism, The Hundred years, 1835 -1935* (Cape Coast: 1934).

<sup>28</sup> “Wesleyan Methodist Mission Report,” 1856, 69; Cf. Hans W. Debrunner, *A history of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Pub. House, 1967), 156.

<sup>29</sup> W. Moister, “Memoirs of Henry Wharton” (London, 1875), 135-136.

<sup>30</sup> See also Debrunner, *A History of Christianity*, 156 and F. L. Bartels, *Roots of Ghana Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 14, 36 for the fate of early Charismatics in Gold Coast Methodism. In later years in the early parts of 1980, Rev. Arhin of the Cape Coast Diocese was branded occultic and his prayer centre was closed down.

<sup>31</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *A Discursive Interpretation of African Pentecostalism*. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/22138> (Accessed January 1, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Debrunner, *A History of Christianity*, 330.

The case of Prophet Samuel Yamson, a catechist of the Methodist Church, however, was rather exceptional. Whilst still in the service of the Church, he practised divine healing and performed miracles. It is pertinent to find out whether these contested practices were in conformity with the ethos of the mother Church. If they were, why were some expelled from the Church? How did the Church leadership at the time understand and explain these experiential matters?

In the course of history, after the two instances above, many more of these experiential practices were proscribed by the Methodist Church hierarchy. The Abasua Prayer Centre, which is popularly known as Atwea Mountains, came close to being banned.<sup>33</sup> The Church at the time interpreted activities at the Abasua Prayer Centre as syncretic and occultic because they were not in conformity with the Church's tradition.<sup>34</sup>

Currently the MCG has embraced this culture of pilgrimages. It has instituted mass pilgrimages which takes its members to the Abasua Centre, twice in a year. Since the last visit of the writer in 2013, the place has consistently shown a growth pattern of 18,557 pilgrims in 2005 to 35,780. However, the same syncretic and occultic practices seem to continue.

Pilgrims bring back home blessed items like anointing oil and water. Some take leaves, sand and stones. At the site, they pray and symbolically 'shoot' their enemies. Some go to the extent of tying their enemies with twigs around the big trees. Perhaps, it needs mentioning that during the researcher's last visit, the leadership had instituted certain mechanisms to correct these practices. They had, in fact, spared no effort in reminding them of the Christian's break with the African Traditional rituals, especially the homeopathic magic, within which all these practices are considered.

Twice in a year, the MCG organizes mass pilgrimages to the Abasua Prayer Centre. As other prayer centres have sprung up in Dioceses, revival meetings and pilgrimages are also organized at the Circuit and

---

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Very Rev. Isaac Boamah, supernumerary. A very close associate of Rev. Abraham Osei-Assibey who was the first to receive the call to the Atwea Mountains and Founder of the Kristomu Anigvie Kuo, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

<sup>34</sup> See Cephas Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2006).

Societal levels. All these activities operate within the sphere of the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP).

In the following section, the link between the present re-awakened Pentecostal zeal and that of the historic Wesleyanism are discussed in the frame of the MPRP's mandate.

The Ghana Methodist Conference in 1994 accepted a committee's report for the formation of MPRP after persistent calls to resuscitate the MCG out of its spiritual lethargy,<sup>35</sup> besides the need to safeguard its membership which was moving out into the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches.<sup>36</sup> The Evangelism, Renewal and Advisory Team (EMRAT), the Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Division (EMR) of the General Directorate for Ministry, and the Board of Ministries were mandated to oversee this programme.

MPRP runs along five main tracks, namely: Prayer and Worship, Teaching & Discipleship, Healing & Counselling, Evangelism & Preaching, Welfare and Social Action. In each of these tracks the programme is supposed to be planned and executed in collaboration with other divisions or sub-committees at the various strata of the Church using the most highly motivated and spirit-filled, mature and capable members of the church. It is a programme run by the entire church at the diocesan and other levels for all members.<sup>37</sup> It may be quarterly, monthly, and weekly as approved by the Executive board at the level where the programme is to be held.

---

<sup>35</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 157, 158.

<sup>36</sup> Most of the mainline churches were losing members to the Charismatic churches during the early 1990s. Members no longer enjoyed the cold and formal liturgical lifestyle, a heritage of the western missionaries. Desmond Tutu referred to the situation as "the white man's largely cerebral religion which hardly touched the depths of the African soul. Many Africans were responding to the gospel of Christ in their thousands, yet great areas of their lives were often left untouched by Christ, often leaving sincere Christians with deep uncertainties." Similarly, Andrew Walls opined that Evangelical thinking did not interrogate the African culture; even if it did, it was simplistic or superficial. Besides these facts, the educated elite of most of the mainline Protestant denominations, among whom were the missionaries and indeed, of the whole western world, had bought into John Locke's (1632–1704), *Reasonableness of Christianity* dictated by the rationalistic tendencies of the western world. Locke rejected enthusiasm in religion, advocating a rational, non-dogmatic faith much in tune with the Latitudinarians (The Latitudinarians depended upon reason to establish the moral certainty of Christian doctrines rather than argument from tradition).

<sup>37</sup> Methodist Church Ghana, *Handbook on 1<sup>st</sup> Prayer and Renewal Convention* (Cape Coast, 1995), 2.

The first Director of EMRAT<sup>38</sup> asserted at the first connexional convention that MPRP exists, firstly, to promote prayer and worship, which are key elements for Church growth. For this reason, prayer conferences are held at most prayer centres. For example, the Effiduase Diocese in Kumasi holds annual conferences for evangelists and prayer warriors. Currently, the conference is held twice a year and people outside the church are also invited to attend.

Unfortunately, the purpose and significance of the Abasua Prayer centre as a place of spiritual growth is being lost.<sup>39</sup> Activities that take place at the centre run counter to the stated objectives. At the time of the researcher's visit in 2012, sand collected from the site was given to 'a warrior group' in Accra to give to Ministers perceived as uncharismatic to sprinkle in their pulpits. In the bid to transfer the sacredness of the site to their homes, people bring home mementos from the site.

These relics are not kept merely as souvenirs but are considered 'powerful' by Church members.<sup>40</sup> Some pray on it calling on 'Atwea Nyame....' literally meaning God of Atwea. People send their passports, certificates, anointing oil, bottled water to be prayed over. Sometimes they place them at the foot of a cross erected at the centre.<sup>41</sup> Currently, the cross is barricaded, yet these items are placed outside the barricade. Elsewhere, medicinal plants which have purportedly been revealed by God are prepared for the sick ones to use right at the prayer centre before the camp breaks.<sup>42</sup>

This practice of translating the sacredness of the Centre is a clear example of indigenous practices in homeopathic magic (cf. 2 Kings 5:7). Africans, according a former presiding Bishop of the Church, want a concrete and not an abstract expression of their faith.<sup>43</sup> However, these

<sup>38</sup> Forson, *1<sup>st</sup> Prayer and Renewal. Convention 1995*, 5

<sup>39</sup> V. Rev. Forson, interview granted researcher, March 25, 2013

<sup>40</sup> As exemplified in the following responses, of some respondents the Researcher encountered at Abasua Centre: "I take the sand, because this place is a holy ground." (A fifty-five-year-old male, a caretaker from Tarkwa Diocese). "I normally take the anointing oil because the evangelists pray on it" (A 35-year-old artisan from Sekondi). This was on the very day one of the resource persons had drawn church members' attention to the fact that the practices are African Traditional rituals. These entrenched positions make one wonder whether these practices could be corrected.

<sup>41</sup> The founder of the Centre is believed to have been transfigured at the site when he first stepped there. V. Rev. Isaac Boamah, interview granted the researcher, March 19, 2011

<sup>42</sup> See Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Healing Pilgrimages," *Exchange*, 36 (2007): 65-86. As cited in Gyadu's work, Van Rijk asserts that these practices naturally characterize Ghanaian Christianity.

<sup>43</sup> A former Presiding Bishop, Interview granted the researcher, February 24, 2013

practices have attracted serious criticisms from some clergy as well as laity of the Church.

### **The Relationship between Methodism and Neo-Pentecostalism**

The section examines identifiable traits of Pentecostalism or neo-Pentecostalism in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Ghana. From the foregoing, it has been shown that some factions of the MCG are not comfortable with certain religious tendencies in the Church. While attempting to discover the form and content of the Church's current spirituality, there is, therefore, the need to establish the relationship existing between Methodism and neo-Pentecostalism.

Early studies on African Pentecostalism by scholars such as Hollenweger portrayed the African Initiated Churches [AICs] as the early Pentecostals; however, Anderson believed that they merely bear a family resemblance. Ogbu Kalu, on the other hand, posited that Pentecostalism was not exported to Africa from Azusa Street.<sup>44</sup> He argues that it is rather the result of responding to the gospel from within a charismatic indigenous worldview. Therefore, it may be argued that the African form of Pentecostalism has certain uniqueness best understood from its primal world view.

As a renewal movement within Protestantism, Pentecostalism is not a monolithic organization; it is rather independent associations which banded together to create different denominations that we find today. They consider speaking in tongues as one of the charismata *pneumatika* (gifts of the Holy Spirit).<sup>45</sup> They believe that everyone baptized by the Holy Spirit manifests other supernatural gifts like word of knowledge, prophesy, healing, interpreting of tongues among others.

They stress the need for people to be born again or converted; emphasize holy living and literal interpretation of the Bible and exhibit emotional modes of religious expression, as well as enthusiastic congregational singing and praying, and spontaneous testimonies. Their preachers, mostly lay people, preach extemporaneous sermons using very

---

<sup>44</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *A Discursive Interpretation of African Pentecostalism*, The Free Library. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/22138> Accessed January 1, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15<sup>th</sup>ed., s.v. "Pentecostalism."

simple biblical themes. This trend, however, has changed to very rigid and formal services now led by ministers who are trained in homiletics.

Pentecostal belief pattern was exhibited among the Holiness Movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Holiness Movements were the Protestant denominations from which most of the first generation of Pentecostals emerged. These characteristics placed them at *par*, especially on faith healing, with the Baptist and Methodist-Holiness churches.

The term Pentecostalism in its modern use was not applied to them though. The term was not used until the 1906 Azusa Street experience. Usually, credit for this Christian spirituality is accorded to Charles Fox Parham, a Holiness preacher. However, in view of the Wesleyan teaching on entire sanctification, it needs to be pointed out that similar views were espoused by the holiness movements. Hence, there is a clear convergence of views between Pentecostalism and Methodism.

The crucial question is: did Pentecostalism emerge from the Holiness movement or Wesleyanism? The brief discussion above suggests the first hypothesis.<sup>46</sup> However, the situation is much more complex because the holiness movement was equally spawned by the Wesleyan revival. Consequently, what was actually practised as traditional Wesleyan spirituality was in effect Pentecostalism.<sup>47</sup>

Another proof comes from the John Wesley himself. In a sermon at the opening of John Wesley's City Road Chapel in 1778, he stated:

---

<sup>46</sup> Regarding the relationship between the Wesleyan and the Holiness Movement, one school of thought asserts that the expansion of the Wesleyan movement drew members away from Wesley's convictions of perfectionism and entire sanctification; members had become very liberal in their faith. The Holiness Movements came in to restore the original Wesleyan tradition. Glenn O'Brien is rather of the view that this precursor of Pentecostalism (the Holiness Movement) was a radical wing of Methodism. With their views "considered very extreme," or "at least a dangerous novelty by many Methodist bishops," they (the Holiness Movement's) were opposed. Their rejection led to the formation in 1867 of the National Camp-Meeting Association for Holiness enthusiasts (an outgrowth of the ecumenical camp meetings where holiness believers gathered). Furthermore, as Wesley's Methodism became mainstream religion, the various Holiness Movements branched off into different areas. In effect, it is rather their marginalization which made them to operate effectively outside mainstream Methodism, while at the same time "continuing to exert an internal influence on Methodism." What characterized these two movements, Wesleyanism and Holiness, is the issue of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>47</sup> Considering the Pentecostal features observed in contemporary Ghanaian Methodism, though they portray features of traditional Wesleyanism, there are also clear testimonies of indigenous African Traditional Practices as copiously documented by Essamuah. See, Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 18.

“Methodism is not a new religion, but the old religion of the Bible ... of the primitive church ... of the Church of England ... no other than the love of God to all mankind.”<sup>48</sup> In another context he indicated that Methodism belonged to “a long line of Church traditions.”<sup>49</sup> There is no better proof than this; that the founder aligns his church to the Early Apostolic Church which was endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit in the Upper room.<sup>50</sup>

It can, therefore, be plausibly stated that ‘Methodism is Pentecostalism’. David Martin summarizes it as follow:

There is no great difficulty in establishing the genetic connection of Methodism and Pentecostalism. However, embarrassing it may be to some Methodists, for whom the ‘enthusiastic’ past of Methodism is emotionally and historically remote, the early stages of Methodism in England and America closely resemble the present condition of Pentecostalism.<sup>51</sup>

Martins’ view stems from the element of spirit baptism experience in the Wesleyan Methodist. The experience at Fetter lane and at many other places; tongues, prophecy, etc., constitute dimensions of the ‘second blessing’ or entire sanctification. Furthermore, the scholar points out that the search for holiness is the most convincing link between Pentecostalism and Methodism. But the question remains as to who originated it.

Bernie L. Gillespie, Bonjour Bay, J. T. Flynn W. Tjiong and Glenn O’Brien argue that the Wesleyan-holiness movement birthed Pentecostalism.<sup>52</sup> The claim of these scholars that Wesley began the holiness agenda and therefore began the Pentecostal ferment cannot, however, be maintained. This may be true when events from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are reckoned with. But going back into history, as early as the second century, there were some of such fringe

---

<sup>48</sup> See Frank Bateman Stanger, *The Historical Trail*, “The Reopening of John Wesley’s City Road Chapel: A Call for Methodist Renewal,” pdf. Ed. Dr J. Hillman Coffee 1979). <http://gnjumc.s3.amazonaws.com/516B815F7> accessed 26/9/2017.

<sup>49</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, 15<sup>th</sup>ed., s.v. “Wesley, John.” See also Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, XVIII: 212.

<sup>50</sup> Bevins, “A Pentecostal Appropriation,” 229-246.

<sup>51</sup> Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Bay, “The current Tendencies,” 255-264; Flynn and Tjiong, “Fanning the Flames,” 9; O’Brien, “Joining the Evangelical Club,” 330.

movements.<sup>53</sup> This meant that a number of movements and churches had in the past espoused this concept.

Reckoning with the MCG's experience, the question is how peculiar is it from the Ghanaian Pentecostal and Charismatic waves? There may be clear resemblance between the two, but it cannot be said to be purely the main form of Pentecostalism traced back into history. Joel Robbins' assertion that Pentecostalism embodies certain cultural dynamism which allows it, in most cases "to replicate itself in the orthodoxies pertaining everywhere it spreads, as well as possessing the ability to adapt itself to the cultures into which it is introduced" could be true of the Methodist Ghana's situation.

What is observed today could be the Church's own variation of the Pentecostal fervour, which was internally brewed. It may be asked, what are the 'Ghanaian Methodist internal variations of Pentecostalism? And how have they affected the church's polity? Furthermore, how may the features of Pentecostalism which were found at the initial stages of the missionary activities be explained?

One reason that could be offered is that the early missionaries' major preoccupation was on evangelism and social reforms. Because they tempered their faith with rationalism, experiential religion was almost at the side-lines for the first 100 years of the church's existence. The isolated cases reported by Southern and Debrunner were exceptions rather than the norm. In the view of the researcher, this major preoccupation also explains, in part, the attacks meted out against certain charismatic individuals during the early years of the Church's autonomy. But as purported by most of the clergy interviewed in the study, those cases of expulsion were due to extreme forms of syncretism.

Apart from these brief answers given, more cogent reasons can be derived from three key determinants the researcher perceives as the MCG's church growth strategy, namely: Prudential Means of Grace, African sense of innovativeness and Ecumenism.

The first of these strands stems from Wesleyan teaching on Sacramental Means of grace (PMG), the other two also flow from it. The Prudential Means of Grace (PMG) was considered circumstantial, by John Wesley. It afforded contextual opportunities besides the instituted means of

---

<sup>53</sup> J.S. Pobee, ed., *Spirit Renewal and Ministry*, ed. (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1993), 93.

grace, to operate throughout the Christian communities, in accordance with the prevailing cultures. It is intended to address direct needs as and when they occur. Thus, the MCG's peculiar situation as African Charismatic institution, affords the Church the privilege to be innovative. The first president of the MCG, Rev. F.C.F. Grant noted: "it is natural to love the traditional life of the Church to which we belong and treasure what has been handed down to us by our fathers in the faith.... at the same time, we ought to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to examine our Church life in the light of the age and circumstance."<sup>54</sup>

The PMG allows the Church to be innovative, thus the second key determinant is cultural innovativeness. Various cultural innovations have been introduced into the religious expression of the MCG. These innovative trends address certain serious pitfalls in the missionary approach to evangelization in Africa. For instance, pilgrimage to prayer camps. This is an example of a ritual introduced into the MCG's liturgical system. The immediate past President of the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG), sharing his thoughts on the relatively recent developments at the Church's prayer centres opined that African Christians believe in tangibles and would want to identify with practices that give concrete expressions to their faith. Some of these practices, the former first clergy added, bear Old Testament nuances. Notably, the Old Testament has much in common with African Indigenous Religions in terms of ritual practices. Hence, references to passages about yearly visits of Jews journeying to Jerusalem, Moses' and the disciples' mountain top experiences, performing of certain rituals connected with healing among others are all interpreted with African nuances.<sup>55</sup> These innovative practices have been introduced also as a result of influence from other churches and this view leads on to the third determinant for growth which is Ecumenism.

The two first clergies cited above have all expressed sensitive views on ecumenism. The first, expressing thoughts on the need to examine our Church life in the light of the age and circumstance, noted that the MCG should "not be so obsessed with *its* own tradition in order to take into account what is of precious value in the traditions of other churches..."<sup>56</sup> The second also intimated that contemporary

---

<sup>54</sup> The first president of the MCG, Rev. F.C.F. Grant, "Introduction" in *The Methodist Church Ghana, The Constitution*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Rt. Rev. Emmanuel K. Asante, Presiding Bishop, Interview, February 25, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Grant, *The Constitution*, 6.

Christianity is on a path of ecumenism and being in an ecumenical relation suggests that the church is opened up for new ideas.<sup>57</sup> These new ideas, so long as they are biblical and grounded on sound theological basis, would be adopted.

Inferring from these, it may be safely asserted that churches, MCG inclusive, must be in ecumenical relations in order to find fulfilment. Furthermore, being in ecumenical relations would guard against arbitrariness and other stringent and rigorous acts which would not promote the welfare of members. Acting differently may cause loss of members, so ecumenism stems the drift of membership and stabilizes growth.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, contemporary Ghanaian Methodist spirituality is a religious style which blends the Wesleyan tradition as well as the current Ghanaian Charismatic Renewal patterns with a tinge of African indigenous cultural practices. The discussion dwelt on Christian spirituality, roots and elements of the Wesleyan Spirituality. It further addressed Ghanaian Methodist spirituality, which exhibits features of Pentecostalism and Neo- Pentecostalism historically and contextually then the Ghanaian Methodist spirituality and the Renewal Programme of the Methodist Church Ghana.

The findings suggest that Methodism in today's Ghana and contemporary Pentecostal Ghanaian spirituality are two sides of the same coin. Consequently, contemporary Ghanaian Methodist spirituality is greatly inclined towards its Wesleyan roots, but largely tempered and influenced by innovative Ghanaian cultural elements as well as certain ecumenical ideals. In particular, the religious elements identified in the spirituality of MCG shares affinities with the contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal waves.

*Dr. Doris E. Yalley*

School of Theology and Mission  
Central University, Dansoman (Ghana)

---

<sup>57</sup> Rt. Rev. Emmanuel K. Asante, Presiding Bishop, Interview, February 25, 2013.