

## CLAIMING RELIGIOUS SPACE: THE CASE OF NEO-PROPHETISM IN GHANA

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**Abstract:** This essay discusses yet another type of Pentecostal Christianity which has been growing in Ghana since the 1990s. It posits that this phenomenon deserves its own category. This movement has ethos, style and emphases that are supposedly Pentecostal yet depart markedly from mainstream Pentecostal traditions. Using this new phenomenon as a case study, the essay argues that one of the main reasons for the emergence of new religious movements is the quest to find space when newer leaders and movements fail to fit into the sophisticated and elitist structures and style of ministry of already established movements.

## 1.0 Introduction

Since the 1990s the Ghanaian religious scene has witnessed the emergence and steady growth of what may be appropriately described as neo-prophetism. This development calls for a reconsideration of the explanations for the occurrence of new religious movements of the Pentecostal type. Already existing explanations include Africans reacting to Western European political and ecclesiastical domination,<sup>1</sup> compensating for the loss of traditional support systems,<sup>2</sup> addressing the traditional fears of the African,<sup>3</sup> and answering to the quest for belonging.<sup>4</sup>

In his recent major work on contemporary Christianity in Ghana, Paul Gifford explained that Ghana's new religious movements flourish mainly because they claim to possess answers to the 'most pressing existential problem, economic survival'.<sup>5</sup> While this is partly true, it seems that new movements often emerge to serve the religious needs of people in specific generational brackets, socio-economic class and of a religio-cultural orientation.<sup>6</sup>

It is, to a large extent, a question of finding space for oneself when the culture and worship styles of the dominant or older movements appear to be crowding out people of a certain type of religio-cultural orientation and socio-economic status or failing to cater

<sup>1</sup> See Cephas Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2002), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> See C.G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A study of some Spiritual Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1962) pp. 130-33.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g. J.S. Pobee & Gabriel Ositule II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches: A challenge to the Ecumenical Movements* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1998), p. 10; A. Atiemo, *The Rise of Charismatic Movements in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1993), p. 47; Birgit Meyer, 'If you are a Devil, you are a Witch, if your are a Witch, you are a Devil', *Journal of African Religion in Africa*, xxii, 2 (1992), p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> E. B. Welbourn & B. A. Ogot, 'A Place to Feel at Home' London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Co, 2004), p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> See Ogbu U. Kalu, "Yabbing the Pentecostals: Paul Gifford's Image of Ghana's New Christianity", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, XV (2005), pp. 1, 3-16.

for the concerns of the younger generation.<sup>7</sup> Neo-propheticism seems to have emerged to serve the needs of those whose orientation to issues of life is rooted in the primal world view. It also seems to serve the interest of people of low socio-economic status who do not fit well into the rather elitist Charismatic Churches. The phenomenon that we refer to as 'neo-prophetic' include churches such as the Alive Chapel International of Prophet Salifu Amoako, King Jesus Evangelistic Ministry of Prophet Emmanuel Kwaku Apraku, Great Light Worship Centre of Prophet Toner Asamoah Boateng (Apae Live), and Owusu Bempa's End Time Power Ministry.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.0 *The Problem of Typology*

The emergence of neo-Propheticism further complicates the issue of categorising African founded Pentecostal/charismatic-type of churches founded by Ghanaians. Attempts at lucid categorization of various expressions of Christianity in Africa though compelling has been an extremely difficult exercise. The difficulty is further exacerbated by attempts at delineating clearly the major strands of African Instituted Churches (AICs). This is mainly due to a variety of origin, leadership style, theology and organizational ethos. These movements have been variously labelled Ethiopian, Zionist, African, Pentecostal, Spiritual, Prophetic, Charismatic, Evangelical, Messianic, Separatist, Revivalist, Vitalistic, Witchcraft eradication, etc. without much distinction.<sup>9</sup>

Hollenweger, the doyen of Pentecostal studies, assigned the following reasons for the difficulty in making clear distinctions between the movements:

There is no reliable overview of the charismatic renewal in the third world... problems of establishing the extent and character of the charismatic renewal are almost insurmountable, first, because the scene is changing all the time; secondly, because there is not accepted definition of the charismatic renewal; and thirdly, because it is almost impossible to get accurate statistics and description.<sup>10</sup>

John S. Pobee corroborates Hollenweger's first reason that explains the unreliable nature of the categorization of African Instituted Churches in his foreword to Allan Anderson's recent book, *African Reformation*, as follows: 'Typology is not always helpful because AICs are dynamic and under constant change.'<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, "Yabbing the Pentecostals. 5; Abamfo Atiemo, 'Deliverance in Charismatic Churches', *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, IV, (1994/1995), P. 40; Elom Dovlo, 'A Comparative overview of Independent Churches and Charismatic Ministries in Ghana', *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, 2 (1992).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Gifford included Prophets Salifu Amoako, Isaac Anto, Abubakar Bako and Owusu Bempa in his *Ghana's new Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 90-107 and David D. Styles Ocran, recently studied Prophets Elisha Salifu Amoako and Emmanuel Kwaku Apraku in his M.Phil thesis submitted to the University of Ghana under the title, "Propheticism in Ghana: A case study of Some Charismatic Churches", 2004.

<sup>9</sup> See B.G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); H.W. Turner, *The Life and Faith of the Church of the Lord* (Aladura) (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 2 vols.; Elom Dovlo, 'A Comparative overview of Independent Churches and Charismatic Ministries in Ghana', p.55; Birgit Meyer, 'Christianity in Africa: From Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004), pp. 447-474.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Hollenweger, 'Charismatic Renewal in the Third World: Implications for Mission', *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 4 (1980), pp. 68-72.

<sup>11</sup> J.S. Pobee, Foreword of Allan Anderson's *African Reformation* (Asmara: African World Press, 2001), p.x.

In her recent article on African Instituted Churches, (AICs),<sup>12</sup> Dr. Philomena Mwaura, a Kenyan scholar, rightly sets out the following criteria for the classification of the AICs: ‘...origins, historical period, geographical location and theology...’. Mwaura adopts Bengts Sundkler’s classification which Harold Turner and M.L. Daneel used as follows:

- i. Ethiopian/Messianic-emerged in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, against European domination in power and culture as well as paternalism in ecclesiastical matters.<sup>13</sup>
- ii. Zionist or prophet-founded religious movements-emerged in the 1920s to 1960s, variously called Zionism in South Africa, Aladura (praying churches) in Nigeria, Spirit Churches or *Sunsum Sore* in Ghana and Spirit or *Roho* Churches in Easter Africa.
- iii. Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostal churches –emerged since the 1970s.

It is significant to note that movements labelled Ethiopian were not found in Ghana as exemplified by Christian G. Baeta’s monumental study, *Prophetism in Ghana: A study of some Spiritual Churches*.<sup>14</sup> Thus only the second and third categories are manifested in Ghana. The earliest form of AICs in Ghana was the prophet-founded.

Our major reservation about this kind of taxonomy is the fact that, following the earlier scholars, Mwaura used strictly historical categories in spite of the fairly comprehensive criteria she herself outlined a guide to the classification. The other criteria namely, geographical location and theology were not employed at all. This lends the taxonomy to serious overgeneralization. For instance, Mwaura lumps the Church of Pentecost (COP) with the Musama Disco Christo Church and the Church of the Twelve Apostles as Aladura or Spiritual Churches. This is highly unacceptable to any casual observer who is familiar with the Ghanaian religious landscape. Indeed, the COP emerged around the same period as the MDCC and the Church of the Twelve Apostles. However, their theology, practices and ethos are significantly different from those of MDCC for instance.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Mwaura buttresses her categorization by noting that:

Although up to about 1985 the Classical AICs were the fastest growing form of Christianity, they have been overtaken by the new forms of African Pentecostal Christianity which gained momentum in the 1990s. Scholars have noted that due to the impact of the Neo-Pentecostal churches (NPCs) other churches including Classical AICs

<sup>12</sup> Philomena Mwaura defines AICs as ‘...autonomous church groups with an all African leadership and, usually, an all African membership. See, Philomena Mwaura, ‘African Independent Churches: Their Role and Contribution to African Christianity’, *A New Day Dawning: African Christians Living the Gospel* (Zoetermeer, Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2004), p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> Mwaura cites O.U. Kalu, ‘The Third Response: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa 1970-1995’, *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 2 1998, p.3; and J.S. Pobe & G. Ositelu II: *African Initiative in Christianity: The growth, gifts and diversities of Indigenous African Churches – A challenge to the Ecumenical Movement*, (Geneva: WCC, 1998), p.4.

<sup>14</sup> C.G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A study of some Spiritual Churches*, pp.3-5.

<sup>15</sup> See E. Kingsley Larbi’s comprehensive study of the COP in his *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, (Accra, Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001).

are declining numerically. They have also been demonized by the NPCs due to their rootedness in African religions and culture.<sup>16</sup>

On the contrary, the COP is anything but the above description. For instance, Mwaura's point that the AICs (including the COP) is declining in membership is grossly erroneous. The COP is well known as the fastest growing church in contemporary Ghana.<sup>17</sup> In fact, it is growing faster than any of the new forms of African Pentecostal Christianity which Mwaura refers to as having gained momentum in the 1990s. Furthermore, the COP is not 'demonized' as the case may be for the Musama Disco Christo Church. Rather, most of the key NPCs in Ghana maintain close fraternal relations with the COP. At the moment, the COP is providing key leadership role in the Ghana Pentecostal Council (which includes some of the key NPCs such as Word Miracle Church, Christian Action Church), with the Chairman of the COP, Rev. Dr. M.K. Ntummy, serving as its President and the General Secretary, Rev. Ekow Wood, a pastor of the COP.

Mwaura may be excused for not being familiar with the Ghanaian religious landscape. She limited her taxonomy only to historical categories. We have been using a typology for contemporary African initiated movements<sup>18</sup>, which though may not be perfect, tries to take into consideration, historical and theological categories as follows:

- i. The Independent Churches originating in Ghana or from other African countries;
- ii. The Classical Pentecostal movement such as the COP, Christ Apostolic Church, Apostolic Church of Ghana etc.;
- iii. Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic non-denominational fellowships such as Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International and Women's Aglow Fellowship International;
- iv. Charismatic Renewal Groups in the mainline churches, for example Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Bible Study and Prayer Groups of the Protestant denominations;
- v. The Independent Pentecostal/charismatic Churches/ministries<sup>19</sup> – which in fact are the same as what Mwaura refers to as 'Neo-Pentecostal churches.'<sup>20</sup>

The 'neo-prophetic' phenomenon which we have referred to above is not quite covered by our typology. The phenomenon, which is distinguishable from all the others listed above, deserves to be in its own category.<sup>21</sup> This development indeed corroborates what Hollenweger and Pobee have noted as the fast changing religious scene which makes typologizing of Christian renewal movements quite problematic.<sup>22</sup> Yet it is crucial that

<sup>16</sup> Philomena Mwaura, 'African Independent Churches: Their Role and Contribution to African Christianity', p. 100. She cites, Gerrie ter Haar, 'Standing up for Jesus: A Study of New Developments in Christianity in Ghana' *Exchange*, 23 (1994), 223 and Ogbu U. Kalu, 'Estranged Bedfellows: The Demonization of the Aladura in Pentecostal Rhetoric,' *Missionalia*, 28 (2000), p.121.

<sup>17</sup> See Ghana Evangelism Committee, *National Church Survey, Update 1993: Facing the Unfinished Task of the Church in Ghana* (Accra: Ghana Evangelism Committee, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> See Cephas Omenyo, 'Charismatic renewal movement in Ghana', *Pneuma*, 16 (1994), pp. 169-185.

<sup>19</sup> C.f. J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 26-27.

<sup>20</sup> Philomena Mwaura, 'African Independent Churches: Their Role and Contribution to African Christianity', pp. 100-101.

<sup>21</sup> C.f. Deji Ayegboyan & Ukah Asonzeh, 'Taxonomy of Churches in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective', *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, XX1 (2002) pp. 68-86.

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 3 above.

students of new religious movements must be alert in monitoring this dynamic phenomenon otherwise their taxonomy would easily be obsolete.

### 3.0 *Historical origins*

The neo-prophetic movement deserves to be discussed in its own right. It is crucial to put the contemporary prophetic movement which is a new phenomenon into its proper historical setting. Furthermore, by tracing its origins it will make it easy to delineate it from other categories of 'Pentecostal-type'<sup>23</sup> movements in Ghana. For limitations of space, this paper shall focus on Prophets Salifu Amankwa and Emmanuel Kwaku Apraku. Before we focus on these prophets, we shall discuss their generally accepted pre-cursor, the late Prophet Francis Akwasi Amoako, to help us put our discussions into its proper context.

### 3.1 *Prophet Amoako — Precursor of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana*

The late Francis Akwasi Amoako, popularly known as Brother Amoako, is the generally acclaimed forerunner of contemporary Prophetism in Ghana.<sup>24</sup> Prophet Amoako emerged on the Ghanaian religious scene in the early 1980s. In Amoako's own testimony, he had a pre-Christian background which<sup>25</sup> was characterized by drug addiction, robbery and drug peddling (particularly Indian hemp). He also claimed he was deeply involved in 'spiritism'—invocation of spirits mainly for malevolent purposes. He claimed to have a spectacular conversion to Christianity. A local Christian press gave the following account of Amoako's conversion to Christianity after Amoako's demise in March 1990:

Amoako whose early life was shrouded in fear – a terror in the society – became converted when one day he was preparing to wrap Indian hemp (wee or marijuana) for sale. It all happened suddenly in July 1969 at Santaasé, Kumasi, when a bright light surrounded him in his room and a voice told him to give his heart to the world Saviour so that the Lord can use him. Amoako at first seemed adamant but the sign was so burning and conquering that he could not help. He did not sell that day. And the call also did not end that day. It continually dawned on him and he was later led by the light to the forest where he was confined for two weeks with only the Bible as his armour, fasting and praying. Having thus been equipped by God for His work, Amoako started traveling throughout the country with the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Generally, Amoako was believed to have had an independent conversion although it is evident that at the initial stages of his conversion he participated in the Santaase Methodist Church's renewal meetings as well as the local Assemblies of God Church and the Scripture Union Fellowship.<sup>27</sup>

It is believed Prophet Amoako used to have solitary retreats in the bush after his conversion experience. During one of these retreats he claimed God called him and promised to use him to preach and to bring healing and deliverance to many throughout

<sup>23</sup> See Allan Anderson, 'Diversity in the definition of "Pentecostal Charismatic" and its Ecumenical Implications', *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies*, XIX-2, 38 (2002), P. 46.

<sup>24</sup> C.f. Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> He grew up in Santasi a suburb of Kumasi.

<sup>26</sup> See Serebuor-Badu, p.3, quoted by S.B. Adubofour, p. 363.

<sup>27</sup> See S.B. Adubofour, p. 362.

the world.<sup>28</sup> Prophet Amoako's ministry could not be restricted to the framework of any particular church or ministry. As a result he started an independent itinerant evangelistic ministry which led him to found a group named Bethlehem Evangelistic Ministry (BELAM) around 1977. He was later assisted by eight others who only had basic education to expand the group and rename it the Resurrection Power Evangelistic Ministry (REPEM).<sup>29</sup> It is significant to note that Amoako surrounded himself with others who, like him, only had the minimum basic education.

Amoako's preaching of the gospel was described as plain but bold. He boldly attacked the then Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) government verbally for its anti-Christian tendencies which earned him the nickname "John the Baptist of Ghana."<sup>30</sup> A more significant characteristic of Amoako's ministry was his demonstration of the power of Jesus to heal and deliver people who were believed to be in bondage to the devil. He attracted over 20,000 people to his ministry by 1990 through the manifestation of the above-mentioned characteristics which his clients advertised through their testimonies.

The REPEM later grew into 36 local branches in Kumasi alone, 4 in Takoradi, 10 in Accra, and others in various parts of Accra. On the international scene itinerant preaching tours led to the establishment of branches of REPEM among Ghanaian immigrants in London, Holland, Belgium and Germany. Indeed his demonstration of power and miracles coupled with his rather blunt and, sometimes, use of vulgar language was so non-conformist that no established church or ministry could contain him within its framework. This special style of ministry by semi-literate or entirely illiterate pastors and evangelists, pioneered by Prophet Amoako, has become the pattern followed by the contemporary prophets who lead the neo-Prophetic ministries in Ghana. One typical example of the contemporary prophets who came to ministry through the late Prophet Amoako's ministry is Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako who is the focus of our discussion in the next session.

### 3.2 *Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako*

Born in 1966 and raised in Kumasi by a Muslim family who could not afford to send him to school during his infancy, Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako went to school at a rather mature age. Due to the embarrassment that he suffered, he abandoned schooling after one year and became wayward—taking to smoking, drinking and robbery. Prophet Salifu Amoako was led to the Christian faith by one Mr. Awuah and was introduced to the local Assemblies of God Church at Bantama, Kumasi. He left the Assemblies of God Church due to its over-emphasis on English language which he did not quite understand. He joined Evangelist Amoako's Resurrection Power Evangelistic Ministry at Santasi which used the local language, Twi. He committed himself to serve at the church by undertaking all kinds of menial jobs in the church as well as doing the house chores for Prophet Amoako who later invited him to live with him in his house. Amoako thus became his mentor hence the addition of his mentor's name 'Amoako' to his original name.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> See Emmanuel M. Ahlijah, 'Pentecostalism and Belief in Witchcraft in Ghana: A Case Study of Resurrection Power Evangelistic, (REPEM), Kumasi', BA Dissertation, (University of Ghana/Legon, 1989), p.12.

<sup>29</sup> See S.B. Adubofour, p. 364.

<sup>30</sup> See S.B. Adubofour, p. 359.

<sup>31</sup> See Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 91.

Salifu Amoako claimed he had a spectacular experience a week before his mentor, Evangelist Amoako, died. According to him, he was sleeping in Evangelist Amoako's car when the late evangelist laid his hands on him and prophesied that the anointing on him would be transferred onto him Salifu Amoako and God would use him worldwide. Salifu Amoako claims when he heard of the news of the death of his mentor, Prophet Amoako, he was so devastated that he withdrew into a room and resorted to prayer. According to him, God spoke to him during the period confirming what his mentor had prophesied that he would have a worldwide ministry.

Prophet Salifu Amoako emphasises the ministry of angels to humans. According to him, angels are vehicles for spectacular and supernatural occurrences in the lives of human beings.<sup>32</sup> He believes the work of angels has eschatological relevance and that God shall use angels as the main instruments for the accomplishment of his end-time plans. Salifu Amoako claims angels play a crucial role in his ministry and that of other prophets; consequently, his followers are encouraged to yearn to perceive their angels since they do visit them with answers to their various requests. He believes that God has a vision for each Christian in life and this vision needs to be realised at the right 'timing of God'. There is thus no room for failure for Christians. He believes that successful Christians are those who have discovered their 'God-given' vision at 'God-chosen' times and have utilised all the opportunities.<sup>33</sup>

Salifu Amoako began his ministry by forming a small fellowship in Kumasi. He claims, later, he was directed by God in a trance to move from Kumasi to Accra to start his ministry. He claims in 1994 God spoke to him to organise a ten-day prayer vigil dubbed "Ghana for Christ Believers' All-Night." According to him, this vigil prayer served the purpose of announcing his ministry of signs, wonders and prophetic manifestations to the nation. This led to the establishment of his fellowship which he named 'Jesus is Alive Evangelistic Ministry' which metamorphosed into a church by the name 'Alive Chapel International' which was inaugurated on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1998. The church meets at the Orion Cinema at the Kwame Nkruma Circle.

Prophet Salifu Amoako, Founder and General Overseer of the Alive Chapel International, administers healing and deliverance to people with the aid of oil, handkerchief, and honey. He believes these items also are used as aids when praying for people for the purpose of attaining wealth and prosperity. He, however, claims these items are administered under divine direction, thus they are not the norm in the church's ministration. Since 2002, the ministry of the Alive Chapel International holds a media programme dubbed "This is our Day" on TV3, a local television station.

### 3.3 *Prophet Emmanuel Kwaku Apraku*

The 37-year old Prophet Kwaku Apraku hails from the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. He is a first generation Christian. His parents practised the indigenous religion and forbade him to attend church. He dropped out of school at a very early stage and became a juvenile delinquent, involving himself in crimes such as theft and the abuse of hard drugs. According to Apraku, he was one day held in a police cell for stealing a fowl when one Pastor Kwabena Paul who visited the cell on a routine preaching tour prophesied that he was going to be a prophet. According to Apraku, he dreamt of seeing a beautiful city with the inscription "King Jesus" on entering his father's shrine as well as

<sup>32</sup> He refers to Hebrews 1:14 and Colossians 2:18. See David Styles Ocran, *Prophetism in Ghana: A case study of some charismatic churches*, M.Phil. Dissertation, (University of Ghana, Legon, 2004), pp. 59-62.

<sup>33</sup> See Elisha Salifu-Amoako, *Vision and Provision* (2000) for details.

Jesus hanging on the Cross with blood flowing and he heard a voice assuring him that if he believed in the blood and in the name Jesus many signs and wonders would be performed through him. He also claims in that same dream he was given the name 'Emmanuel'. He believes that was the beginning of his conversion. He then began to associate with one Evangelist Kusi Berko, a popular gospel singer and preacher. He later joined the Christ Redeemer Church in Kumasi and became an itinerant preacher, working mainly in Kumasi and its environs.

Prophet Apraku later moved to the Central and part of the Eastern Regions of Ghana touring towns such as Swedru, Winneba, Ajumako, Oda and Besiase. Due to his unorthodox practices he had difficulty in being accepted by some mainline churches in the above-mentioned towns that sometimes invited him to minister. He later moved to Accra and in 1998 established the King Jesus Evangelistic Ministry form where he has opened several branches throughout the country. A common feature of the church is the fact that it sells items such as toilet soap, lime, bottled oil (anointing oil), honey, salt, white handkerchief, porridge and other items which are believed to aid prayers during its services. Furthermore, during fundraising services the prophet sometimes gives out items such as cubes of sugar, toffees, raw eggs and others at prices that are several times the market value, yet worshippers willingly patronise them.

#### 4.0 *General Emphases, teachings and practices of neo-Prophetic movements*

The particular teachings and practices under reference include the concept of *ɔtamfo* (enemy), the practice of *akwankyerɛ* (guidance), and the various forms of exorcism and healing. In this section, we discuss these concepts and practices and provide an analysis of how they fit into the history and the phenomenon of Christian renewal in Ghana.

The importance of evil spirits in the Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal in Ghana has been widely noted.<sup>34</sup> Evil spirits include witches and other presumed malevolent spirits that are linked to one another in complex ways. 'In the teaching and practices of these prophets the appropriation of the traditional concept of *ɔtamfo* (enemy) seems to include not only evil spirits and witches but also other human beings that believers have cause to suspect of envy or jealousy. *ɔtamfo*, in traditional Akan life and thought, is normally one that is suspected of undermining other people's health, wealth, honour or general well-being through witchcraft, evil juju, or the spread of malicious gossip. The *ɔtamfo* (enemy) includes actual human beings and not just spirit beings.

This belief is at the base of Akan traditional understanding of witchcraft. Among the Akan it is believed that a witch can attack and harm you only if she is related by blood to you, or if such a relative who is a witch connives with other witches. This belief has been responsible for mistrust, suspicion and tension in extended families. Akan maxims that express this belief make every relative a potential enemy of a person. *ɔtan firi fie* (source of adversity is one's own family); *ɔtamfo benya wo a na efiri wo ankasa wo fi* (an enemy cannot get at you unless they are aided by some one from your own family); *aboa bi beka wo a na ofiri wo ntama mu* (the ant that bites you is hidden in your cloth). In the minds of worshippers in the churches under reference, the 'enemy' as a concept in the Bible which, for them, is the same as 'powers and principalities', includes

<sup>34</sup> Max Assimeng, *Religion and Social Change in West Africa* (Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 1989), p.60; Abamfo Atiemmo, 'Mmusuyi and Deliverance: A study of Conflict and Consensus between African Traditional Religion and Christianity', M.Phil Thesis (University of Ghana, 1995), pp. 147-150. See also Birgit Meyer, 'If you are a Devil you are a Witch', p. 107.



their human enemies. For them, this is clear, as they interpret from the following scripture: '... a man's enemies are the members of his own household' (Micah 7:5, 6).

But when it is only a relative who either alone or in the company of others that could harm a person through witchcraft, neighbours, friends, co-workers and classmates could harm you by the use of evil juju, a curse or work against your interest by spreading malicious gossip about you to significant others, e.g. your prospective suitor, employer or creditor. The enemies are considered agents of the Devil who are being used wilfully or unwillingly to impede one's progress in life. It is believed that God's will for every believer is prosperity and good health and that anything to the contrary is not caused by God but by an 'enemy'.

Mainstream Pentecostalism, apparently coming of age, has understood and interpreted the 'adversary' or 'enemy' in the Bible as spirits that are distinguished from their human agents or instruments, trying to balance the traditional view with the New Testament teaching.<sup>35</sup> In that sense, alleged witches ought to be shown love and considered as victims who need deliverance. However, traditional attitudes related to the enemy do not make it easy for people rooted in that mindset to forgive an enemy who destroys one's life and honour. It is not as if these Christians do not understand or believe in forgiveness. They do. However, the fact that the types of enemies in view attack the most valuable natural properties of people makes them enemies who should neither be allowed to reproduce them nor live in peace until they forsake their evil ways or are completely destroyed.

Witches, those that use evil juju and those that spread malicious gossip, destroy a person's *sunsum*, which can result in a person falling seriously ill or even dying. They undermine a person's *animuonyam* (honour/dignity/spiritual attraction by causing the person to fall from grace to grass, fail in life's endeavours, or lose face in public and lose favour with significant others. Traditionally, libations always include imprecations pronounced on such 'enemies' – that they should become impotent or barren; that they should come to shame and not live. Mostly, traditional ways of dealing with the enemy take ritual forms. The strong belief in spiritual power that can be tapped for various material ends means that the tensions generated by beliefs about the enemy hardly result in physical violence. Mainly, people resort to ritual means to protect themselves or to neutralise the effect of the enemy's diabolical activities. Although, occasionally, accusations have led to heightened anxieties that result in violent attacks on alleged witches, it is by ritual means mostly that Ghanaians seek to protect themselves from and overcome the damaging effects of the enemy's attacks.

The neo-prophetic Charismatic Churches stress on the 'enemy' as the cause of a person's misfortunes in life seems only to be a matter of emphasis-and reinterpretation. Belief in evil spirits, including witchcraft is acknowledged in both traditional religion and almost all the waves of renewal in Ghanaian Christianity.<sup>36</sup> However, the almost exclusive focus on the enemy, which most ordinary people understand to include human beings, especially relatives they have reason to suspect, has given rise to novel ritual forms of dealing with the enemy. One such means is the practice of whipping the enemy in prayer. At prayer meetings, worshippers carry canes with which they seek to 'destroy' the enemy. Sometimes, instead of canes, believers clap their hands in symbolic slapping

<sup>35</sup> See Edward Langton, *Satan: A Portrait* (London: Skeffington and Sons Ltd., 1945), p.25; James Boyd, *Satan and Mara* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), p. 55; J. Jeremiads, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> See Abamfo Atiemo, 'Mmusuyi & Deliverance', pp.76-88.

of the 'enemy'. In this practice, worshippers together declare their intention before the prayer. A typical declaration is as follows:

*Awurade e,  
 ɔtamfo biara a  
 ɔmma mennye yie, no,  
 se mebo me nsa mu bo mpae a  
 apranaa nte ngu wo mo so  
 car mbo no nku no  
 se oye me maame o,  
 se oye me papa o  
 ma omo nyina ntete gu*

### Translation

Lord,  
 When I clap my hands and pray,  
 May the enemies who work against me  
 be struck by thunder;  
 may they get hit and killed  
 by a car;  
 whether it is my father,  
 whether it is my mother  
 or whoever it is that is my enemy  
 Let them all fall.

Or

In the case of caning, the prayer goes thus:

*Yesu din mu  
 Wo ɔtamfo a wompe  
 Me yiedie;  
 Me bɔ wo abaa  
 Me see wo  
 Wɔ Yesu din mu  
 Wɔ ndwuma a  
 Wo ye tia me nyinaa  
 Me see no wɔ Yesu din mu.*

### Translation

In Jesus' name  
 you enemy who does not  
 want me to prosper  
 I cane you.  
 I destroy you  
 In Jesus' name.  
 I destroy all your works  
 against me in the name



of Jesus.

In certain cases, disease and problems such as barrenness and impotence are returned to the enemy who is believed to have been the cause of that condition.

The human enemy may also be symbolically shot as the following example illustrates:

ɔtamfo anaa atamfo a  
wrehaw me  
nawɔmpe me yie no  
Yesu dim mu me bɔ wɔn tuo—pee!

### Translation

The enemy or enemies  
That are harassing me  
And work against my prosperity  
I shoot them in Jesus's name—pee!<sup>37</sup>

Worshippers often testify to the efficacy of such symbolic acts in prayer. Some testify that such acts have resulted in inexplicable physical injury, incapacitation or even death of suspected enemies. Or sometimes people least suspected to be one's enemies are believed to have suffered the material result of such specific symbolic acts of violence, thus exposing such people as one's secret enemies.

Another practice which marks out these prophets from leaders of other waves of renewal is the practice they call 'prophetic guidance' or *akwankyere*. In 'prophetic guidance' these leaders who prefer to be called 'prophets' give information that is supposed to explain a person's situation and also prescribe solutions. Sometimes this is done openly in the setting of public worship but mostly it is done on one-on-one basis. There are times that they declare seasons for special 'prophetic ministration'. This may take the form of a specific number of days declared as days of fasting and prayer. Most of them also hold regular weekly prayer vigils on Fridays. In the case of the one-on-one ministry session, they refer to the process as 'counselling' or 'guidance session.' Contents of prophecy given during such sessions include vivid description of one's supposed enemies and why one has come to be hated by such so-called enemies. It is sometimes also done over the radio in listener phone-in segments. When 'prophetic ministration' takes place in the public worship setting, the content of the prophecy may range from graphic description of a person's situation to what a person wears under his/her clothes. Such information is presumed to be made available to the prophet by the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> At one of such services observed<sup>39</sup> the prophet mounted the platform after a long period of singing and dancing which ended with a session of slow singing which some Pentecostals call 'worship.' The congregation received him with ecstatic expression of joy. He invited the congregation to say to one another, 'today God will do wonders.' He then said:

<sup>37</sup> 'Pee' is imitation of the sound of the small hand gun that local hunters use.

<sup>38</sup> C.f. Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, pp. 96-107.

<sup>39</sup> Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003 at the End-Time Resurrection Power Ministry.

There is somebody here this afternoon whose husband wants her to join him abroad but that person is finding it difficult to secure a visa, she has already paid three thousand dollars to a visa contractor who has absconded with the money, witches of that person's family have put a mark on her face until that mark is taken away she shall never succeed in securing a visa. That person must come up to me right now.

The whole place was silent — nobody moved. Then the Prophet said:

God knows you, you cannot hide, your first name is Agnes (not the actual name mentioned) you are wearing a green string of beads under your dress, your brazier is black and the underwear is also black, come out.

Suddenly a lady in her thirties rose up and walked to the dais in tears while the gathering shouted praises to God and called out slogans depicting the exploits and power of the prophet.

##### *5. The Prophets and their ministries*

Invariably, most of these prophets share a lot in common with their earliest Ghanaian 'ancestors' such as Wade Harris and Sampson Oppong who came from obscure and questionable backgrounds, mostly receiving their calls in prison. They either had no Western education or had the very minimal of it. They claim to have independent calls from God, mostly in a spectacular manner. These unusual elements in their backgrounds coupled with their unconventional style of ministry make it difficult for them to be accepted or recognised by proponents of orthodoxy. Yet, they minister independently and thousands of people gravitate towards them. Their ministries revolve mainly around the prophetic charisma. They project themselves as people with great spiritual power and capable of performing extraordinary feats. They are regarded by their clients as people 'who see.' In Ghanaian popular belief people who see into the future and into the spiritual dimensions of people's present problems are highly regarded and their ministries are well patronised.

Related to their ability 'to see' is their claim that they are able to understand and interpret dreams. Traditionally, many people believe that it is possible to receive messages from the spirit world through dreams. Dreams are therefore taken seriously by most people. African churches of the AIC type, for example, have as one of their main features dreams and their interpretation. Nevertheless, worshippers are often warned that the interpretation of dreams is not so simple. It is said to be a complex art which may be carried out through prayer and meditation. Evil spirits are believed to be able to play tricks on people in dreams. For example, it is taught that a witch could appear in a dream wearing the face of another person with the aim of causing confusion between the one who had the dream and the one whose face was used.

The prophets have also revived and expanded the practice of using material items for prayer. In the AICs a brand of lavender called 'florida water' was mostly used in prayer for healing and exorcism. This practice was generally condemned by the mainline Protestant churches and the Classical Pentecostals. The charismatic movement made popular the use of olive oil which they have come to call 'anointing oil.' The contemporary prophets use anointing oil profusely but they have also introduced the use

of *koko*,<sup>40</sup> lime juice, toilet soap and handkerchief which they consecrate and sell to clients. Such material items are regarded as vehicles of healing and other blessings.

Unlike the rather much more sophisticated and better educated pastors of the charismatic churches who mainly use English in preaching, these prophets mostly use the Asante Twi dialect of the Akan language. Their expressions are normally not refined; they admonish, rebuke and warn in language that is sometimes provocative and bothers on vulgarity and profanity. By this they seem to be projecting an image of being brave and create the impression that they sincerely preach the undiluted word of God. Like most leaders of charismatic churches, these prophets advertise their alleged exploits on radio and television. They also advertise their programmes by the same media.

#### 6. *Claiming religious space*

The emphases that these prophets place on certain teachings and practices that seem to connect well with important elements of indigenous Ghanaian spirituality, and which appear to be mostly ignored by the mainstream Pentecostal/Charismatic churches that are becoming increasingly sophisticated and elitist make them incontrovertibly relevant. In the past three decades or so, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement in Ghana has almost completely shed off its traditional aversion for theological scholarship and sacerdotal tendencies and gone ahead to become the religion for the new educated urban middle class elite.

This development has been accomplished by reducing the emphasis placed on charisma and elements such as dreams, visions and their interpretation on the one hand and a growing show of inclinations toward intellectualism and a steady drift toward sacerdotalism on the other. The effect of this development could be discerned in the rather practical motivational speaking they often resort to in place of the traditional Pentecostal/Charismatic sermons of spiritual transformation and God's power to deliver from evil they previously preached. It could also be discerned in the academic degrees and clerical titles that have become holy treasures greatly sought after by modern Pentecostals/Charismatics in Ghana. This drift towards elitism could also be discerned in the establishment of Universities and Bible Colleges with accreditation/ affiliation to well-established state universities and some foreign institutions of higher learning. In the process, the narrative Biblical preaching, stress on dream and visions, the sacramental use of water and other materials, which in the past attracted the masses to Pentecostalism, have been played-down in favour of more formal worship-styles and faith-expressions.

Increasingly, people with no formal education or even the semi-educated are being edged out of the leadership and membership of mainstream Pentecostalism. Furthermore, the Classical Pentecostal churches seem to have been increasingly routinised in their organizational arrangements. They now have well-defined structures and hierarchical arrangements that are tied to one's experience in ministry, educational background and track record of display of loyalty and dedication to the church. This means a major shift from emphasis on claims to charisma as the main qualification to enter the ministry to increasingly formal and 'mundane' criteria of appointment to the ministry.

<sup>40</sup> 'Koko' is a traditional porridge made from corn dough which is a common affordable meal served at breakfast

It is against the background of the above that one may analyse the shooting into prominence of the type of Christian renewal that we discuss in this paper. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the western mission instituted churches failed to touch the African soul with their type of ministry and had excluded many sincere and enthusiastic but often times not very well educated Africans from participating in the life and ministry of the church. The prophetic movements which later partly led to the rise of the AICs emerged. This development created space in Christian ministry for such charismatic independent preachers who strongly felt called by God to minister but who, by the stringent academic requirements in the mission instituted churches, could not qualify for ordination into the ministry. It also created the opportunity for those on the peripheries of society, such as women to secure space to operate in ministry.

The emergence of the classical Pentecostal churches provided the arena for those who longed for vigorous self-expression in worship and other religious and cultural routes to spirituality to operate freely. Some of such people whose spiritual orientation and lack of adequate educational background would have made it difficult for them to be accepted into the ministry of the mission instituted churches at the time, found space in classical Pentecostal churches as overseers and pastors.

### *7. Conclusion*

When the Pentecostal/charismatic-type churches become routinised, they tend to de-emphasise spiritual power and charisma and, in the process, develop Church cultures that leave virtually no space for people with low educational level to participate in leadership and general church life.

With the Ghanaian's attraction for spiritual power as the source from which to find help to address all kinds of problems, new movements that stress spiritual power will always thrive and when they appear to be losing their initial charisma, new ones more vigorous than the previous would emerge and provide space for people with the appropriate gifts/skills to operate. Thus, perceived deficiencies in religious movements may be compensated for, most of the time, in the emergence of more radical and vigorous new ones. This development also creates room for a kind of spirituality that met the desires of ordinary Africans who do not find fulfilment in existing Christian traditions.