

# African Charismatics

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# African Charismatics

Current Developments within Independent  
Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana

*by*

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu



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To  
Theodora, Theophil, Griselda and Emmanuel



## CONTENTS

Preface .....	ix
Abbreviations .....	xii
Introduction .....	1
Chapter One Pentecostalism in Context .....	9
Chapter Two Prophetism and Renewal .....	36
Chapter Three Demystification of Prophetism .....	64
Chapter Four Democratisation of Charisma .....	96
Chapter Five Salvation as Transformation and Empowerment .....	132
Chapter Six Salvation as Healing and Deliverance .....	164
Chapter Seven Salvation as Prosperity .....	201
Chapter Eight African Charismatic Spirituality .....	233
Bibliography .....	249
Index .....	275





## PREFACE

The material in this book formed the substance of my Ph.D. thesis presented to the University of Birmingham, UK, in March 2000. The general recession of Christianity in the modern West, particularly Western Europe, has coincided with the accession of the faith in the Southern continents, especially Africa south of the Sahara. This study was inspired partly by a desire to illustrate an aspect of the nature and manifestation of the shifting centre of gravity of Christianity in the twentieth century from the North to the South. Pentecostal Christianity, the religion of the Holy Spirit, it is argued, represents the most concrete evidence of the phenomenal expansion of Christianity in African countries like Ghana. In Ghana today, as elsewhere around the African continent, multitudinous independent indigenous Pentecostal and autochthonous Charismatic movements that developed in response to the staid denominationalism of historic mission Christianity have come to represent local manifestations of a global phenomenon. The African independent churches and Charismatic movements studied in this volume, like most, if not all, new religious movements, can be very volatile in nature. These are highly eclectic movements that are changing all the time and since this research was concluded significant changes have occurred and continue to occur within the movements studied here.

The changes in question have been occasioned by such factors as the continuous metamorphosis of older African independent churches into modern versions of themselves by dropping the use of paraphernalia and rituals considered too close to traditional religions in order to ensure their own survival. An increased interaction and exchange of personnel between Asian Pentecostals and modern African Charismatic movements has widened the international network within which some of the movements operate. There is also the heightened, even competitive, use of the media and modern media technologies by African charismatic leaders and their movements and an ever-increasing volume of publications emanating from Charismatic pastors. Accusations of sexual and financial impropriety have now begun to occur among Charismatics, with some leading to acrimonious secessions. Sharper distinctions in terms of identities have also gradually

appeared within what originally seemed a homogeneous movement. These developments are significant and would have been sufficient to justify rewriting either portions of the study, or at least the conclusion, in order to accommodate some of the salient ones. After consideration and in the full knowledge that studies on these movements are ongoing, I decided to leave the material largely undisturbed. So, except for some deletions particularly affecting footnoting and slight modifications in chapter titles, the bulk of the material has been maintained intact.

Many friends and family members contributed in various ways to enable me to conduct my research. The thesis was written under the guidance and supervision of Rev. Dr Emmanuel Y. Lartey, then of the University of Birmingham and now Professor of Pastoral Theology and Care at the Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia, USA. I remain grateful to Emmanuel, his wife Griselda and their four boys for support and friendship over the years. Sponsorship for my studies was provided by the Langham Research Scholarships and my family and I are grateful for the generous support that enabled us to live together in Britain for the greater part of my studies. Gratitude is extended to John W. Stott for his vision in setting up Langham Trust, to Canon Paul Berg, the Honorary Administrator, for taking very good care of us, and also to the members of Christ Church, Bristol, who adopted us as missionary partners and showed tremendous concern for our emotional, material and spiritual well-being.

I acknowledge the encouragement received from Dr Kevin Ward of the University of Leeds and Dr Allan Anderson of the University of Birmingham, examiners of my thesis, who prompted me to rework it for publication. Kevin Ward mentioned me to Paul Gifford whose writings on contemporary African Christianity provided invaluable sources of information for this work. I thank Mr Gifford sincerely not only for providing the guidance on how to transform a thesis into a book but also for assisting the process by painstakingly reading through the manuscript more than once and suggesting points at which amendments could be made. Ingrid Lawrie of Leeds University deserves special mention for the meticulous care with which she copy-edited this book, consulting with me at every turn to ensure it turned out well. I appreciate your hard work, Ingrid, and the amount of time and energy you have invested in this volume. Professor Ogbu U. Kalu, formerly of the University of Nsukka, Nigeria, and now of

McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, and Professor Rosalind I.J. Hackett, of the University of Tennessee, deserve mention for making time to meet me during visits to Birmingham. The interest Professors Kalu and Hackett showed in my work and our discussions were very beneficial.

Many people, too numerous to mention individually, assisted in the collection of data during the research. They include Dr. Casely Essamuah, a colleague in the ministry of the Methodist Church Ghana and minister of missions at Park Street Church, Boston, USA, and Dr. Kojo Arhinful, Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana, Legon, who secured very useful books and articles for my use. My friends William and Avril Kudzi, Alex Owusu Biney, fellow ministers Christopher Andam and Boateng Enninful, and Church of Pentecost pastor, Apostle Dr. Opoku Onyiah, all assisted with the acquisition of data during the course of the research. Heartfelt thanks also go to the Enyimayew and Asibey-Berko families of my former congregation, the Legon Interdenominational Church, Ghana, who relieved me of anxiety by accommodating my family in the months prior to their joining me in Birmingham. This work could not have been completed without the co-operation of the numerous pastors, leaders and members of various independent churches in Ghana who granted me interviews and made available for my use church documents and other publications. I thank them for their contributions and help. Theodora, my wife and friend, and our children Theophil, Griselda and Emmanuel have been my closest companions along this journey and I am grateful to them and to God for bringing us into each other's lives.

The helpers have been many, but the information provided in this volume represents a personal interpretation of current developments within Ghanaian Christianity. I thus remain solely responsible for anything herein that readers may find questionable. Essentially however, this work is meant to be a contribution to the academic study of African Christianity and, if readers find something here that adds to their knowledge and understanding of this burgeoning and volatile phenomenon, then the purpose for which the study was conducted will have been fulfilled.

*J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu*  
*April 2004*

## ABBREVIATIONS

AICs	African Independent/Instituted/Initiated Churches
BSPG	Bible Study and Prayer Group
CDO	Civil Defence Organisation
CEM	Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry
CMs	Charismatic Ministries
CoP	The Church of Pentecost
GES	Ghana Evangelical Society
GHAFES	Ghana Fellowship of Evangelical Students
HOVCEA	Hour of Visitation Choir and Evangelistic Association
JWI	Joyful Way Incorporated
MCG	Methodist Church Ghana
MDCC	Musama Disco Christo Church
PCG	Presbyterian Church of Ghana
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
SU	Scripture Union
TWMCs	Traditional Western Mission Churches
YAFCA	Youth Ambassadors for Christ Association

## INTRODUCTION

In this book, Pentecostalism is presented as a movement of the Holy Spirit that over the years has acquired the status of a global phenomenon with local manifestations. The varied responses to the presence of the Spirit within different socio-religious contexts and cultures have given rise to an equally varied and diverse multiplicity of churches and movements that respond to the designation Pentecostal, Charismatic or, in not a few cases, both. The growth, diversity and variegated nature of Pentecostal movements across the world confound attempts at achieving neat classifications. One result is that terms and designations associated with Pentecostalism have come to mean different things in different contexts. When used in Ghana, the expression 'Charismatic', for example, takes on a slightly different meaning from what pertains in a Western European context. In the Western context, Charismatic movements are normally renewal groups operating within older and more firmly established historic mainline denominations. In sub-Saharan African countries like Ghana, on the other hand, the expression 'Charismatic' is used more in reference to the new wave of independent Pentecostal movements. Despite their indigenous roots, they are greatly inspired by North American, neo-Pentecostal, televangelistic movements with their mega-church philosophies, world-dominating agenda for Christianity and religious entrepreneurial ambitions that motivate people to translate their salvation into practical everyday achievements in business, education, economics and family life. This book acknowledges the American influence on Ghana's Charismatic churches. In the last couple of years, however, this influence has expanded into an international network incorporating similar churches in other contexts including South-East Asia, South Africa, the Caribbean and the UK, where mega-churches like the Kingsway International Christian Centre led by Nigerian-born Charismatic pastor, Matthew Ashimolowo, have become collaborators in efforts that have turned this new wave of Charismatic Christianity into a global culture. The position adopted in this study, as far as the origins of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity are concerned, however, is that the existence of the movement in Africa, as elsewhere around the globe, is not causally linked

to the origins of North American Pentecostalism, which began in the early years of the last century.

In the opening chapter, I offer a working definition of Pentecostalism that is deliberately made broad enough to cater for the different streams of the movement scattered across the diverse contexts. I then proceed to situate the study in context by providing an overview of the different waves of Pentecostal movements that have hit the religious shores of Ghana since the turn of the twentieth century. The main body of the study is contained in two sections spanning chapters 2 to 7. The first section, comprising chapters 2, 3 and 4, focuses on major historical and socio-theological developments that have occurred within Ghanaian independent indigenous Pentecostalism since its emergence at the turn of the last century. In chapter 2 an attempt is made to articulate within a five-point framework what may be considered the main religious/theological contribution to Ghanaian Christianity of the older African independent churches, called in this volume by their popular Ghanaian name, *Sunsum sorè* (Spiritual churches). One of the most significant trends within Ghanaian Christianity at present is that the *Sunsum sorè*, once the growth point of African Christianity, are on the whole declining in physical presence, though not in pristine theological impact. Some *Sunsum sorè* have not gone away, they have simply taken on new identities in keeping with current trends and in response to the changing face of African Christianity under the forces of religious modernisation and globalisation. Their history and contribution to indigenous Christianity need to be preserved, and some of the factors accounting for the decline of these older independent churches are discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 2 is meant to affirm that the problems leading to the decline of the *Sunsum sorè* as discussed in chapter 3 belie the overall contribution that the older churches, pioneers in Charismatic renewal in many parts of Africa, have made to Christianity in Ghana. This contribution, it is argued, still endures through the survival of reforms undertaken by the older historic mission churches in response to the challenge from the *Sunsum sorè*. Today, historic mission churches in Ghana have come full circle in the admission of women into the ordained ministry, the use of drums, hand-clapping and the organisation of healing services, reforms that were initiated in response to the drift of their members into independent churches. These reforms helped the historic mission churches to hold on to some of their own. The rise of the Charismatic Ministries/Churches, and the

prevalence in these newer independent churches of pneumatic occurrences initially associated with the older AICs, have served to reinforce the importance of pneumatic phenomena to the survival of Christianity in Africa. Chapter 4 deals with the rise and nature of the Charismatic Ministries (CMs), beginning with their roots in the conservative evangelical movement and the basic theological differences between this fresh wave of Pentecostalism and their older counterparts, the *Sunsum sorè*.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7, which form the second section, are more theological, and examine the key themes associated with the theological orientation of the CMs. Generally, most of the teachings and beliefs in chapters 5–7 straddle the whole of the neo-Pentecostal movement. Where it is thought that a particular ethos is widely shared, reference is made to ‘Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals’ instead of CMs. The issues raised in chapters 5–7 are premised on the fact that the basic intention of the CMs as renewal movements is to mediate what they consider to be a more relevant Christian soteriology than has been proffered by other Christian traditions. Each of the main themes on the nature of this salvific theology is discussed in the chapters as follows: chapter 5 looks at ‘salvation as transformation and empowerment’; chapter 6 looks at ‘salvation as healing and deliverance’; and chapter 7 examines the theology of ‘health and wealth’ as found in the teachings of the CMs. The concluding chapter 8 attempts to bring together the main findings embodied in the research and what this reveals about the nature of African Pentecostal spirituality.

The book as a whole looks at the collective history, and the religious and theological orientation, of indigenous Pentecostal movements. Harold Turner, one of the pioneers in the study of religious innovation in Africa, maintained that such movements are best studied according to their tendencies and emphases ‘rather than as individual religious bodies and movements’.<sup>1</sup> As his perceptive view is followed in this study, I do not concentrate all attention on particular movements or churches. In keeping with this method, the field research is qualitative in nature and has focused on collecting broad samples of data in order to arrive at ‘tendencies and emphases’ reflecting the ethos and character of particular waves of indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), 80, 82.

Pentecostalism in Ghana. Most of the groups under study were founded by individuals or by small groups of individuals (mostly two or three) with a clear leader whose personal vision often determined the weight given to particular teachings and practices. It would therefore be misleading to give the impression that the different waves of Ghanaian indigenous Pentecostal movements form single coherent and undifferentiated entities. For each wave, it was thought that concentrating all attention on single churches would not give sufficient insight into the theological orientation of the movement as a whole. It is the quantitative proliferation of similar movements and the qualitative impact they have subsequently made within given periods that has drawn attention to them. This was a key consideration in the collection of data. Some ideas, practices and teachings are more prominent in particular sections of the movement than others. For example, although reference is made to the use of olive oil as an aid in healing, and to a recent spate of enthronement of bishops in Ghanaian CMs, some of its leaders denounce these developments as excessive. Others interpret them as inconsistent with their theological orientation. One Charismatic church leader even considered it 'sacrilege' for CMs to retrieve for their own churches institutions that they had earlier condemned as stifling spiritual progress in established Christianity. Although the belief that Christians can expect material prosperity if they follow the 'right principles' is present in the teachings of almost all CMs, the emphasis seems stronger in the message and lifestyles of certain leaders and their churches than others. The choice of cases and examples for this study has, therefore, been determined by how much prominence and clarity particular Charismatic leaders and churches appear, in our judgement, to give to issues of relevance and interest to this work.

The bulk of the data culminating in this publication was gathered in two main phases of field research: first between January and September 1996 and then from July to September 1998. The initial interest in indigenous Pentecostalism was sparked during field research undertaken in 1993 towards my M.Phil. study on 'Traditional Missionary Christianity and New Religious Movements in Ghana' at the University of Ghana, Legon. That work focused on new religious movements in general, including some from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The broad nature of the study did not permit an in-depth examination of specific theological issues relating to independent indigenous Pentecostalism. As indicated in the footnotes, some audiotape-recorded interviews with selected leaders of the



evangelical and Charismatic movements took place during the period of the M.Phil. study. The relevant tapes were transcribed for this work, and almost all the leaders or their direct assistants were also re-interviewed either in 1996 or later in 1998. This helped in reviewing some of the issues raised and those needing further exploration were followed up during the second round of interviews. In the summer of 1998 (July-September) another visit was made to Ghana mainly to observe changes that had occurred in the field since 1996 and to update material collected earlier.

All three phases of fieldwork involved the following: the examination of relevant church documents and the extraction of information; structured and unstructured interviews; personal observation through visits to prayer meetings, church services, camp meetings and other programmes organised by the movements under study. Ghanaian Pentecostals tend to be very proud of their churches, so members, leading functionaries and adepts were willing to engage in extensive conversations on their respective movements. These conversations proved very appropriate because of their informal and spontaneous nature. In Ghanaian culture generally, the visitor is not considered an intrusion. It was therefore possible to revisit a number of Charismatic church pastors, often at very short notice, for conversations and interviews, all of which were audiotape-recorded. In all cases permission was asked to tape parts of conversations that were thought to contain new information or considered worth quoting. These informal conversations were time-consuming, but also provided an enormous amount of information that would have been difficult to obtain otherwise. The major Charismatic churches in Ghana hold at least two services on Sundays and one or more weekday meetings. This made it possible to visit at least two churches every Sunday and another two during the week. With the permission of members to whom I spoke after church services, information considered vital was written down to ensure nothing was lost. One social-scientific researcher has noted that seeing a person's life and taking part in it—the two main ingredients of participant observation—make sense only when they are accompanied by speaking and listening.<sup>2</sup> Follow-up visits to church meetings as a participant

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<sup>2</sup> Sjaak van der Geest, 'Participant Observation in Demographic Research. Fieldwork Experiences in a Ghanaian Community', in A.M. Basu and P. Aaby (eds.), *The Methods and Uses of Anthropological Demography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 40.

observer afforded the opportunity to listen to and engage in informal conversations with members of the various movements for further information and clarification of relevant issues. Pentecostals pray aloud. The nature and content of such personal communication with God within public space also provided unique insights into the view of supplicants on the nature of God and the privileges they expect to gain from him as his children.

The appropriation of media technologies by the CMs in particular has also made available a wide range of resources for research. These include audio- and videocassette tapes, mostly containing sermons preached, church magazines and newsletters. Many of these were purchased from the respective ministries. Further copies of tapes, church magazines and newsletters of CMs were received from Ghana on request from friends. The author holds copies of all tapes referred to in this study. A major source of information has been the books published by pastors of the Charismatic churches, which invariably contain messages preached. A significant part of what the CMs believe and teach also comes through their radio programmes. During the 1996 fieldwork and again in 1998, this author listened to and took written notes almost every day from messages delivered on Ghanaian FM stations by Charismatic preachers and the responses from listeners telephoning either to put across prayer requests, or to testify about something God had done.

As noted earlier, this is a study of 'tendencies and emphases' rather than of particular churches and personalities. In addition to the study of the Jesus Divine Healing Church, which is the main case used to illustrate the decline of the Sunsum sorè, a visit was made to Winneba, the scene of an earlier study by Wyllie which led to the publication of *The Spirit-Seekers*. This visit confirmed that not only have a number of the churches listed by Wyllie in this 1968 study gone out of existence, but many of those remaining have experienced repeated schisms within the thirty-year interval. It was also revealing that in that period the religious field had expanded to accommodate a number of new independent Pentecostal churches providing stiff competition for, and thereby marginalising, the Sunsum sorè. A visit was also made to Mozano, the 'holy city' of the Musama Disco Christo Church, during the church's annual Peace Festival of 1998. The General Head, Prophet Miritaiah Jonah Jehu-Appiah, granted the author a one-hour interview and also provided an assis-

tant to give him a tour of the significant centres of religious activity.

The expression 'Pentecostal theology' is sometimes used in this work, but in our conclusion an attempt is made to put together what would usually be expressed in our discussions as the 'theological orientation' or 'spirituality' of Ghana's indigenous Pentecostal movements. 'Theology' in the Christian context has been defined as involving 'discourse about God', that is, 'a reflection upon the God whom Christians worship and adore'.<sup>3</sup> In the Western context, theologising invariably involves rational systematic analyses of the 'content of faith', that is the nature, purposes and activity of God in relation to the world. Pentecostals theologise too. But as our working definition will seek to put across, they centre their Christianity on the experience of God the Holy Spirit, seeing this experience as the heartbeat of their faith. It is more appropriate, therefore, especially within oral cultures like that of Ghana, to speak of 'Pentecostal beliefs and practices' rather than of 'Pentecostal theology', which gives the impression of a rational systematic reflection of what faith entails. The articulation of such 'beliefs and practices' within Ghanaian Pentecostalism, which is based on members' experiences of the Spirit, is what has been expressed in this study as their 'theological orientation' or 'spirituality'. Spirituality in this context therefore refers to the way in which indigenous Pentecostals express or live out their faith. It encapsulates the cluster of values, beliefs and practices that give Pentecostals their distinctive Christianity. An important element of Pentecostal spirituality is the emphasis on 'gifts of the Spirit', often expressed in the literature as 'Charismatic gifts'. In this study, the expression 'spiritual gift' is preferred, as the use of 'Charismatic' by the groups under study almost always entails a gift from the Spirit.

The oral nature of African theologising in general and of Pentecostalism in particular has necessitated looking beyond Western organisational models and conceptual patterns of thought in order to arrive at the spirituality of indigenous Pentecostals. We find an instance of the Western approach in Dayton, who captures the gestalt of Pentecostalism in a four-fold common pattern of belief: salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit, divine healing and the Second Coming

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<sup>3</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 141.

of Christ.<sup>4</sup> This may be helpful, but codifying Pentecostal theology this way fails to take account of the prominence of particular beliefs in specific cultural contexts like that of Ghana, where, because of the oral nature of the culture, religion in general, as Pentecostalism in particular, is not articulated through credal formulae. The emphasis on religious experience does not necessarily negate the importance of doctrinal formulations. Rather, religious experience proves the reality of doctrine through practical expression. Part of the popularity and attraction of Pentecostalism in the African context thus lies in the experiential and expressive nature of the movement, particularly in its ability to offer health and well-being in this life. It is noteworthy that these are ends to which much traditional ritual in Africa may also be directed. What is discussed in this study as embodying indigenous Pentecostal spirituality has therefore not been retrieved from any existing set of codified beliefs. The essence of African Pentecostal spirituality, as stated in the method adopted for this study, has been arrived at by participating, observing, listening and asking for the meanings of what Ghanaian Pentecostals preach, sing, say, do and sometimes write about. This work takes its cue from Walter J. Hollenweger, the doyen of intercultural Pentecostal studies, in applying the intercultural view of theology to the study of twentieth-century waves of Pentecostal renewal in Ghana. Ghanaian Pentecostals, this work endeavours to argue, may have their failures, but through their experiential spirituality they are successfully mediating the sacred, bringing God to people and conveying the self-transcending and life-changing nature of Pentecostal religion in an African setting in a way that resonates with African traditional spirituality.

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<sup>4</sup> Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987).

## CHAPTER ONE

### PENTECOSTALISM IN CONTEXT

A leitmotiv running through the modern period is the bankruptcy of Christendom as carrier of Christian reality. . . . How dare anyone claim that Western culture is *Christian*? The tension produced by the discrepancy between churchly reality and official creed has caused concerned people in every generation to press for renovation of the church so that it might live wholly under the lordship of Jesus Christ. . . . (Wilbert R. Shenk).<sup>1</sup>

In an article on ‘Christianity in Africa’ written in 1970, David Barrett observed that by AD 2000 the centre of gravity of the Christian faith would have shifted markedly southwards, not only resulting in Christianity becoming the dominant religion of Africa, but also causing its transformation into a primarily non-Western faith.<sup>2</sup> The phenomenal growth experienced in African Christianity since the turn of the twentieth century has served to confirm Barrett’s observations. The exponential growth and renewal of Christianity in Africa stands in sharp contrast to the present state of Europe where, as Forrester writes, Christianity has been marginalised through the forces of ‘secularism, atheism and materialism’.<sup>3</sup> In Europe, modernity, the application of systematic rationality, science and technology to appropriate nature for servicing human ends and problems, has generally engendered anti-supernaturalism, unbelief and moral relativism leading to the relegation of religion to the private realm. Religious experience, which Otto refers to as the ‘non-rational element’ in religion, seems largely in the Western context to have been jettisoned out of the

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<sup>1</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, *Write the Vision: The Church Renewed* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995) 12.

<sup>2</sup> David B. Barrett, ‘AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa’, *International Review of Mission*, vol. 59 (January 1970), 39–54.

<sup>3</sup> Duncan B. Forrester, ‘Christianity in Europe’, in Sean Gill, Gavin D’Costa, Ursula King (eds.), *Religion in Europe: Contemporary Perspectives* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 34–45.

'idea of the holy'.<sup>4</sup> Thus whilst Forrester invites Christian Europe to come to terms with her peripheral condition and search for a new role befitting her minority status,<sup>5</sup> Hastings speaks of modern Africa as being 'totally inconceivable apart from the presence of Christianity'.<sup>6</sup> For at a time when chapel buildings in many parts of Western Europe are being converted into pubs, clubs, restaurants, warehouses, cinemas, museums, residential facilities (and in other instances Buddhist and Hindu temples), these same secular facilities are being refurbished for the use of churches in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>7</sup> In Ghana, the immediate context of this enquiry, properties originally designated for secular, commercial, and other mundane purposes continue to be reclaimed for use as places of worship by new churches, most of which belong to the Pentecostal stream. Thus a major premise of this research is that Pentecostalism is the area in which the growth in African Christianity has been most conspicuous.

*Defining Pentecostalism: An Intercultural Perspective*

Our discussion of Pentecostalism in African Christianity must first be set within the context of what is meant by 'Pentecostal'. Historically the emergence of Pentecostalism worldwide has been interpreted as standing in direct continuity with the experiences of Charles Fox Parham and William J. Seymour's Azusa Street movement of 1901 and 1906 respectively. While scholars like Synan hold the view that practically all the Pentecostal groups in existence can trace their lineage to the Azusa Mission, there is evidence to suggest that not all Pentecostal outbursts around the world may be causally linked to North American initiatives.<sup>8</sup> Pentecostal outbursts in India, for example, are said to have predated the North American experience

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Forrester, 'Christianity in Europe', 40.

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Hastings, 'Christianity in Africa', in Ursula King (ed.), *Turning Points in Religious Studies: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Parrinder* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 208.

<sup>7</sup> Unless stated otherwise, references to Africa in this work refer to sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>8</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

by at least forty years, taking an indigenous course with little or no Western missionary involvement.<sup>9</sup> In Haiti, where glossolalia is considered akin to certain features of voodoo spirit possession, 'speaking in tongues' which defines much of Western Pentecostalism, it is claimed, does not set the Pentecostal apart from others nearly as much as the ceremony of burning voodoo objects and paraphernalia.<sup>10</sup> This may be understandable as Third World Pentecostals generally consider traditional religions like voodoo avowed enemies of renewed Christianity. This study therefore identifies with the views of scholars like Pomerville, Peterson and Sepúlveda, who see as erroneous the idea that all Pentecostal movements can trace their lineage to Seymour's Azusa Street mission or to Parham's initiative. Our view is that this position overlooks the unique origins of other previous but equally significant or even simultaneous Pentecostal outpourings around the world. Further, it also erroneously portrays Pentecostalism as an American export rather than a Holy Spirit-led renewal of the church in the context of salvation history. In the documentation of the history of Pentecostalism, the origins of the movement in different contexts across the world should be distinguished from the efforts of its American versions to globalise knowledge of it.

Pentecostal history in this study is thus viewed from an intercultural perspective. This perspective, originally advocated by Hollenweger, sees the different contexts of Pentecostalism as distinctive members of a global family. An intercultural theology, therefore, aims at a 'body of Christ' in which individual organs remain committed to their function whilst contributing to the whole without any assuming a sense of superiority over the others.<sup>11</sup> The intercultural view of Pentecostal history rejects conventional interpretations that consider what happened in the course of Western Christendom as universally normative for Christian history. Interculturality values diversity. So, speaking on the theme 'Pentecostal Theology in the Twenty-First Century', John C. Thomas, a former president of the Society

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<sup>9</sup> Gary B. McGee, 'Pentecostal Phenomena and Revivals in India: Implications for Indigenous Leadership', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 20, 3 (1996), 112–117.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick J. Conway, 'Pentecostalism in Haiti: Healing and Hierarchy', in Stephen D. Glazier (ed.), *Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), 7–26.

<sup>11</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Intercultural Theology', *Theological Renewal*, 10 (London: Fountain Trust, 1978), 4.

for Pentecostal Studies, refers to the fact that, despite the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and theological diversities of those constituting Pentecostalism, the movement has generated a global culture with shared features.<sup>12</sup> Thomas therefore suggests encouraging the diverse voices from all parts of the world that make up the Pentecostal family not only ‘to find a voice’, but also ‘to speak their own theological language, making their own contributions to the larger Pentecostal family’.<sup>13</sup>

In applying an intercultural interpretation to Pentecostal history therefore, we depart from approaches to the study of Pentecostalism that present African participants as mere clones, consumers or imitators of innovations that originated outside their context. Religious movements are invariably shaped by the cultural and political milieu in which they arise. The intercultural perspective has implications for what it means to be Pentecostal because it calls for a broader, more inclusive definition of Pentecostalism than one finds in the thinking of some Western authors. The following personal working definition of Pentecostalism is given with the intercultural perspective in mind:

Pentecostalism refers to Christian groups which emphasise salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic phenomena including ‘speaking in tongues’, prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general, perceived as standing in historic continuity with the experiences of the early church as found especially in the Acts of the Apostles, are sought, accepted, valued, and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experiences of his Spirit.

Pentecostalism is a stream of Christianity that emphasises experience and so those who seek ‘membership’ do not have to go through a catechism. What has been outlined in the working definition above may be profitably regarded as the ‘core beliefs’ that a person has to affirm or identify with, albeit experientially, in order to be regarded as a ‘Pentecostal’. In the praxis of religion, there are thoughts and practices that are self-evident only to those who are part of a specific religious culture. So if, for instance, during a Pentecostal meeting a

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<sup>12</sup> John C. Thomas, ‘Pentecostal Theology in the Twenty-First Century’, *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 20, 1 (1998), 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



member speaks of his or her new life in Christ, testifies to a healing experience or suddenly prophesies, whether in tongues or in plain speech, reflects on a personal dream as embedding some divine injunction, narrates a revelation, or approves a preacher's point by shouting 'Amen' or 'hallelujah' as often happens, this would not be considered unusual or aberrant active behaviour by insiders. Rather it would be considered natural to Pentecostal spirituality and accepted as normal, though sometimes not uncritically, because not only are the Holy Spirit's spontaneous manifestations recognised in Pentecostal gatherings, but also there are biblical injunctions on the need to observe order even in the midst of spontaneity.

In conversations with Ghanaian Pentecostals—and informal conversation is one of the key methods of data collection adopted for this study—participants rarely spoke of 'being Pentecostal' in dogmatic terms. In most cases, references were made first to a transformative encounter with God leading to a 'new life in Christ' or being 'born-again'. People then spoke of some pneumatic experience like 'speaking in tongues', or suddenly realising that one is manifesting the gift of healing, or receiving messages from God, normally about events which later come to pass. In almost every case, people developed an insatiable desire to read the Bible, to pray, and to join in fellowship with like-minded believers. There was also constant reference to overcoming previous scepticism regarding the authenticity of the range of charismatic, that is spiritual, phenomena attributed to the presence and experience of the Holy Spirit. Thus the difference between a Pentecostal Christian and one who is not is that for the Pentecostal the Spirit is an experience but for the others simply a doctrinal concept. Theologically, adherents of Pentecostalism unite around an emphasis upon the experience of the Spirit in the lives of believers and in the church, often in response to the ossification of established Christianity. This is the reason for capturing developments in Ghana in terms of renewal, defined by Sanneh as 'the re-awakening, in a Christian setting, of local impulse and bringing that to bear on Spirit-prompted vernacular participation'.<sup>14</sup> God's

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<sup>14</sup> Lamin Sanneh, 'Translatibility in Islam and Christianity in Africa: A Thematic Approach', in Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E.A. van Beek, and Dennis L. Thomson (eds.), *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression* (London: James Currey; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 41.

Holy Spirit is experienced by Ghanaian Pentecostals as a Spirit of renewal, a source of 'vitalising breath/energy' for the glowing splendour of the church.

*Pentecostalism: The Growing Edges of Ghanaian Christianity*

In Ghana, where this study was conducted, some churches are declining numerically and others are enjoying new leases of life in the face of challenges from a context that has become religiously pluralistic. Myriads of new religious movements, many of non-Christian provenance, operate in Ghana and so the growth in Pentecostalism is only part of a national religious stirring. In the face of this religious advance and mosaic, the contention of this research is that, in terms of religious and theological influence, Pentecostalism at the moment represents the most cogent, powerful and visible evidence of religious renewal and influence in Ghana. I would argue that even the new lease of life being experienced by some of the older churches in Ghana is explicable in terms of their, albeit recent, tolerant and open attitude towards Pentecostal phenomena and renewal movements in their midst. This proliferation of Pentecostal movements in African countries like Ghana highlights an important dimension of Barrett's observations that has not, in terms of current developments, attracted the same scholarly attention as his general prediction of Christian growth. Barrett postulated that the phenomenal growth in African Christianity would weigh more in favour of 'younger' churches than the 'older' Western ones.<sup>15</sup> In the Ghanaian context, the 'older Western churches' refers to churches standing in historic continuity with Roman Catholic and Protestant missions that evangelised the country from the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries respectively. These churches include the Presbyterian (1828), Methodist (1835), Anglican (1904) and Roman Catholic (1482; 1880) denominations. The Western European missionary heritage of these churches is evident in their imitations of Victorian-style architectural buildings, and their retention of traditional Western mission patterns of ministry, clerical accoutrements, liturgical forms and hymnody, creeds, and infant baptism and confirmation as the principal means of initiation

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<sup>15</sup> Barrett, 'AD 2000: 350 Million Christians in Africa', 50.

into membership. Although all the churches in question now operate under indigenous leadership, in this study they are designated 'traditional Western mission churches' (TWMCs) by reason of their historical and theological heritage. In fact the spread of TWMCs in Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, was invariably the work of its indigenous agents. Nevertheless the adjective 'traditional' is considered important not just because of the historical links the churches in question share with the Western missions that pioneered them, but also to distinguish them from other churches of Pentecostal persuasion that are linked historically to foreign missions. Such Western mission-initiated Pentecostal churches include the Assemblies of God, International Church of the Foursquare Gospel and the New Testament Church of God, which are also quite prominent in Ghana. The latter churches belong to the Western classical Pentecostal tradition in which, generally speaking, to be Pentecostal means to have the post-conversion experience designated 'baptism of the Holy Spirit', and which experience, it is normally insisted, must be manifested in 'speaking in tongues'. The expression 'classical Pentecostal churches' is maintained for churches in this category because they normally function as Pentecostal denominations that share the traditions and outlook of similar churches in the West.

To return to Barrett's prediction, in the modern global expansion of Christianity the churches of the Third World are younger, and within Third World countries themselves the Pentecostal churches are younger than their traditional Western mission counterparts. Hollenweger thus took Barrett's prediction further in noting that, given the great rate of expansion at the time, by the beginning of the twenty-first century Pentecostal Christians were expected to number as many as all other Protestants put together.<sup>16</sup> A significant dimension of the general growth in Third World Christianity, then, is that Pentecostalism is the area in which this growth has mostly been felt. Elsewhere Barrett himself acknowledges this by referring to the twentieth-century resurgence of Pentecostal and Charismatic renewal as 'the main and the major sign and wonder of our time'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2.

<sup>17</sup> David Barrett, 'Signs, Wonders and Statistics in the World Today', in Jan A.B. Jongeneel (ed.), *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism: Essays on Intercultural Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 189.

The accuracy of statistical data with respect to religious movements may often be open to question; nevertheless, looking at the Ghanaian religious field at the moment, there is no doubting the qualitative influence and impact that Pentecostal Christianity continues to have on the church's mission.

*Pentecostalism: A Means of Theological Creativity in Ghana*

A second major premise of this research is that, against the backdrop of the worldwide expansion of Pentecostal Christianity, the local versions can be understood only within the context of the socio-cultural and religious environment in which they exist. This research therefore embodies a historico-theological study of some current trends within Ghanaian Christianity focusing mainly on Pentecostal groups collectively designated 'independent indigenous Pentecostal churches'. The groups concerned are described as both 'independent' and 'indigenous' because there is virtually no foreign missionary element in their origins. Any such foreign collaboration followed the trail-blazing efforts of indigenous initiatives. Moreover, unlike, say, the classical Pentecostals, they mostly exist not as denominations but as single-congregation autochthonous churches under Ghanaian leadership. They are considered Pentecostal because they consciously seek to experience and affirm the *active* presence of the Holy Spirit as part of normal Christian expression. On the importance of current developments in African, and for that matter Ghanaian, Christianity for historical and theological research, it is sufficient at this point to quote Andrew Walls, who, writing almost three decades ago, noted that in the ensuing years: 'Theology that matters will be theology where the Christians are', and that 'what sort of theology is most characteristic of the Christianity of the twenty-first century may well depend on what has happened in the minds of African Christians in the interim'.<sup>18</sup>

Much has happened in the theological consciousness of African Christians since the first contact with Western European missions. The missions, it must be acknowledged, contributed significantly to

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Walls, 'Towards Understanding Africa's Place in Christian History', in John S. Pobee (ed.), *Religion in a Pluralistic Society* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 182, 183.

the process of religious change in Africa, especially through the vernacular translation of the Scriptures. However, in the process of indigenous assimilation of Christianity, African Christians found unsatisfactory the tendency of traditional Western missions to explain away the mighty works of God found in the Bible, including God's ability to counter the reality of evil. They found unsatisfactory the inability of inherited Western theologies to respond to their deep-seated yearnings for protection and for the vitalising experience of the Spirit underscored in the Bible. In response, the independent indigenous Pentecostal churches initiated what some observers interpret as a 'second Christianisation'—'renewal', in the context of this study—by placing the Holy Spirit at the centre of the Christian message. Although Pentecostals themselves unapologetically appeal to the Bible for explanations of their experiences, in the African context there is a significant measure of credibility in the perceived resonance between Pentecostal and African traditional/primal religiosity. Quoting Ghanaian theologian Kwame Bediako:

Primal religions generally conceive of religion as a system of power and of living religiously as being in touch with the source and channels of power in the universe; Christian theology in the West seems, on the whole, to understand the Christian Gospel as a system of ideas.<sup>19</sup>

It is thus revealing that Harvey Cox sees in Pentecostal Christianity the recovery of primal spirituality.<sup>20</sup> Pentecostalism is itself a movement that relies on direct experience of the divine rather than on codified beliefs, creeds or philosophies. One of the key features of primal spirituality is the belief in an invisible realm of benevolent and malevolent transcendent powers. Humankind not only stands in need of the powers and blessings of the benevolent beings, but may actually appropriate their protection from evil spiritual forces through covenant relationships with the transcendent benevolent helpers. Pentecostalism is popular in African cultures like that of Ghana because it affirms the reality of God and other supernatural entities. Demons who seek to destroy the Christian and angels as transcendent

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<sup>19</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 106.

<sup>20</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), chapters 4–8.

helpers both feature in the Pentecostal worldview. The ability of Pentecostalism, like traditional religion, to offer personal support in times of need is thus one of the main reasons for the survival of the movement.

Into the twenty-first century, to return to Walls's observation, not only are the bulk of Christians as predicted in Africa, but the theology that seems to have become most characteristic of the church is that which takes seriously the pneumatic experiences of the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. These developments have led to what will at points in this study be referred to as 'the Pentecostalisation of Ghanaian Christianity'. The renewal occurring within Ghanaian Christianity has been such that even churches standing in historic continuity with Western missions and inheriting their rationalistic, systematic, and credal forms of Christianity have been pressured into renewal. This has involved a rethinking of traditional church pneumatologies including the practical articulation of a response to the reality of evil, a non-negotiable element in the religious consciousness of indigenous Christians. In this way Africa has emerged as a new centre of theological creativity, a workshop where Christian answers to African questions are being hammered out. Investigation of the concerns of this theology constitutes one of the main reasons for the research embodied in this volume.

### *Waves of Renewal in Ghanaian Christianity*

Historically it is possible to view the emergence of Pentecostal innovations and creativity in Ghana in terms of at least three main waves. This metaphor is apposite, for, like waves on the seashore, various forms of Pentecostal movement have swept through the Ghanaian religious scene during the past century. Many have perished, others have waned in fervour and enthusiasm, but to different degrees each has left traces of its influence on the religious landscape. Ironically Pentecostals themselves, on account of the unpredictable nature of the movement of the Spirit, may on occasion recall their experiences in terms of being 'hit by waves' of the Spirit. The history of modern Pentecostal outpourings shows that new movements have been born and many existing ones have been renewed or energised. Others have, however, experienced schism and erosion. Thus, speaking in terms of the future of their movement, a pastor of one of Ghana's

new Pentecostal churches averred: ‘no one can predict the future; our movement is like waves which break on the seashore. If the current ones fade, God will bring “a new visitation.”’ To speak of current trends in Ghanaian Christianity, therefore, is to speak not just of growth, expansion and influence, but also of schism, erosion and decline. Indigenous Pentecostal movements in Ghana have proliferated in three main waves, as follows.

### *Sunsum Sorè*

The first wave of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, the Sunsum sorè, began in spontaneous response to the meteoric rise and parallel activities of a number of African prophets whose magnetic personalities and campaigns of revival and renewal drew masses into Christianity. In Ghana, these great religious stirrings began in 1914 with the visit to the coastal town of Axim of the ‘Black Elijah’ of West Africa, the Liberian prophet, William Wadé Harris. Casely Hayford, a leading barrister, merchant and Methodist layman who not only witnessed the Harris revival but was also believed to have received baptism at the hands of the Prophet, is quoted as drawing this conclusion about the impact of Prophet Harris: ‘This is not a revival. It is a Pentecost.’<sup>21</sup> Prophet Harris himself is said to have described his conversion in terms of ‘the Holy Ghost [having] come upon me’.<sup>22</sup> The reputation of Harris went before him as he toured West African coastal towns demonstrating the omnipotence of God through manifestations of divine power in dramatic conversions, healing, prophecy, and deliverance from evil spirits and faith in the material symbols of traditional religiosity.

Wherever it has appeared, Pentecostalism seems to emerge with a strong anticipation of Christ’s imminent return. To those who heeded his message to abandon their visible signs of traditional religion, Prophet Harris ‘promised deliverance, from a future judgement of fire and a time of peace, concord, brotherhood and well-being which was to come with the impending return of Jesus Christ to

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<sup>21</sup> Hans W. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing, 1967), 271.

<sup>22</sup> David A. Shank, *Prophet Harris: The ‘Black Elijah’ of West Africa* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 57.

establish his Kingdom'.<sup>23</sup> Prophets Samson Oppong and John Swatson, a former Harris convert, were two contemporaries of Harris who preached mainly in the Ashanti region of Ghana with similar spectacular results of conversion. Prophetess Grace Tani and Prophet John Nackabah, former traditional priests converted through the Harris campaign, became the main inspiration in the formation of the Twelve Apostles Church, one of the biggest independent churches in Ghana following the Harris revival. With claims of encounters with God through various crisis conversions, these itinerant prophets preached the gospel with power. Their zeal and passion initiated a shift from the formal and staid spirituality and theology that had come to characterise the lives of traditional Western mission churches.

Following the activities of the indigenous prophets, a number of independent churches came into being, mainly to provide alternative 'spiritual homes' for disenchanting members of TWMCs. Some of the people going through Pentecostal experiences found themselves having to start their own churches because their TWMCs were unable to countenance the emerging Pentecostal spirituality. The resulting churches are often referred to as AICs, an acronym meant to stand for any of the following: African independent churches, African initiated churches, African instituted churches, or African indigenous churches. These names undoubtedly served a historical purpose since the churches against which the AICs defined themselves maintained historical and theological connections with Western mission bodies. Current developments in African Christianity have rendered these designations ambiguous. Innovations keep occurring within African Christianity, which, although led by Africans, prefer to define themselves in terms of first-century Christianity and the international networks to which they belong. Moreover these new churches initiated by Africans are also independent in the same sense as the original AICs.

More often than not, explanations for the emergence of religious movements in Africa have been derived from factors outside the movements themselves. In contradistinction to an 'emic' viewpoint which results from studying behaviour 'as from inside a system' like a religious movement, 'etic' is used to refer to attempts to study

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 6.



behaviour using criteria that are ‘external to the system’ under study.<sup>24</sup> The significant variations within the older independent church movement in Africa have led to the use of such classifications as ‘messianic’, ‘nativistic’, ‘separatist’, ‘spiritist’, ‘millennial’, ‘syncretistic’ and ‘protectionist’ which may be described as *etic*. I share the view of scholars interested in the study of religion who underscore the value of both the *etic* and *emic* approaches in behavioural analysis. However, the *etic* approach could serve to give the individual movement ‘a functional reasonableness’ or even castigate it as possessing dysfunctional aberrant characteristics. In dealing with the issue of nomenclature in the study of religious movements therefore, scholars like Wach recommend that the intention, motivation and central religious orientation of the innovators be considered important factors that make such movements unique.<sup>25</sup> For example, contrary to the church’s view of the second-century prophetic movement Montanism as irritant and heretic, the prophets themselves, Montanus and his two female associates Priscilla and Maximilla, saw their task as bringing to the Catholic Church a ‘lost Pentecostal springtime’.<sup>26</sup>

In Ghana the so-called AICs appear in the literature as ‘Spiritual churches’, a designation intended to underscore their pneumatic orientation. To that extent our view is that the Spiritual churches share the ethos of Pentecostal movements worldwide. In Ghana the popular vernacular expression for these churches is *Sunsum sorè*, where *Sunsum* is Spirit and *sorè* is worship or church. They belong to the same phenomenological type as Nigeria’s *Aladura* (‘praying churches’) and South Africa’s *Zionist churches*. In talking to leading participants, the impression one gets is that the vernacular designation *Sunsum sorè* appears to be the best approximation that Ghanaian AICs reached in the perception of themselves as re-living the biblical Pentecostal experience in an African setting. The pneumatology of the Spiritual churches this study has in mind is rooted in the

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<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Pike, ‘*Etic and Emic Standpoints for the Description of Behaviour*’, in Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), 28–36.

<sup>25</sup> Joachim Wach, ‘The Meaning and Task of the History of Religions, (“*Religionswissenschaft*”’, in Russell T. McCutcheon (ed.), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, 86.

<sup>26</sup> Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39.

Bible. Not only do the churches explain their spirituality as resonating with biblical patterns, but in fact there is also no vernacular translation of the biblical expression ‘Pentecost’. Since the phenomena and experiences associated with ‘Pentecost’—speaking in tongues, healing, deliverance, visions, dreams, prophesying, revelations, etc.—are the result of being ‘possessed by the Holy Spirit’, Sunsum sorè (that is, churches of the Spirit) seem to observers and the churches concerned a more appropriate expression of their experiences, central beliefs and theological orientation. The Sunsum sorè saw themselves as different from TWMCs not in terms of being more African, but rather as being churches in which the Spirit existed as experience and not merely as doctrine. In principle every Pentecostal church may be described as a ‘Spiritual church’. Instead of the conventional ‘African Independent Churches’, therefore, this study follows local usage and, more importantly, the understanding of the churches concerned, and refers to them as Sunsum sorè. This designation is preferred first because it not only captures in vernacular form but also affirms the basic Pentecostal orientation of the so-called AICs. Secondly, it distinguishes the Sunsum sorè from African nationalist or Ethiopianist (independent) churches also initiated by indigenous people but generally possessing a different ecclesiology or pattern of ministry. Whereas leading members of nationalist churches, consisting mostly of the educated elite, dropped their ‘Christian names’ in favour of African names, founders of Sunsum sorè tended to emphasise their baptismal or ‘Christian’ names to emphasise their new identity following conversion and calling into ministry. One way to appreciate the Pentecostal orientation of the Sunsum sorè therefore is to compare their underlying motivation and nature with those of the African nationalist or Ethiopianist church movement, which, although intended as a rebellion against missionary control, effectively maintained the missionary model of ecclesiastical life. African nationalist churches were determined to fulfil in authentically African terms the biblical prophecy that ‘Ethiopia [i.e. black Africa] shall stretch forth his hand to God’ (Psalm 68:31).

This work recognises that Sunsum sorè consist of such a variety of groups with an equal diversity of emphases in things pertaining to the Holy Spirit that it is difficult in the light of global developments to call them ‘Pentecostal’ without qualification. The concern of this study lies mainly with those Ghanaian versions that are recognisably Christian because they believe in and affirm the omnipo-

tence of God, the lordship of Jesus Christ as the sole mediator between God and humankind and the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity poured out on 'all flesh'. So Baëta, for instance, recognises the Sunsum sorè as composed of people who have turned away from traditional resources of supernatural succour in order to worship the God proclaimed in the Christian evangel.<sup>27</sup> In that respect this work identifies with the position that older independent churches such as the Sunsum sorè bear the characteristics of Pentecostalism observed anywhere. This work therefore classifies them with the groups to which the collective expression, 'independent indigenous Pentecostal churches/movements' of Ghana will be applied.

#### *Western Mission-Related Pentecostal Denominations*

The second wave of Pentecostal churches, the Western mission-related Pentecostal denominations, have their roots in indigenous initiatives but became linked quite early with foreign Pentecostal missions. The one to concern us most in this study is the Church of Pentecost, which is currently listed, in terms of church attendance, as the single largest Protestant church in Ghana.<sup>28</sup> In 1998, the CoP claimed a membership of 496,000 adults and 415 new assemblies between 1989 and 1998.<sup>29</sup> The primary interest of this study as far as the CoP is concerned lies in the Church's unique ministry that has made it a significant external factor accounting for the current peripheral status of the Sunsum sorè in Ghanaian Christianity. Although it identifies with the classical Pentecostal tradition, the CoP has acquired a unique indigenous character marking it out as different in outlook from, say, the Assemblies of God, whose American imprint after sixty years of existence in Ghana is still quite obvious.

The CoP is one out of three 'Apostolic' churches to emerge from the initiative of Apostle Peter N. Anim (1890–1984) and his subsequent collaboration with the British Apostolic missionaries James and Sophia McKeown. In 1917 Apostle Anim started a local prayer

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<sup>27</sup> Christian G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some 'Spiritual' Churches* (London: SCM, 1962), 135.

<sup>28</sup> Ghana Evangelism Committee, *National Church Survey Update: Facing the Unfinished Task of the Church in Ghana* (Accra: GEC, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> The Church of Pentecost, 'Reports for the 7th Session of the Extraordinary Council Meetings' (Koforidua, Ghana, 22–26 April 1999), Appendix 1B.

group at Asamankese in the Eastern Region of Ghana, triggering off a 'revivalist type campaign' throughout that region. Anim, who was of Presbyterian background, had come to believe in the efficacy of 'prevailing prayer' for the healing of diseases through *The Sword of the Spirit*, the periodical of a Philadelphia-based Faith Tabernacle movement.<sup>30</sup> Faith Tabernacle taught that 'God would answer the prayers of those who had perfect faith in Him' by healing their sicknesses without recourse to any medicine.<sup>31</sup> In 1921 the teaching of Faith Tabernacle was to work for Anim when through the application of 'prevailing prayer' he was healed of a chronic stomach ulcer and guinea worm disease. Following Anim's personal experience of divine healing, the local prayer group under his leadership adopted the name Faith Tabernacle, thus becoming affiliated with the USA-based movement in 1922. In the following years Anim's group was to enjoy massive following through the experiences and testimonies of healing involving participants. The increased participation and patronage led to an extension of the group's influence through the establishment of branches outside Asamankese.

The Faith Tabernacle group was not Pentecostal. They abhorred 'speaking in tongues' but pursued a strong millennialist teaching, and emphasised personal holiness and the sufficiency of prayer for healing. However, at the time Apostle Anim had also come under some Pentecostal influence through reading another magazine from the Apostolic Faith, a Pentecostal movement based in Portland, Oregon, USA. In 1930 Anim and his group severed relations with the US-based Faith Tabernacle movement and adopted the name Apostolic Faith instead. In 1932 a member of Anim's group seeking healing for his sick twin babies was said to have been praying in the bush when he received the gift of 'speaking in tongues'. From then the phenomenon of tongues spread through the group, becoming a regular experience and part of their prayer meetings and evangelistic campaigns.

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<sup>30</sup> For more information on the nature and activities of this organisation, which was also active in Nigeria, see J.D.Y. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 63–71; Harold W. Turner, *History of an African Independent Church I: The Church of the Lord (Aladura)*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 10–26.

<sup>31</sup> Peel, *Aladura*, 66–67.

In the face of these developments, Apostle Anim had established contact with Pastor Odubanjo of Nigeria, who had himself seceded from Faith Tabernacle, USA, and who was seeking affiliation with the UK Apostolic Church. In September 1931 Anim and two other members of his group were able to visit their brethren in Nigeria by joining some missionaries of the UK Apostolic Church, who were on a missionary journey to Nigeria via Accra. This contact was to prove decisive for Anim's group. By 1932, the UK Apostolic Church had stationed two missionaries in Nigeria. One of these, Pastor George Perfect, visited Anim's group in Ghana for two weeks in 1935, making a deep impression on the Ghanaians through his prayers for healing, which yielded spectacular results. Before his departure for England, a decision had been reached to affiliate Anim's group with the UK Apostolic Church based in Bradford. In October 1936 the Missionary Secretary of the Apostolic Church visited Asamankese to assess the Apostle Anim initiative, during which visit he promised to recommend that a missionary be sent to Ghana. In fulfilment of this promise, James McKeown arrived as the first resident missionary of the Apostolic Church in the then Gold Coast in 1937.

The belief in and practice of 'prevailing prayer' survived the changes taking place within Anim's group. Thus, when McKeown arrived, the group was still holding on tenaciously to their faith healing practices. Faith healing is used here to mean belief in the doctrine that regards as sin the use of medicine and prophylactic substances for the healing of sickness. Consequently, Anim's group believed that Christians should look only to Jesus for healing or risk perishing in hell fire. The group therefore felt let down when the missionary McKeown, who was expected to exercise stronger faith, sought hospital treatment during a severe bout of malaria. After a series of disagreements and confrontations over this strong faith healing belief, McKeown and Anim parted, just two years after McKeown's arrival. Each leader took some of the members with him. The faction that remained with Anim became known as the Christ Apostolic Church. McKeown's own relationship with his mother church in Bradford began to develop cracks, mainly over matters of church government in the mission field where McKeown was working and his reservations over the Apostolic Church's belief in 'directive prophecy'. 'Directive prophecy' in this context refers to prophetic utterances that give specific instructions concerning actions that God is supposedly asking people to take. Matters came to a head in 1952 when

McKeown, in spite of doubts in Bradford, received a US-based Latter Rain evangelistic team led by Dr Thomas Wyatt. This culminated in McKeown's dismissal from the Apostolic Church, Bradford, and led eventually to the formation of McKeown's own Gold Coast (Ghana) Apostolic Church. The faction that refused to identify with McKeown's secession continued to operate under the auspices of the UK body as the Apostolic Church of the Gold Coast (Ghana). Thus by 1953 the fallout in the relationships among McKeown, Anim and the UK Apostolic Church had produced three main Apostolic churches in the Gold Coast: Apostle Anim's Christ Apostolic Church; Pastor McKeown's Gold Coast Apostolic Church; and the UK-related Apostolic Church of the Gold Coast.<sup>32</sup>

The litigation between McKeown and his former employers continued over the use of the name 'Apostolic', custody of properties and related issues. After a series of intractable conflicts and court cases, leading to interventions by the Ghana government, McKeown's group finally adopted the name Church of Pentecost in August 1962. Initially the CoP benefited immensely in terms of membership from those sceptical of the strict faith healing position of Anim's group. Many such disenchanted members, unable to cope with the risks and dangers to health of this doctrine, joined the CoP. Except for its faith healing doctrine, which has since been abandoned, Anim's Christ Apostolic Church shared a common pattern of church organisation, a common body of doctrine and teaching with both the Apostolic Church of Ghana and the Church of Pentecost.

### *The Neo-Pentecostal Movements*

The third wave of Pentecostal Christianity currently enjoying enormous growth and influence in Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, is the neo-Pentecostal movement. The expression 'neo-Pentecostal' is used here as an umbrella term to encompass Pentecostal renewal phenomena associated with trans-denominational fellowships, prayer groups, ministries and independent churches, which came into existence or prominence from about the last three decades of the twentieth century. In the Ghanaian context the historical reference is

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<sup>32</sup> The UK-affiliated Apostolic Church of the Gold Coast was granted limited autonomy by Britain in 1965, and full autonomy in 1985.

important, but the neo-Pentecostal movement has a theological distinctiveness that is not as evident, at least not to the same degree, in the other versions of Pentecostalism. Generally Pentecostals, as noted earlier, believe in the enabling power of God following the experience of his Holy Spirit. One implication of this pneumatic experience is that individual Christians are given what participants often express as 'a ministry', or an enabling power, and spiritual sensitivity which is not necessarily imparted through ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies. Such ministry or spiritual power, participants testify, is granted through a confirmable experiential encounter with the Holy Spirit.

In practice this 'democratisation of ministry' sounds truer of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism, particularly with respect to the emphasis placed on 'every-member-ministry', than of the other Pentecostals. In African religious movements the leader/founder, who is perceived to be a man or woman of sacred power, is held in awe and much religious activity may revolve around such persons. This tendency to defer to religious leadership is to some extent also present in sections of the Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal movement. Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals, however, make 'personal spiritual power for every believer' the hallmark of their theology and pastoral endeavours. Thus in neo-Pentecostalism generally there is strong opposition to over-reliance on the charismatic abilities and competence of particular individuals. Recourse to and dependence on traditional remedies, biblical symbolism and the use of prophylactics to mediate healing associated with the ministry of the *Sunsum sorè* are also normally discouraged. Neo-Pentecostal teaching emphasises that personal experience of Pentecostal power should enable individuals to live the Christian life with minimal recourse to human or symbolic mediation. In other words, the experience of the Spirit, following conversion, not only empowers the believer to be an effective witness, but also opens the door to the reception of ministry gifts of the Spirit including those of healing, discernment and prophecy.

In Ghana, the neo-Pentecostal movement has manifested itself in three main forms. First, it exists in autochthonous churches, generally designated as 'Charismatic Ministries' (CMs). The CMs are very keen to reflect their international character and connections. Although they were born entirely out of indigenous initiatives, Ghana's CMs belong to the same phenomenological type as Britain's House Church Movement and North America's 'new paradigm churches'. Miller

calls them ‘new paradigm churches’ because ‘they are democratising access to the sacred by radicalising the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers’.<sup>33</sup> The expression ‘ministries’, which is more widely used for them in Ghana, thus carries a theological import meant to distinguish them from other Christian churches in the country. It is intended to capture the essence of the ecclesiology of these autochthonous churches in which practical expression is given to the doctrine of the ‘priesthood of all believers’. Secondly, the neo-Pentecostal movement in Ghana is also manifested in trans-denominational fellowships. These are lay neo-Pentecostal associations established under the auspices of their North American versions. As their designation suggests, they are not churches, but rather parachurch associations that encourage participants to remain in their churches and, with their charismatic experiences, try to bring about renewal from within. The two main examples are the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International and its female parallel (not branch) Women Aglow. The activities of neo-Pentecostal fellowships revolve around bringing like-minded Christians together in weekly prayer meetings, evangelism tours aimed at opening new Chapters (as the branches are called) and, more importantly, weekend breakfast or dinner meetings. They also hold annual conventions that bring together members from across the country and even beyond. At all these gatherings, carefully selected speakers, often socially prominent individuals, share their dramatic conversion testimonies in order to challenge hearers into surrendering their lives to Christ, a step believed to ensure benefits of spiritual and material emancipation like those being enjoyed by the testifier. These trans-denominational neo-Pentecostal groups deserve attention not just because their activities feed into those of the CMs. They also serve as conduits in channeling charismatic practices into TWMCs, from which significant numbers are drawn. Finally the neo-Pentecostal movement also exists in groups within TWMCs, dedicated to their spiritual renewal. In the West such groups are known as ‘Charismatic Renewal’ movements and their existence is traced historically to the 1959 experience of the Episcopalian priest Dennis Bennett in Van Nuys, California. Bennett had experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and, although

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<sup>33</sup> Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.



he subsequently resigned from his parish following disapproval of his Pentecostal experience by the Episcopal establishment, he encouraged sympathisers to believe it was possible to speak in tongues and remain Episcopalian. There is no historical connection between the Bennett experience and renewal groups in Ghanaian TWMCs. In fact some Ghanaian versions predate the Bennett experience by at least two decades. So, for example, when the first National Conference of renewal prayer groups existing within various Presbyterian Church of Ghana congregations was held in 1965, one of the groups from Kumasi was already 25 years old. Except for the Roman Catholic version where the expression 'charismatic' is retained, renewal movements in Ghanaian mainline churches are normally referred to as 'prayer groups'. They are dedicated to renewal through the restoration of effective and fervent prayer and openness to the manifestations of Pentecostal phenomena. The main ones include: the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme, the Bible Study and Prayer Group of the Presbyterian Church and the Charismatic Renewal Movement of the Roman Catholic Church. To accommodate the different versions, they are referred to in this work as 'renewal prayer groups' and 'within traditional mission churches' is added where appropriate.

#### *Some Current Developments within Ghanaian Christianity*

The waves of Pentecostal movements in Ghana to be considered in this study are the two types that have emerged mostly as single-congregation independent churches, the Sunsum sorè and the CMs. However, any such study must inevitably be undertaken in the context of current developments within Ghanaian Christianity as a whole, in which three trends may be identified.

#### *Decline of the Sunsum Sorè*

The Sunsum sorè are experiencing an overall numerical decline, verified by two church attendance surveys conducted in 1988 and 1993 by the Ghana Evangelism Committee.<sup>34</sup> For example, attendance in the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) declined by 17 per cent over the five years, that of the Twelve Apostles Church

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<sup>34</sup> GEC, *Survey*, 1993.

declined by 22 per cent, and the African Faith Tabernacle by 23 per cent. Until the early 1970s, the Sunsum sorè were considered, optimistically, to be the most significant development within African Christianity in terms of growth, impact and historiography. In this study, the rise of the Sunsum sorè is considered a watershed in Ghanaian Christianity. However, by the 1960s and 70s, leading scholars in the field, notably Baëta and Hastings, had started making references to the decline of these independent churches.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, field observations conducted in Winneba as part of this research revealed that a number of the many individual Sunsum sorè had actually gone out of existence.<sup>36</sup> Under pressure from the CMs, some Sunsum sorè have also modified their outlook in keeping with 'modern' trends. However, so far no attempt has been made at a systematic explanation of the main causes of this downward trend in Sunsum sorè presence and activity. The concern of this study is not with the quantitative data as such, but rather with what they teach about Sunsum sorè Christianity in the light of its widely acknowledged innovative contribution to the renewal of Christianity in Ghana.

#### *Rise of Prayer Renewal Groups in Mainline Churches*

A second recent trend within Ghanaian Christianity is the recovery by TWMCs from losses suffered during the height of the Sunsum sorè's popularity. This recovery, it will be noted, is partly explained by the TWMCs' positive response to challenges initially posed by the Sunsum sorè. In order to stem the tide of their members drifting into Sunsum sorè, TWMCs began opening up to Pentecostalist phenomena. With fresh challenges being posed by the rise of the CMs, the loss from TWMCs to independent Pentecostals may not have ceased, but has been reduced. The most important point here for our purposes is how the 'Pentecostalisation' of TWMCs has enabled the latter to hold on to their own, thus reducing the exodus of certain categories of person into Sunsum sorè.

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<sup>35</sup> C.G. Baëta, 'Some Aspects of Religious Change in Africa', *Ghana Academy of Arts and Science: Proceedings 9-10* (Accra: GAAS, 1971-72), 60; Adrian Hastings, *A History of African Christianity 1950-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 248, 261.

<sup>36</sup> The observation was based on following up spiritual churches studied in Winneba in the mid-1960s: Robert Wyllie, *The Spirit-Seekers: New Religious Movements in Southern Ghana* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1980).

*Charismatic Ministries*

A third discernible trend within Ghanaian Christianity, one that is central to this study, is the rise, growth, and theological influence of the CMs. The CMs have taken centre stage in Ghanaian Christianity and clearly constitute its most significant development in the last thirty years. The identifying features of the CMs include: a special attraction for Ghana's 'upwardly mobile youth'; a lay-oriented leadership; ecclesiastical office based on a person's charismatic gifting; innovative use of modern media technologies; particular concern with church growth; mostly urban-centred congregations; a relaxed and fashion-conscious dress code for members; absence of religious symbolism in places of worship; English as the principal mode of communication; and an ardent desire to appear successful, reflect a modern outlook and portray an international image. The CMs have virtually replaced the Sunsum sorè as the growth area of independent indigenous Pentecostal churches in Ghana. In the light of this development, some recent publications in a way misrepresent modern Africa by the frequent references to the older African independent churches as paradigmatic of indigenous Pentecostalism.<sup>37</sup> It is our view that indigenous Pentecostal thought forms have been reinvented in the CMs. Gifford, who criticises Cox for seeing the older AICs as still paradigmatic of African Christian independency, is himself not entirely correct in asserting that the Charismatic churches have 'seriously depleted' the membership of the AICs.<sup>38</sup> The CMs undoubtedly may have siphoned off some members from the Sunsum sorè. There are examples of Sunsum sorè that have metamorphosed into 'Charismatic churches' in order to survive. However, as this study seeks to demonstrate in chapter 3, the causes of the decline of the Sunsum sorè cannot be explained simply in terms of a massive drift into CMs. A glance at the demographic composition of the Sunsum sorè and CMs would reveal that the two versions of indigenous Pentecostals have different clienteles. Ghana's CMs tend to attract significant numbers of students, well-educated young people and professionals. The Sunsum

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<sup>37</sup> The studies I have in mind include Cox, *Fire from Heaven* (especially chapter 12) and John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II, *African Initiatives in Christianity: The Growth, Gifts and Diversities of Indigenous African Churches—A Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> See Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst and Co., 1998), 111. For the criticism of Cox, see Gifford, *African Christianity*, 33.

sorè, on the other hand, have an older but often worse educated membership, with the churches often dominated by adult women.

In the midst of the plummeting fortunes of the Sunsum sorè, the CMs have been proliferating very quickly. Writing in the 1960s, Baëta was perceptive in observing that prophetism appeared to be ‘a perennial phenomenon of African life’ and the powers emanating from it, healing, revelations, prophecy and the power to bless and curse, may well recur in African Christianity from time to time.<sup>39</sup> These phenomena are indeed recurring in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal movements. In that respect the theological orientation of the CMs may not be as discontinuous with that of the Sunsum sorè as the CMs themselves would like it to appear. In both movements we have contextual expressions of Pentecostal Christianity, which historically arise within, and therefore are shaped and driven by, different socio-cultural, political and religious circumstances. We encounter in both movements the same quest for the demonstrable presence of the Holy Spirit and a desire to respond to the problems and frustrations for which Africans seek answers in the religious context.

*Renewal within Ghanaian Christianity: Towards a Hypothesis*

In this study the expression ‘renewal’ has been preferred to its coterminous expression ‘revival’ in endeavouring to articulate the import of innovations occurring within Ghanaian Christianity. Revival, like renewal, presupposes articulating a response to flagging zeal and spirituality. However Ghanaian Christians often spoke of revival in terms that connoted corporate episodic religious activity consciously organised to restore spiritual vitality. Most churches in Ghana claimed they organised occasional revivals sometimes in the form of camp meetings to create and enhance their spiritual capacities. Renewal, on the other hand, makes room for spontaneity in both individual and corporate experiences of continuous religious reorientation. Renewal connotes not just a restoration of the individual to God from nominal Christianity or unbelief. It also aims at the reformation of what religious innovators may consider an inadequate ecclesiological belief system in order to make it conform to biblical Christianity as they

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<sup>39</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, 6–7.

understand it. Such reformation however, tends to put a lot more emphasis on the Holy Spirit, and the renewed often change religious allegiance. One thing that is common to followers of the indigenous movements under study here is that a majority claimed one form of Christian background or another. In their testimonies, participants in indigenous Pentecostal movements often spoke of having been confronted with fresh opportunities to renew their personal relationship with God, a step often seen in hindsight as missing from their previous Christian affiliations. For members of indigenous Pentecostal movements whose background is Christian, 'previous religious affiliation' in almost every case referred to a traditional mission church. The existence of the various independent indigenous Pentecostal churches stands as evidence of a deep 'spiritual hunger' that their traditional denominations could not fully satisfy. To speak of 'renewal' therefore, is to speak of a response to that which has become static, staid, institutionalised, legalistic, bureaucratised, formalised, routinised or moribund in the religious and spiritual life of the individual and of the church. Renewal is thus a response to the church's perceived loss of life and vitality leading to a stultification of her growth and mission. So, in many countries across the world, the Pentecostal movement appeared as a protest movement against 'dry denominationalism' seeking to reverse perceived trends towards 'carnality' in the churches.

Henry Pitt Van Dusen is acknowledged as the first person to make reference to the Pentecostal movement as 'the Third Force in Christendom', ranging it alongside the major Christian confessions of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>40</sup> Following Van Dusen, Lesslie Newbigin undertook a theological study of Pentecostalism in *The Household of God*, classifying the movement as an ecclesiastical and theological type and emphasising its place as a 'third stream' of Christian expression after Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>41</sup> Newbigin's study attempts to respond to questions relating to the nature of the constitution of the Church. He defines the 'visible Church' as 'the company of people whom it has pleased God to call into the fellowship of His Son', noting that, 'what our Lord left behind Him

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<sup>40</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901–2001* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 16.

<sup>41</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London: SCM, 1953), 87–88.

was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community'.<sup>42</sup> This visible community of God or the church militant, Newbiggin further notes, is made up of mortals who share the failures and shortcomings of the human race. In spite of this, God does not abandon his church although it may be full of things utterly at variance with his will.<sup>43</sup>

The recognition by Newbiggin that the visible church has strengths and weaknesses is crucial for our understanding and appreciation of the vicissitudes in the life of the church in African Christian history, which has had its fair share of schisms, fission and eruptions. The failures of the church may have occurred as a result of human sin and depravity, but Newbiggin points out that the grace of God remains sufficient and his power is made perfect, even in the weaknesses of the visible Church. In spite of the weaknesses that may be discerned in the life of the African churches, they remain, for their members, testimonies to the interventions of God in history. God is perceived as a God of renewal who through his Spirit continuously renews the body of Christ. It is Newbiggin's thoughts on Pentecostalism as renewal that are directly relevant to our study:

When the Church becomes corrupt and its message distorted, God does raise up prophets to speak His word afresh, and groups in whom His Spirit brings forth afresh His authentic fruits. When these new gifts can be assimilated within the old structure they serve to renew it all. But when a break occurs and a new structure is formed upon the basis of the particular doctrine of the reformer, or the particular spiritual experience of the group, something essential to the true being of the Church has been lost. The body which results is inevitably shaped by the limitations which mark even the greatest individual minds. It necessarily lacks the richness and completeness which belongs to the whole catholic Church.<sup>44</sup>

This is the hypothesis upon which this thesis proceeds in discussing 'current developments within Ghanaian Christianity'. Each of the movements to be discussed is upheld by members as a divine intervention in the continuous re-shaping of Ghanaian Christianity. The attention being given to indigenous Pentecostalism must not be misconstrued to imply that traditional mission Christianity has ceased

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 27, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 74.

to be of any relevance in Ghana. On the contrary, the fact that they have survived for almost two centuries bears testimony to the significant role that these churches continue to play in the socio-religious history of Ghana. In the re-shaping of Christianity through the Pentecostal movement, we find God doing something new. Indigenous Pentecostals emphasise the *active* presence of the Spirit in a way that one does not find in the traditional mission church. Renewal has its source in the activity of God's Spirit. Indeed, when the earth was 'without form and void', God's *ruach* (wind/spirit) blew over the surface of the earth in order to give it life (Genesis 1:2). The different waves are seen as proof that the Spirit of God is a Spirit who renews and so, as Taylor puts it, 'wherever there is a flagging or corruption or self-destruction in God's handiwork, he is present to renew and energise and create again'.<sup>45</sup> The popularity of Pentecostal movements in Ghana is thus largely a response to the marginal role that Christian traditions give the Holy Spirit in their mission and theology. The various renewal movements mediate 'the holy' in ways considered relevant to the needs of people and this is verified by their attraction especially for people in older Christian traditions. Ghana's experience is not isolated, so it is interpreted within the wider context of a global Pentecostal spirituality that it shares. The inevitable diversity within the Pentecostal family across cultures is the result of each hearing the declaration of 'the wonders of God in our own tongues!' (Acts 2:8, 11). Some of the theological reflections born out of the experiences of Ghanaian innovations in Pentecostalism are examined in this study.

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<sup>45</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972), 27.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PROPHETISM AND RENEWAL

A process of internal change was thus initiated in which African Christians sought a distinctive way of life through mediation of the spirit, a process that enhanced the importance of traditional religions for the deepening of Christian spirituality. . . . Biblical material was submitted to the regenerative capacity of African perception, and the result would be Africa's unique contribution to the story of Christianity (Lamin Sanneh).<sup>1</sup>

This chapter advances the view that although the Sunsum sorè may be declining quantitatively as noted in chapter 1, their qualitative impact on Ghanaian Christianity continues through an enduring religious and theological heritage. In other words, as Sanneh points out, their diminishing presence has not erased their unique contribution to Africa's Christian story. This heritage, discussed below, has been delineated under the following themes: the initiation of an effective inculturation process; the normalisation of charismatic experiences in Christian expression and worship; a more practical view of the nature of salvation; the use of oral theology; and an innovative gender ideology. I would argue that these emphases in Sunsum sorè spirituality mark the distinctive theological contribution of these churches as indigenous Pentecostal movements to the story of Christianity in Ghana.

Much exists in the literature concerning the 'Africanness' of the Sunsum sorè. However, for the Sunsum sorè themselves their religious innovations and experiences are interpreted through a hermeneutic of biblical historical precedence. This self-perception is shared with Pentecostalism in its global manifestations and hinges on the belief that biblical Christianity can be restored and that the same signs and wonders that followed the apostolic proclamation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 180.



gospel could accompany its proclamation today. For Pentecostals generally, a valid criterion of the Spirit's presence is the manifestation of power. So, like the Pentecostal movement everywhere, the Sunsum sorè felt the absence of power in the contemporary church and saw in their movement God restoring his power in order to equip the church for its earthly mission. Unlike some previous works, this thesis does not view the contribution of the Sunsum sorè to Ghanaian Christianity merely in terms of their being more African than the mission churches. Rather, they are regarded as being, primarily, contextual expressions of what they perceived as biblical and Pentecostal Christianity.

The title of Harold Turner's collected essays, *Religious Innovation in Africa*, aptly captures the unique contribution of the independent churches to the renewal of Christianity in Africa. Turner does acknowledge the faults and excesses of many of these older independent churches in an essay on 'Pagan Features in West African Independent Churches'.<sup>2</sup> These 'negative instances' are taken up in the next chapter as contributing to the decline of the Sunsum sorè. The point being pursued in this chapter is that the faults and excesses of the Sunsum sorè should not obliterate their initiative as genuine attempts at reliving Pentecostal Christianity in an African context. In the experiences of the indigenous prophets and their followers, renewal took place in the form of personal, often dramatic, conversions, miraculous acts demonstrating the power of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of Pentecostal phenomena, embodying charismatic or spiritual gifts into Christian practice. Initially, the integration of charismatic phenomena into Christianity drew a hostile reaction from ecclesiastical authority. But, as is evident in what follows, the reforms that the activities of the Sunsum sorè instigated in the mission churches underscore their invaluable contribution to the changing face of Ghanaian Christianity. The religious legacy of the prophets, and the churches their activities spawned, continues to endure not through literary works but in the historical and theological impact of their work and ministry.

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<sup>2</sup> Harold W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa: Collected Essays on New Religious Movements* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1979), chapter 14.

*Sunsum Sorè Spirituality: An Enduring Impact on Ghanaian Christianity*

Even if the Sunsum sorè dwindle numerically as they seem to be doing at present, two things continue to bear testimony to their dominant presence in Ghanaian Christianity during the first half of the twentieth century. First they provided an agenda for church historians, missiologists and theologians interested in African Christianity. The evidence for this is the massive bibliography available on African independent indigenous Pentecostal movements.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, the study of independent churches became something of a 'cash-crop' venture among scholars of Christianity in Africa. Hastings observes:

The scholar . . . looking for an interesting research topic in the field of African religion at that time could hardly fail to be attracted by one of the almost innumerable new churches springing into vibrant existence in Zaire, Kenya, Zambia or Ghana in those years. . . . 'African Christianity' was now, suddenly, a popular subject indeed but almost entirely in terms of the independent churches.<sup>4</sup>

A significant implication of this myriad of publications is that they gave scholars interested in African Christianity a theological framework within which to articulate what lies at the heart of indigenous Christianity. The Sunsum sorè provided a more innovative, exciting and stimulating theological agenda, quite unlike the Christianity of traditional Western missions and the African churches, which in every way looked like their missionary forebears. In these independent indigenous Pentecostals, African theologians, to use Sundkler's frequently quoted words, began to see what African Christians 'when left to themselves' considered important in Christianity.<sup>5</sup> The other evidence of the enduring influence and impact of the Sunsum sorè on Ghanaian Christianity lies in the change that has occurred not only in the way the faith is expressed but also in the shift in theological emphases. An idea of the extent and extraordinary impact of

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<sup>3</sup> In the area of academic publications, Turner has served us well with his excellent collection and subsequent publication of bibliographical material on these 'prophet-healing' churches as he calls them. See Harold W. Turner, *Bibliography of New Religious Movements in Primal Societies* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Hastings, 'Christianity in Africa', 204.

<sup>5</sup> Bengt G.M. Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 17.

these independent churches is best gathered from their effect on one of their ardent critics, the traditional mission churches. At the height of the growth of Sunsum sorè in the 1950s and 60s, concerns began to appear among the TWMCs about the drift of their members into new independent churches. Some members severed their links completely. Many others went for what may be referred to as 'plural belonging' or 'double insurance'. In popular Ghanaian discourse, this meant maintaining membership in the mission church and patronising the activities of various Sunsum sorè to meet specific needs. Without waiting for any executive fiat, some members of mission churches constituted themselves into renewal groups in order to offer within their own churches the type of spirituality that had led to the drift into and affiliations with Sunsum sorè. These developments forced TWMCs to initiate reforms, albeit in limited ways, in order to hold on to their own. These reforms were instigated by a yearning of the membership of mission churches for the spirituality of the Sunsum sorè, a spirituality duly informed by their Pentecostal ethos. What follows is a discussion, under the five main themes outlined above, of what may be considered the core of Sunsum sorè spirituality. Through these we also encounter what may be regarded as their essential contribution to Ghanaian Christian religiosity and theology.

### *Effective Inculturation*

In the many studies conducted on the nature of their Christianity, the independent churches have been praised for showing that Christianity can be expressed and meaningfully informed by the African religio-cultural reality. The ability of these independent churches to combine the two fundamental elements of 'Christianity' and 'African culture' in a way that advertised their intentions without undervaluing their African credentials has often been referred to as one of their strong points. This ability, I would argue, made the Sunsum sorè pioneers in the synthesis of Christianity and African religio-cultural conditions. Inculturation is used here in reference to this sensitivity shown towards African religio-cultural ideas and realities in the mediation of the gospel. The African religio-cultural reality has maintained its dynamism and vitality in the African religious consciousness in the face of Christianity's phenomenal growth and impact. The process of inculturation thus includes the attempt to find ways in

which the Christian faith can speak to the African situation in relevant idioms. One of the key attractions of the Sunsum sorè has been their ability to take traditional cosmology seriously. The result has been a relevance that African Christians did not find in the Western, mission brand of Christianity.

Although 'being African' was not the primary motivation of these movements, the Christianity of Ghana's Sunsum sorè is an ingenious synthesis of Ghanaian traditional and Pentecostal beliefs and practices. Both indigenous Pentecostals and mission churches firmly reject traditional religious practices as evil and demonic. This attitude underlies the point that the Sunsum sorè represented a turning away from traditional resources of supernatural support to seek refuge with the God of the Bible. In the process of turning away 'from idols to serve a living and true God',<sup>6</sup> however, certain fundamental features of traditional cosmology have been retained in the spirituality of independent Pentecostal movements. In chapter 1, one of these was identified as the belief in an 'alive universe' populated by transcendent benevolent and malevolent powers. Against this backdrop, evil is not generally accepted as an inevitable part of life. Events are generally believed to be mystically caused and so divination plays a crucial role not only in revealing the meanings behind misfortune, but more importantly in prescribing the ritual means to counter their effects. On the retention of ritual action in the independent Pentecostal movements of Africa, Ray explains:

Most rituals are therefore assumed to have an efficacious aspect; prayers and offerings not only say things, they are supposed to do things. The performative force of ritual speech and action is assumed to attract benevolent powers and repel malevolent ones . . . Yoruba go to their shrines to seek cures for their ills, answers to their questions, and guidance in their lives. This pragmatic, ritually centred view of religion . . . is not only fundamental to Aladura Christianity, it is fundamental to most other African independent churches as well.<sup>7</sup>

The provision of an adequate and relevant response to the pastoral needs of any community depends on the church's ability to understand the community's culture and recognise how it is related to and

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<sup>6</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism*, 135.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Ray, 'Aladura Christianity: A Yoruba Religion', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 23, 3 (1993) 268.

enhances her own thinking. In terms of inculturation, that is translating Christianity into African cultural terms, indigenous renewal movements seem to be the ones that took the African ethos seriously. They initiated a shift from the reductionism associated with the TWMCs in which peoples' religious experiences were explained away either as superstition or as figments of their imagination. Rather than deny the reality of the African supernatural world, the Sunsum sorè virtually institutionalised what they considered to be more effective ways of dealing with that world. Thus it is said of Prophet Harris that on his evangelisation tours he was often confronted by traditional religious persons in contests of spiritual power, but the prophet's triumph in these contests, presumably in the name of the 'God of Elijah', led to the mass destruction of religious objects followed by baptisms aimed at preventing their return.<sup>8</sup> A pertinent instance of such power encounter may be seen in the superior might that the Sunsum sorè demonstrated over nineteenth- and early twentieth-century medicine cults in Ghana. These traditional cults, existing in various forms and under varied names such as Dente, Tigare and Abirewa, were believed to possess the ability to make wealth and to offer protection against evil spirits and witchcraft. In the African context witchcraft is often cited as the explanation for impotence, sterility, failure, infant mortality and for other debilitating conditions of life. People therefore resorted to these medicine cults for help with child-bearing, economic prosperity, academic success and cures from diseases. The proliferation of medicine cults became a concern for the mission churches as their members clandestinely patronised them in search of solutions to problems, solutions that, presumably, their mission churches could not offer. But, as Noel Smith reports, the medicine cults lost their appeal when the Sunsum sorè emerged and began to counter their influence by calling on the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup>

An acceptance of the supernatural, and the provision of ritual contexts within which to engage it, in our view gave the indigenous Pentecostal movements a pastoral and theological edge over Western missionary Christianity. In the religious consciousness of Sunsum sorè

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<sup>8</sup> Shank, *Black Elijah*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835-1860* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966), 265-266.

and churches in that category, the spirit beings in African cosmology, except for the Supreme Being, have endured as demonic powers with Satan as their supreme commander. This is how Paul is understood when he speaks of the Christian life as a struggle against 'principalities, powers, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6:12). The process of putting on the 'whole armour of God' therefore involves much prayer and ritual through which Christians seek the intervention of the power of God's Holy Spirit in order to ward off evil from their affairs. In the story of the medicine cults, for example, it was widely believed that a number of people took a 'double insurance' by remaining as members of mission churches whilst at the same time consulting the cults when in trouble. The devotees of Tigare, arguably the most popular of the cults, it is said, included 'Pagans and Christians' of all denominations.<sup>10</sup> By articulating a Christian answer to people's fears and anxieties, the Sunsum sorè managed to surmount this problem. Thus, in the mission churches Ghanaians had been searching in desperation for Christian solutions to the problems of suffering, evil and ill health, but in the Sunsum sorè the emphasis on faith healing and protection helped them to find the solution that has always been available in the traditional concept of healing.

Indeed healing is an area in which the Sunsum sorè have distinguished themselves as churches whose spirituality is relevant to the needs of the indigenous context. This is a context in which, as Emmanuel Milingo points out, 'to heal' is 'to release someone from a stumbling block to human fulfilment'.<sup>11</sup> It is in the area of healing in particular that the Sunsum sorè demonstrated that they share the same views on aetiology and diagnosis as their followers. The African context, we have noted, is one in which organically manifested symptoms are often considered to be the result of external spiritual aggression. But such aetiology has been judged by Western scientific medicine to be 'a senseless veneration of witchcraft, superstition, and magical cures, a sign of abysmal ignorance'.<sup>12</sup> This think-

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<sup>10</sup> K.A. Busia, *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents, 1950), 80.

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Milingo, *The World In Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1984), 24, 25.

<sup>12</sup> W.Z. Conco, 'The African Bantu. Traditional Medicine: Some Preliminary Observations', in Z.A. Ademuwagun et al. (eds.), *African Therapeutic Systems* (Waltham, MA: Crossroads Press, for African Studies Association, 1979), 72.

ing is also evident in Western mission theology, but not so with the Sunsum sorè who, by contrast, take seriously belief in the power of witches, evil spirits and other mystical agents of sickness. Evidence of this shared attitude lies in the recognition of the potency of herbal medicines and their subsequent incorporation into Christian healing. The use of herbs as an effective therapeutic source in Africa predates contact with Western science and medicine. Prophet Harris advised that converts should pray when they gathered, prepared and administered herbs, and that people treated with such herbs would be healed.<sup>13</sup> Because of their largely unproven scientific effects and Western influence on Africa—both secular and Christian—there exists a very strong aversion to traditional therapeutic sources including the use of raw herbs in the practice of modern medicine. The result is that traditional herbal medicine has never been fully integrated into medical practice on the African continent. By integrating traditional herbal medicine into Christian healing, the Sunsum sorè challenged Western perceptions on the use of herbs.

This positive attitude to herbal medicine in Christian healing by the Sunsum sorè has an ingenious Christological import. One of the central theological themes identified as defining ‘the basic gestalt of Pentecostal thought and ethos’ is the belief in ‘Christ as Healer’.<sup>14</sup> Pentecostals affirm healing as being integral to the ministry of Jesus and that of the early church, viewing it as an essential part of the salvation mediated by Christ to humanity. In the African traditional context, medicine and healing are important functions of religious leaders. Consequently there is an inseparable link between the medical function of traditional priests and their credibility in African society. In the theology of the Sunsum sorè, the centrality of healing in both Pentecostal and African traditional religiosity is affirmed. Christ is not only Saviour, Baptiser with the Holy Spirit and the soon Coming King, he is also *Oduyefo Kese*—‘Great Healer/Physician’. Christ is Great Healer not just in the general Pentecostal sense of bringing healing through verbalised prayer and the ‘laying on of hands’, but he also infuses the herbs collected from the forest with power so that their curative effects might be fully operative. In the traditional context, the gods and spirits are those relied on for that

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<sup>13</sup> Shank, ‘Black Elijah’, 180.

<sup>14</sup> Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 24, 173.

service of providing herbs with sacramental potency. Healing is therefore an area in which the Sunsum sorè spoke with special authority, for in their spirituality they transformed African notions of healing by pointing to their availability in Christ. In the words of Ward: ‘They are interested in locating the cause of sickness in the realm of evil spirits, charms and witchcraft, and in confronting and defeating those powers in the name of Christ.’<sup>15</sup>

The power in Christ’s name and the power in his blood are therefore invoked upon herbal preparations, that they might be purged of all mundane effects and that such medicines might become a source of healing also in the Christian context. For the mission churches, evangelism invariably meant building a network of schools and colleges, but for the independent churches it meant healing from sickness through the power of the Spirit. Healing has been their most common feature and their principal means of evangelism and proselytising. Consequently the word ‘healing’ often appears in the names of churches, and together with exorcism and protection from evil constitutes their main attraction.

### *Normalisation of Charismatic Experiences*

An important conclusion reached by Sharpe in *Understanding Religion* is that the ‘study of religion’ must begin, if it is to do so at all, with a recognition and respect for that which is regarded as holy in the lives of individuals and communities.<sup>16</sup> For, as he notes, it is important in the study of religion to judge peoples’ numinous experiences by what they claim to be—‘a mode of communication with an ultimate reality which is not capable of being subsumed under purely this-worldly, sensory categories’.<sup>17</sup> It is with this understanding that we contend that the ‘golden core’ of Pentecostalism is the experience of the Holy Spirit. Similarly what made the Sunsum sorè different when they appeared was the active expression given to religious experiences explained in terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit. By taking the non-rational aspect of Christian experience seriously,

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<sup>15</sup> Kevin Ward, ‘Africa’ in Adrian Hastings (ed.), *A World History of Christianity* (London: Cassell, 1999), 223.

<sup>16</sup> Eric J. Sharpe, *Understanding Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 60.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.



the indigenous Pentecostals became implicit critics of Western rationalist theologies.

If the study of the Christianity of the Sunsum sorè is stripped of the social scientific factors cited by some as accounting for their emergence, what stands at the centre is participants' life-transforming experiences of the Spirit, that is, their pneumatological emphasis. This is what sets them apart as a 'peculiar people', qualitatively different from whatever forms of Christian expression were available when they emerged. Institutional religion, like the Christianity of traditional Western missions, tends to find direct communications from the supernatural uncomfortable, even dangerous and at variance with their 'ordered' Christianity.<sup>18</sup> The religious transformation of William Egyanka Appiah, the former Methodist catechist who founded the Musama Disco Christo Church, manifested itself in 'speaking in tongues', recourse to intense prayer vigils and claims to divine communication in dreams and visions. An example of the hostility of established Christianity to 'direct supernatural communication' is found in an injunction given by the Methodist Church to Appiah to stop all his 'occult activities' because 'the Methodists were not like that'.<sup>19</sup> For the Sunsum sorè such communication—dreams, visions, revelations and angelic visitations—in the light of biblical patterns is considered normal. In contradistinction to the suspicious attitude of the mission churches to the Spirit, the founders of the Sunsum sorè through their experiences of personality transformation became embodiments of the power of the Spirit. Their communities were also communities of the Spirit. The Sunsum sorè believed that by direct communication the Spirit could make itself felt in their gatherings—some would speak in tongues, others would prophesy, see visions, have a new song or in various ways become overwhelmed by the sheer experience of God as 'a presence'. In comparison with the spirituality of the mission churches therefore, the Sunsum sorè tended to have a greater appreciation of the Spirit's nature and activity.

Theologically the Sunsum sorè viewed God, 'the holy', as possessing an 'immediacy' that was clearly missing from the day-to-day life of institutionalised Christianity. This immediacy is embodied in the pneumatological emphases of Sunsum sorè Christianity, in which

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism*, 35.

the Godhead is envisaged as present and powerful through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit among others reveals the will of God and fills men and women with new powers of prophecy, utterance, prayer and healing. These new powers of the Spirit captured by the Pauline phrase 'spiritual gifts', *charismata pneumatika*, refer to the endowments of the Holy Spirit listed in I Corinthians 12:8–10 and related passages like Romans 12:6–8 and I Peter 4:10–11. The orientation of the Sunsum sorè, as indeed of Pentecostals everywhere, is to appropriate these spiritual gifts as part of ordinary Christian life. An important development following the experience of the Spirit's outpouring is the integration of charismatic experiences as a normal feature of Pentecostal gatherings. The Sunsum sorè were by no means the first to manifest spiritual gifts in a Ghanaian Christian context. There were flashes of Holy Spirit-related revivalist phenomena reported at Methodist camp meetings in the then Gold Coast from the very early years of Methodism in the country. But arguably one of their most significant and enduring contributions has been the normalisation of such charismatic experiences in Christian worship and spirituality. The use of 'normalisation' in this context refers to the acceptance as normal of Spirit-inspired phenomena and practices initially considered abnormal, and the incorporation of such phenomena, formerly excluded, into religious life and activity. On the way in which Pentecostals have generally normalised charismatic experiences in Christian expression, Hocken observes:

What is new in Pentecostalism is not the occurrence of particular pneumatic phenomena nor the initial opening-up of the pneumatic dimension of individual Christians; rather it is the organisation, embodiment and expectation of all these gifts within the life of Christian communities, i.e. the articulation and organisation in corporate Church life of what has over the centuries been known only spasmodically in isolated instances.<sup>20</sup>

For the Sunsum sorè of Ghana, the normalisation of charismatic experiences in Christian expression meant the recovery and restoration of Pentecostal power as promised by Joel and as fulfilled in the Acts of the Apostles. The Sunsum sorè thus defined themselves not

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Hocken, 'The Significance and Potential of Pentecostalism', in Simon Tugwell et al., *New Heaven? New Earth?: An Encounter with Pentecostalism* (Springfield: IL: Templegate Publishers, 1976), 22.

just as African churches, but also as Christian communities standing in the tradition of the early church. They believed that the healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy and other charismatic phenomena were signs that God had fulfilled his 'last days' promise to pour out his Spirit on 'all flesh' (Joel 2:28–32). By perceiving themselves this way, the Sunsum sorè participated in the worldview of their counterparts in the West who also, as argued by Land, saw themselves as people of promise.<sup>21</sup> At a time when such charismatic experiences as 'speaking in tongues', healing, prophecy, visions, dreams and revelations remained marginal to mission church Christianity, Ghana's Sunsum sorè appealed to biblical patterns and normalised them as part of Christian worship and experience.

Normalisation also meant an end to the fragmentation of body, mind and spirit in Christian religious experience associated with Western thought. In Pentecostal spirituality generally, there is a strong link between the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual dimensions of life. Mind, body, and spirit 'trichotomy' associated with Western thought is not present. This makes possible the employment and normalisation of healing, prophecies, dreams, and visions in Christian worship. There is much in the Pentecostal attempt to end the fragmentation of body, mind, and spirit that coheres with African ideas of human holism. To cite Akan anthropology as an example, the *okra* (soul) received from God relates one to the creator. The *sunsum* (spirit) comes from the father and gives a person his or her personality. The *ntoro* links a person to the paternal clan and the *mogya* (blood) coming from the mother determines one's matrilineage. The important point for our purposes is that these components are inter-related and the condition of each affects the others. By extension, Africans view life in holistic terms with 'body and spirit', the 'sacred and secular' and the 'psychological and theological' being held together as one whole. The result is that health in traditional terms is symptomatic of a balanced relationship with one's self and with the cosmos.

Sunsum sorè spirituality therefore keeps faith with African traditional notions of religious experience by uniting body, mind, and spirit in intense Spirit-led congregational prayers, prophecy, healing

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<sup>21</sup> Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 70.

and communication with and from the divine. For people seeking pastoral care and counselling, God may even provide directions through dreams and visions. In fact this normalisation of body, soul and spirit is partly the reason for the name Sunsum sorè, because for them the manifestations of the Spirit of God through bodily movements is anything but abnormal. They are visible signs of God's presence among his people.

*A Practical View of the Nature of Salvation*

In an exposition of the 'new covenant prophecy' contained in Jeremiah 31:31–34, McConville explains that the verb *shub* in the passage may be rendered 'return', 'restore' or 'repent'.<sup>22</sup> The usage of *shub*, according to McConville, illustrates that renewal in the Old Testament presupposes such a returning that the covenant relationship with Yahweh may be renewed. He concludes that Israel must return to the worship of Yahweh from that of Baal.<sup>23</sup> Withdrawing patronage of the gods as a prerequisite for renewal is a familiar Old Testament theme. One of the most prominent is Joshua's injunction for Israel to throw away the gods their forefathers worshipped that they may serve the Lord in faithfulness (Joshua 24:14). A similar notion of turning from other gods underlies Paul's presentation of God, in comparison with the Athenian gods, as the one in whom 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28).

The idea of turning from other gods to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ comes out strongly in the renewal initiated by the Sunsum sorè. It has been described as being 'the greatest positive step' the Sunsum sorè have taken.<sup>24</sup> In the Ghanaian context the importance of the emphasis on renewal as a 'turning' is best understood against the background of the African traditional belief in gods, deities, medicines and cults through whom the needs of this life may be procured. The religious orientation of the African involves the pragmatic pursuit of the things needed for the reinforcement of life—

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<sup>22</sup> J.G. McConville, 'Renewal as Restoration in Jeremiah', in Paul Elbert (ed.), *Faces of Renewal: Studies in Honour of Stanley M. Horton* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism*, 134.

blessings, children, health, longevity, protection and general well-being. As noted earlier, in the traditional context the acquisition of these things is normally achieved through considerable ritual effort involving divination and sacrifice. To be relevant in the African context, what was required was a Christianity that ministered to the needs for which people sought answers in religion. Anderson relates this in terms of the need for a dynamic pneumatology:

To be relevant to all of Africa's needs the biblical message must provide a comprehensive and qualitatively higher alternative to the solutions traditional people seek. It must provide a dynamic, life-giving power that secures deliverance from evil and allows people to feel safe in a hostile world. It must furthermore provide for the existential 'this-worldly' needs, and not only for the 'life-to-come'. It must counter the dominant fear and suspicion that the traditionalists feel. It is in these and a host of other areas that a dynamic pneumatology must speak.<sup>25</sup>

Another theological emphasis of the independent Pentecostals is that they combine a practical soteriology with such a dynamic pneumatology. The Sunsum sorè community of believers often testify to having turned their backs on the deities and gods associated with traditional religion. Subsequently they have found refuge in the God of the Bible whose power and strength allays their fears and anxieties. For Africans generally, the belief is that protection from intrusive evil powers paves the way for health, longevity, prosperity and success in life's endeavours. The message of salvation in the Sunsum sorè is therefore generally acknowledged to be of a very strong existential orientation. Salvation invariably includes deliverance from the power of witches, from barrenness, from sickness, alcoholism and other negations of life.

The Sunsum sorè pursuit of renewal as a turning from traditional 'resources of supernatural succour' to the God of the Bible is significant in another respect. By emphasising the adequacy of God in meeting these needs in Christ, the Sunsum sorè challenged what was identified earlier as a hypocritical Christianity associated with the membership of the mission denominations. A popular Sunsum sorè chorus translates: 'The Name of Jesus is given from above; it saves and performs wonders. It is a name that restores sight to the blind,

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<sup>25</sup> Allan H. Anderson, 'Pentecostal Pneumatology and African Power Concepts: Continuity and Change?', *Missionalia*, 19, 1 (1991), 71.

makes the cripple walk, makes the sick whole, and puts evil spirits and witches to flight.’ Sunsum sorè Christianity thus mediated a more relevant Christology for the African context by advocating a spirituality that can answer questions regarding the nature of the Christ who, although not physically present within the world, is concerned, through his Spirit, with what happens in human endeavours. Such practical Christianity is what the Sunsum sorè stood for, as noted by Turner:

it is the independents who help us to see the overriding African concern for spiritual power from a mighty God to overcome all enemies and evils that threaten human life and vitality, hence their extensive ministry of mental and physical healing. This is rather different from the Western preoccupation with atonement for sin and forgiveness of guilt.<sup>26</sup>

Through the articulation of an interventionist theology in which Christ is able to minister to the existential needs of people, the phenomenon of ‘half-traditional/half-Christian’ in popular Ghanaian opinion came to be associated more with members of the mission churches than with the Sunsum sorè. The message of the Sunsum sorè does not exclude the basic notion of salvation as redemption from sin. The personal testimonies of many of the founders of these churches provide cogent evidence of salvation as being inclusive of the experience of personal transformation through the redemptive activity of God. Testimonies of ‘personality transformation’ generally not only articulate radical inner changes in personality, but also often culminate in a remission of chronic physical complaints. Habits like excessive drinking and sexual immorality are also dropped. It is said of one such founder that before his transformation and call ‘he smoked, drank and danced, had several wives and ridiculed his mother’s loud prayers’. His conversion came after restoration to health through prayer following a prolonged illness.<sup>27</sup> The messages of African prophets as seen in the experience of Harris did carry an awareness of the sinfulness of humanity and the need for conversion and baptism as a means of avoiding God’s judgement both in this life and in the next. The sweeping judgement that Sunsum sorè soteriology is entirely this-worldly thus fails to do justice to the inclusive

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<sup>26</sup> Turner, *Religious Innovation*, 210.

<sup>27</sup> Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 112.

perspective from which these African Pentecostals understand their Christianity. Indeed they do preach and sing about the fleeting nature of earthly things and encourage the storing up of treasures in heaven. Thus the Sunsum sorè sing:

*Anigye ben na m'anya? Osor anigye. Ahoto ben na m'anya Osor ahoto. Ha mpo ni na sor ho. Obeye anigye, obeye nwanwa see.*

What is the source of my newly found joy? It is joy from heaven. What is the source of my newly found contentment? It is contentment from heaven. If this earthly foretaste is so fulfilling; how much more wonderful will be our joy in heaven.

The Sunsum sorè certainly affirm the other-worldly goals of Christian salvation. In the same breath they perceive Christian salvation more broadly as something that can also be obtained here and now. Generally, however, it must be admitted that their central preoccupation comes across as offering their followers the means to cope effectively with the ills of daily life. The inadequacy of such an emphasis and its effects on the Sunsum sorè is dealt with in the next chapter. For present purposes, however, it is noteworthy that by emphasising the practical nature of salvation the Sunsum sorè stressed an aspect of the Christian message that remained theoretical in the ministry of the TWMCs. Through this emphasis, the new indigenous Pentecostal movements patented a dimension of Christian salvation that lay subdued in Western missionary discourse. Given the practical ends to which African religiosity is directed, the Sunsum sorè emphasis gives salvation a more practical, if not holistic, orientation, thus making it meaningful to the people among whom they serve.

#### *The Employment of an Oral Theological Discourse*

Orality as a means of theologising is a fundamental quality of Pentecostal spirituality. Martin refers to the idioms through which oral theologies are expressed as 'new spiritual communications', which he notes are 'integrated around the key notion of transformation' and which have been recovered in the twentieth century by the Pentecostal movement.<sup>28</sup> These oral structures involving the employment of oral

<sup>28</sup> David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 163.

theology, that is parables, testimonies, dances, stories, spontaneous singing and so on which form 'the communication-process' of Pentecostalism, account in part for the popularity of the movement in Third World countries like Ghana. With particular reference to the Azusa Street experience, Hollenweger describes the praxis of oral theology as follows:

Proclamation took place not in doctrinal statements but in songs, not in theses but in dances, not in definitions but in descriptions. . . . What held believers together was not expressed by a systematic account of faith or creed, but by the fellowship that was experienced, by songs and prayers, by active participation in liturgy and diakonia.<sup>29</sup>

Such an oral communication process is one of the key features of the indigenous Pentecostal movements of Africa, which themselves exist in oral cultures. Louis Brenner criticises Western Christian scholarship for imposing a notion of 'religion' as being synonymous with a 'system of belief' on religion in Africa.<sup>30</sup> That 'belief' should be posited as the major defining characteristic of 'religion' in Africa, he considers extremely problematic. Brenner's argument is that what comes first in African religiosity is not 'religious knowledge' (doctrine) but 'religious participation'.<sup>31</sup> Western Christianity may emphasise intellectual or cognitive constructs, but, as with traditional religions, African Christians are concerned with the practice rather than the theory. One would contend that this may explain why 'speaking in tongues' as a second blessing subsequent to salvation has, for example, never been an issue for theological debate in the autochthonous Pentecostal churches of Ghana. What is important for the indigenous Pentecostals is not 'doctrinal systematisation' but experienced participation in ritual through performance of correct action and the adoption of correct attitudes in worship.

Prayer and music are two areas in which oral or informal theologising as participation is very prominent. In the independent indigenous Pentecostal churches prayer is often extemporaneous, and in it

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<sup>29</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, 'From Azusa Street to the Toronto Phenomenon: Historical Roots of the Pentecostal Movement', *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge*, *Concilium* (1996/3), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Louis Brenner, "'Religious' Discourses in and about Africa', in Karin Barber and P.F. de Moraes Farias (eds.), *Discourse and its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Centre of West African Studies, 1989), 87–105.

<sup>31</sup> Brenner, 'Discourses', 87.



lies the 'credo' of the believing community. This pattern was evident in the life of the early church. Thus, following the release of Peter and John, the Apostles joined together in prayer. They not only acknowledged the sovereignty of God, but also asked to be enabled to speak God's Word with boldness. For maximum effect the Apostles requested a confirmation of their word with miraculous acts: 'Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus' (Acts 4:23–30). Dickson attests to Sunsum sorè prayers being offered with much feeling and providing insight into the offerers' understanding of the Christian faith.<sup>32</sup> For as Lupo points out, such extempore prayer is extremely reliable as representing the testimony to the religious ideas of those who utter them.<sup>33</sup> 'Collective oral prayer' with worshippers 'all praying at once', mostly in the vernacular or as a mix with glossolalia, a characteristic feature of Pentecostal piety, was introduced into Ghanaian churches by the Sunsum sorè. Meetings are 'led by the Spirit' rather than through a rigid programme. This makes allowance for spontaneity and the intervention of the Spirit through 'speaking in' and interpretation of tongues, narration of testimonies and revelations, many of which may have been received during singing and prayer, and the interjection of sermons with appropriate lyrics and choruses.

Another means of oral theologising among the Sunsum sorè is the lyrical music form *ebibindwom*, literally 'music/songs of Africa'. In the use of lyrics for worship, as Dickson points out, the initiator or cantor is expected to be familiar with the Bible and must also be 'theologically aware' in order to be able to fit the song into the preacher's message.<sup>34</sup> What Dickson does not say is that, especially in the Sunsum sorè, the ability to be a cantor is considered a *Sunsum akyedze*, a gift of the Spirit. Most of it flows from spontaneous compositions. Thus any time a service is punctuated with a lyric, worshippers are aware that in responding they participate in an initiative of the Spirit to

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<sup>32</sup> Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 115.

<sup>33</sup> Alessandro Lupo, 'The Importance of Prayers in the Study of the Cosmologies and Religious Systems of Native Oral Cultures', in Jon Davies and Isabel Wollaston (eds.), *The Sociology of Sacred Texts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 83–93. For this particular point see pp. 86, 87.

<sup>34</sup> Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 109.

sing the praise and extol the works and might of God. On the theological import of the lyrics Dickson observes: ‘The language is concrete and expresses the thought of a God who cares for the person in all life’s situations, both spiritual and physical: he saves not only from sin but also from the dangers of childbirth.’<sup>35</sup> Oral theology in general, as the use of lyrics shows, takes the irrational aspect of religion seriously, allowing for spontaneity based on a view of God’s Spirit as real and communicating with his people in worship. Such spontaneity is a marked feature of Pentecostal spirituality that enriches the nature of worship. In place of reliance on a fixed programme, the Spirit can be manifested in tongues, songs and prophecies, giving worshippers a sense of the presence of God.

This Pentecostal heritage, the preference for oral theological communication, became one of the hallmarks of the Sunsum sorè from the movement’s inception. Although they are in physical decline, the enduring influence of the Sunsum sorè is still evident through the oral mode of theological communication that they pioneered in Ghanaian Christian discourse. In their self-definition, these churches regarded their emergence as the restoration of spiritual power and fervour to Christian worship. Activities and signs regarded as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit as given by Baëta include:

rhythmic swaying of the body, usually with stamping to repetitious music, . . . hand-clappings, ejaculations, poignant cries and prayers, dancing, leaping, and various motor reactions expressive of intense religious emotion; prophesyings, ‘speaking with tongues’, falling into trances, relating dreams and visions, and witnessing, i.e. recounting publicly one’s own experience of miraculous redemption.<sup>36</sup>

In the spontaneous worship form of the Sunsum sorè, the Spirit is expected to guide worship and lead it in unpredictable directions. As evidence of the Spirit’s presence, these churches composed biblically based choruses, often emanating out of personal religious experiences and made up of a few easily memorised phrases. With these choruses, accompanied by hand-clapping, drums, gourd rattles and other local instruments, the Sunsum sorè revolutionised Christian worship and influenced other churches in the process. Thus, at a time when the mission-founded churches were more inclined to main-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism*, 1.

tain worship forms that preserved what was quintessentially Methodist, Presbyterian or Anglican, the Sunsum sorè adopted innovative forms of worship that appealed to ordinary Ghanaian Christians. Their sermons are also unwritten and are delivered with verve and authority. Preaching is often punctuated with shouts of approval, acclamations, loud wailing and appropriate songs typical of the informal nature of African religious activity. The Sunsum sorè have thus been innovative in awakening African Christians to the fact that worship must be an authentic encounter with God who is 'Holy' and who is 'Spirit'. This innovation is one that the Sunsum sorè share with the Pentecostal movement worldwide and which in the oral culture of traditional Ghana acquires dramatic effect. Today, oral theology, which is expressed mainly through testimonies, healings and songs, has been adopted by other Ghanaian churches including many belonging to the Western mission-related category. Oral theology marked a shift from the Western tendency to formalise the Pentecostal experience in doctrinal terms which tends to mutilate what is essential to Pentecostalism—an encounter with God that often defies rational expression.

#### *Innovative Gender Ideology*

In the African Christian context, the inclusive role of women in religious leadership has been truer of the independent indigenous Pentecostal movements than of any other churches. In Ghana the classical Pentecostal churches still maintain an exclusively male ordained ministry. There exists a paradox in African Independent Pentecostalism regarding the role of women. Although they may be excluded from the hierarchy of direct political decision-making, their spiritual leadership was affirmed because of their expressive prophetic and healing powers attributed to the presence of the Spirit. Spirit possession is a characteristic feature of African traditional religions. Such transcendental experiences as spirit possession endow the candidate with the authority to act as a channel of communication between humans and possessing deities. In the traditional religions of Africa generally, women dominate the priesthood, a vocation acquired principally through possession by a deity. On the one hand therefore, the dominance of women as founders of Sunsum sorè served to revitalise traditional notions of female religious authority

through the institutional recognition of their priestly and prophetic powers acquired through their experiences of the Spirit.

On the other hand, however, it needs to be pointed out that the virtual dominance by prophetesses in the Sunsum sorè is interpreted by their women leaders as being in fulfilment of the Pentecostal promise rather than as any deliberate attempt to maintain continuities with traditional religion. The churches concerned did not intend to perpetuate any traditional patterns. The priestesses of traditional deities are not role models for Christian prophetesses. In fact they are seen as competitors, obstacles to the realisation of God's salvation, whose influence must be curtailed through the might of the Spirit. The theological ingenuity in the recognition of prophetesses lies in the realisation that the coming of the Spirit dissolves the traditional barriers that consign women to peripheral roles in Christian churches. The proliferation of Sunsum sorè founded and led by women was a decisive affirmation of the gender inclusiveness of the promise of the Spirit. The outpouring was going to be on 'all people': 'sons and daughters, men and women, menservants and maid-servants', and on 'all whom the Lord our God would call' (Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:39). In affirming this position, one informant constantly referred to Paul's words that as Abraham's seed both 'male and female' become heirs according to God's promise in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26–29).

Hastings observes that nineteenth-century Western Christianity allowed virtually no public role for women, a situation which, as he argues, began to change in the 1950s.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, in terms of the ordained ministry women still remain on the periphery. Most of the TWMCs in Africa followed their Western counterparts in the refusal to admit women into the ordained ministry until the early 1970s. The Anglican Church in Ghana still does not ordain women. Even for the Presbyterian and Methodist churches that ordain women, numbers remain low and the role of such women in their churches remains generally marginal. In sharp contrast to the marginalisation of women in the ministries of traditional Western mission and classical Pentecostal churches, the Sunsum sorè initiated a shift in the significant number of women who were possessed by the Holy Spirit

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<sup>37</sup> Adrian Hastings, *African Catholicism: Essays in Discovery* (London: SCM, 1989), 37, 49.

eventually ending up as prophetesses in these new independent churches. The innovative gender ideology of the Sunsum sorè in allowing a more prominent female role thus endowed women with a new pastoral and theological authority in a Christian context. For, as Lewis argues, being possessed by the Spirit gives 'the mystique, a unique claim to direct experiential knowledge of the divine'.<sup>38</sup> The prophetesses of the Sunsum sorè, like their male counterparts, mediated the 'mind of Christ' through visions, prophecy, interpretation of dreams and the interpretation of Scripture to their hearers. There still exist traditional ritual limitations and taboos governing the role of women in African societies, and this is a concern often lamented by African feminist theologians. In spite of these ritual restrictions, the Sunsum sorè retain and even enhance the traditional mystical powers of women. As Jules-Rosette puts it, the 'new religions' 'establish special symbolic domains of authority for [women] by stressing the equal access of women to secrets of religious life and sainthood'.<sup>39</sup> The initiatives of Captain Abiodun Akinsowon, co-founder of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society, Nigeria, Alice Lenshina of the Lumpa Church, Zambia, and Grace Tani, a former traditional priestess and early convert of Harris who pioneered the Twelve Apostles Church, Ghana, are cases in point. The Sunsum sorè, therefore, were trail-blazers in the acceptance of women not only as founders but also as 'spiritual authorities' of churches.

That the Sunsum sorè initiative is in tune with Scripture and the experience of Pentecostal women generally is demonstrated by Thomas in an article on 'Women, Pentecostals and the Bible', in which he compares the issue of women in church leadership to the Gentile question of Acts 15.<sup>40</sup> This comparison is also noted by Teresa Okure who, writing as an 'African Christian woman', concludes that the women issue is an area where God is leading the church today to 'a more perfect knowledge of his will'.<sup>41</sup> In advocating a more inclusive

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<sup>38</sup> I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, second edition (London: Routledge, 1989), 15.

<sup>39</sup> Bennetta Jules-Rosette, 'Symbols of Power and Change: An Introduction to New Perspectives on Contemporary African Religion', in Bennetta Jules-Rosette, (ed.), *The New Religions of Africa* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1979), 7.

<sup>40</sup> John Christopher Thomas, 'Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Issue 5 (1994), 41–56.

<sup>41</sup> Teresa Okure, 'Women in the Bible', in Virginia M.M. Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (eds.), *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 56.

role for women as agents of the divine will, Okure's suggestions are not too far removed from those of Thomas. For the issue of women to receive the same treatment as the Gentile question, Okure calls on 'God-inspired leaders' who, taking their cue from Paul, would be able to demonstrate on grounds of Scripture 'that the sustained practice of excluding women is in truth opposed to the expressed will of God.'<sup>42</sup> Okure argues that on the basis of Scripture it should be possible to discern what God's will for women really is.<sup>43</sup> Her summary is instructive:

To continue to exclude women from certain Christian ministries on the basis of reasons inspired by outmoded Jewish taboos is to render null and void the liberation that Jesus won for us, and which allows no social and ritual distinctions between male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, since all constitute one person in Christ (Gal. 3:26–28).<sup>44</sup>

Thomas adduces evidence to show that the Christian community acting under the guidance of the Spirit had a significant role to play in the interpretation of contentious doctrinal issues facing the early Christians.<sup>45</sup> The experience of the Jerusalem Council, according to Thomas, shows how the mind of God is made known to the larger community through testimonies about the work of the Holy Spirit in manifestations even among uncircumcised Gentiles. Based on this Acts 15 experience, however, Thomas concludes that stories from Pentecostal publications and Pentecostal communities around the world testify to the fact that God has allowed women to do the work of ministry in the Pentecostal revival.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Martin notes that Pentecostal women 'are among the "voiceless" given a new tongue in the circle of Pentecostal communication'.<sup>47</sup> Thomas's article is instigated by the fact that even among the Pentecostals the situation is far from ideal. Thus, arguing for what Okure calls the 'divine will concerning women', Thomas calls for a more inclusive attitude to women in ministry, just as the Gentiles were accepted as part of the community of believers.<sup>48</sup> A remarkable feature of the New Testament

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 47, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas, 'Women', 41–56.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>47</sup> Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 166, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas, 'Women', 54.

is its perception of ministry as belonging to 'the whole people of God'. So the apostle Peter with the whole community in mind refers to believers as 'a holy priesthood' called to offer 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (I Peter 2:5-10). It is clear from Thomas's conclusions above that the restriction on women's role in Christian ministry is a global problem.

In African cultures like that of Ghana where women are believed to spread negative influences and where traditional taboos often exclude them from sacramental roles, the problem takes on an acute dimension. Responding to this problem essentially from a Christian perspective, the authors of *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* conclude on what they perceive to be the mind of God concerning the role of women:

*The Will To Arise* is the voice of African women theologians. It is grounded in the challenges of Scripture and results from a new wave of change. African women reading Scripture have begun to see that God's will for them is not passive. It is compelling and compulsory. It is a call to action and it is a call to wholeness that challenges the will and the intellect.<sup>49</sup>

The evidence for the central role that the Holy Spirit gave women in Christian mission preceded the realisation of the 'African women theologians' by almost a century. Right from their inception, a significant number of Sunsum sorè have been founded and led by women. In a practical way they demonstrate that indeed God's will for women is not passive, and that his love compels them to be active as leaders in ministry. Sanneh is therefore right in observing that the pioneering role that women played as founders and leaders capable of manifesting and dispensing gifts of the Spirit 'amounted to a timely intervention that rescued Christianity from suffering a moribund fate in much of Africa'.<sup>50</sup> Through the ministry of the Sunsum sorè, women broke free of the auxiliary, marginal and subservient role fashioned for them in the various traditional Western mission denominations.

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<sup>49</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, 'Introduction', in Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro, (eds.), *The Will To Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Lamin Sanneh, 'The Horizontal and Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 7, 4 (1983), 167.

*Results of the Impact of Sunsum Sorè Spirituality on Mission Churches*

In spite of the cautious acceptance by some theologians, and criticisms by others of their therapeutic methods and hermeneutics, there is no gainsaying the fact that the Sunsum sorè have been forerunners in religious innovation in Africa. They revealed in their ethos the liberative might of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The reforms adopted by the TWMCs following the rise of the Sunsum sorè are evidence that the latter awakened the TWMCs to such crucial issues as the importance of the Spirit in religious experience, lay participation, the inclusive role of women, a practical soteriology and a dynamic pneumatology—issues that drew attention to what it meant for a church to be truly Christian and authentically indigenous at the same time. As I have endeavoured to prove, the overall contribution of the Sunsum sorè to Christianity in Africa has never been in doubt. The approach of the Sunsum sorè to Christian life and worship, therefore, helped to give Christian experience a certain immediacy that has contributed immensely to its survival in sub-Saharan Africa. If Western missionary agencies helped to institutionalise Christianity in modern Africa, the Sunsum sorè provided it with a contextual significance needed for its stability. This has been so because some of the situations and challenges that African Christians face, and to which they try to apply Christian solutions, may be alien to Western Christianity, the context from which the Christian tradition arrived in Africa.

That the Sunsum sorè and subsequent varieties of indigenous Pentecostal movements are seen as critics of the modern missionary movement does not invalidate the tremendous missionary contribution to Christianity in Africa. The change in the demographic and cultural composition of African Christianity must be seen as standing in continuity with the efforts of the missionary movement. It is instructive that various studies underscore a 'genetic link' between the missionary movement and the emergence of such new religious movements as the Sunsum sorè. In Ghana as elsewhere, most of these movements emerged spontaneously in areas that had enjoyed long periods of intense missionary activity. The present study does not dwell much on what could be referred to as a 'glorious history' of the missionary movement because it would take us too far afield. Suffice it to reiterate that one of the greatest contributions of the missionary movement to indigenous Christianity is the lead provided



in the vernacular translation of the Scriptures. The availability of the Scriptures in the vernacular played a catalytic role in the emergence of indigenous renewal movements by helping agents of renewal to articulate a contextualised response to the biblical message in relevant local idioms.

It may be argued that one of the reasons for the rise of the modern Pentecostal movement was the belief and yearning the pioneers in the various contexts had for what the Word of God taught. Subsequently what they read, believed and yearned for, they soon began to experience. The African story is no different. The pioneers of indigenous Pentecostalism sincerely desired and subsequently experienced what they read concerning the moving of God's Spirit in the vernacular Scriptures. A personal experience with God is an important desire for all Pentecostals. In most cases the spiritual life-transforming experiences of these indigenous Christians preceded, and only later culminated in, an intense interest in Scripture. Through the vernacular Scriptures God spoke to the indigenous Pentecostals in their own mother tongues, confirming what they had read in Scripture, and helping them to make sense of their spiritual experiences. Thus Baëta sees the Sunsum sorè as struggling prodigiously 'to prove the reality of spiritual things in general and of the biblical promises in particular'.<sup>51</sup> The African Christian renewal movements with their pneumatic view of God as presented in the Scriptures therefore freed the form and interpretation of Scripture from traditional Western mission interpretations. With this new appreciation of God's salvific work through Christ and the dynamic power of the Spirit, the Sunsum sorè have left an indelible imprint on Ghanaian Christianity and theology.

Against the background of the criticisms of the so-called 'foreignness' and irrelevancy of traditional Western mission churches, the Sunsum sorè were welcomed and upheld by both liberation and inculturation theologians as the hope and future of African Christianity and African Christian theology.<sup>52</sup> They were praised, with justification, for being ingenious in their pneumatic use of the Bible, innovative gender ideology, informal, inclusive, participatory and vernacular liturgy, emphasis on communality, incorporation of facets of traditional

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<sup>51</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism*, 135.

<sup>52</sup> See Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 76–78.

religion and culture into worship, and the integration of charismatic tendencies and experience into Christian expression, Christian living and Christian mission. A major result of these contributions is that the TWMCs were stirred to emulate them. They were forced to rethink their view of God, of salvation in Christ and, more important, of the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. Consequently they began to tolerate renewal groups in their midst. The challenges posed by the Sunsum sorè were forced on to the agenda and vigorously discussed at the Synods and Conferences of traditional mission churches. The 1965 Presbyterian Church of Ghana Synod mandated a committee to study ‘prayer groups and sects forming themselves within our Church which often adopt . . . practices usually unfamiliar to our Church life.’<sup>53</sup> The committee clarified its mandate ‘as an expression of the concern of the Church about the large numbers of people who leave the Presbyterian Church in order to join a Spiritual church or attend the meetings of healers and prophets’.<sup>54</sup> The committee acknowledged the general complaint that worship in the Presbyterian Church was dull and lacked spiritual vitality, a need that members were filling elsewhere.<sup>55</sup> In response to this situation, the committee submitted that the church should recognise its own renewal groups in order to curb the drift into the ‘Spiritual churches’. At the 1969 Annual Conference of the Methodist Church, Ghana, similar concerns regarding ‘plural belonging’ were expressed. In a report on ‘The State of the Work of God’ it was suggested that it was necessary to study the spiritual churches ‘and find out what is lacking in our Church which members think is available in the so called Spiritual churches’.<sup>56</sup> The Conference agreed that ‘everything possible should be done rightly to guide the prayer groups and to retain them within the Church, to the *enrichment* of our prayer meetings and the life of the Church as a whole.’<sup>57</sup>

The claims of membership drift and ‘plural belonging’ are indications of the level of the general dissatisfaction with the spirituality of the mission churches. It is instructive for our present purposes

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<sup>53</sup> Presbyterian Church of Ghana ‘Report on Prayer Groups and Sects’ (1966), 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Methodist Church, Ghana, ‘Report of the Committee on the Life of the Church to the Annual Conference’, *Representative Session Agenda* (Sekondi, 1969), 34.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

that the traditional mission churches by their *own* diagnosis attributed the loss of membership to the marginalisation of spiritual gifts (rather than the non-Africanness) in their churches. The reasons for the relevance of the Sunsum sorè to Ghanaian Christianity were thereby acknowledged to be religious and theological. Other measures were taken in response to the pneumatic challenge of the Sunsum sorè. Many Methodist circuits revived the camp meeting tradition of the Church. In the late 1970s, a Methodist President of Conference, the Very Rev. Samuel B. Essamuah, undertook a countrywide, olive-oil-aided healing tour of Methodist churches in Ghana. A few years earlier, the use of oil by any Methodist minister, let alone the President of Conference, would have been unthinkable. The theme song of the tour, which Essamuah himself composed, affirmed much of the traditional and biblical ethos within which the Sunsum sorè also operated:

*Oduyefo kese, fa wo nsa boto mo do. Besa me yare ma me na menya ahodzen dze asom wo o. Yare nketse nketse rehaw me wo sunsum mu; nsem nketse nketse rehaw me wo sunsum mu. Mekyinkyin, ekyin, ekyin me nnya bofo biara, Egya e, besa me yare mame na menya ahodzen na m'asom wo o.*

Great Healer, come and touch me. Heal my ailments that my strength may be renewed for your service. Lord I am deeply troubled; deeply troubled by spiritual sicknesses, anxieties, and worries. To many places have I been in search of healing; but none has been of help. Come Lord, release me from these spiritual ailments and troubles; that I may enjoy the health, strength, and vitality needed to serve you.

The Sunsum sorè have brought to bear on Ghanaian Christianity a distinctive spirituality of Pentecostal quality. By yearning for this very spirituality, their ardent critics affirmed the Sunsum sorè as offering a relevant theological response to the religious needs of the Ghanaian Christian. The TWMCs' response has reduced the ability of the Sunsum sorè to proselytise from their ranks. The factors making for the decline of the Sunsum sorè form the subject matter of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DEMYSTIFICATION OF PROPHETISM

These new religious movements have addressed themselves with remarkable vigour to what they regard as the most pressing needs of their communities . . . The realism in tackling their this-worldly problems is not matched at the level of wider vision . . . thus short-circuiting spiritual and general personal growth at the deeper levels. . . . And thus while strenuous efforts are made to sustain interest through the introduction of ever-new rites, symbols, dress, processions and various forms of fervid bodily expression of religious feeling, in many cases, there is clear evidence of approaching fatigue (C.G. Baëta).<sup>1</sup>

It is nearly a century since the Sunsum sorè as movements dedicated to the renewal of Christianity in Ghana made their meteoric appearance on the religious scene. The popularity of this wave of indigenous Pentecostalism, as was shown in chapter 2, stemmed from their insistence that the acts of the Spirit as found in the Bible must be integrated into the life of the church as part of normal Christian experience. The Sunsum sorè also blazed the trail in providing local Christians with the ritual context within which to counter the reality of evil and through that offered a praxis-oriented form of salvation. Against the backdrop of such an enduring contribution to indigenous Christianity, questions must be asked regarding the ‘approaching fatigue’ referred to by Baëta in the quotation above. Socio-political, economic and religious changes, including the effects of modernity, call for a ‘sustained monitoring’ of trends within African independent Christian movements to establish how they fare under such changes. The overall contribution of the Sunsum sorè to Ghanaian Christianity is not in doubt. At the present time, they find them-

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<sup>1</sup> C.G. Baëta, ‘Some Aspects of Religious Change in Africa’, *Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences Proceedings 9–10*, 1971–1972, 59–60.

selves in difficulties which are attributable not only to changes in the religious field, but also to internal problems and deviations that have cost them public confidence. This chapter attempts a response to the question of why the Sunsum sorè are in decline if indeed, as has been claimed, they have been leading players in the Ghanaian religious field for the best part of the last century.

*Decline of Sunsum Sorè: Theory of Negative Instances*

Within the wider context of the proliferation of new religious movements, Turner refers to an important aspect of the study of movements like the Sunsum sorè that is often overlooked. He calls this the incidence of ‘negative instances’.<sup>2</sup> The main principle underlying the theory of ‘negative instances’ is that in the study of new religious movements it is important to consider not just those which have survived, but also those which have perished. For, according to Turner, in spite of the unavailability of documentary evidence, the stories of the failures of new religious movements may have invaluable contributions to make to our knowledge of the phenomenon as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Our current exercise is thus a kind of study in ‘negative instance’. It is an attempt to explore the factors that have led to difficulties being experienced by the Sunsum sorè. There may not be reason to believe that the Sunsum sorè are disappearing altogether, but they seem to be moving towards the periphery of Ghanaian church life. Figures are hard to come by, as most of these churches do not keep any meaningful statistical data. The large ‘denominationalised’ ones like the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC), African Faith Tabernacle and Twelve Apostles Church still maintain an appreciable presence in the country. They have, however, not been immune to the frequent schisms that have eventually led to the demise of some smaller churches. For all these churches, whether big or small, the strength of their appeal often lies in the charismatic force of the founder’s personality. We shall see below that, as a result of the concentration of charismatic power and financial resources in one person’s hands, deaths of founders have led to bitter feuds among

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<sup>2</sup> Turner, *Innovation*, 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

potential inheritors, often culminating in the gradual decline of the various factions. Those that have suffered most are the multitudinous single-congregation ones which used to be prominent around the country but many of which have simply disappeared with time. For example out of about fifteen churches in Winneba belonging to the Sunsum sorè category and listed by Wyllie in 1968, about eight belonged to the single-congregation category. Out of these, five could not be traced during my fieldwork. The Ghana Evangelism Committee survey figures concerning the decline of the Sunsum sorè (cited in chapter 1) are an indication of the general state of affairs of these churches. After discussion of the enduring theological relevance of the Sunsum sorè in the last chapter, it is now appropriate to examine some of the religious, theological and related factors, that is negative instances, accounting for their increasingly peripheral role in Ghanaian Christianity. The discussion is approached through a case study of one of the single-congregation Sunsum sorè, the Jesus Divine Healing Church of Agona Nsaba, Ghana. Developments in the Jesus Divine Healing Church have been followed since the late 1980s. My initial encounter covered the period 1987–1991 when I lived at Agona Nsaba as the resident pastor of the local Methodist Church. During the period, I established a working relationship with the Prophetess and her Church and was on occasion invited to preach at some of the Church's functions. In addition to my personal acquaintance with developments in this Church, I learned a good deal from the special assistant of the Prophetess. Some significant information also came from a former client of the founder and the founder's 42-year-old son who lived with her for most of the active life of the Church.

*Movement to the Periphery: The Case of Jesus Divine Healing Church*

There are obviously variations in testimonies regarding the calling and making of founders or leaders of Sunsum sorè. Significant numbers are referred to as prophets/prophetesses (*Nkomhyefò*) or seers (*Adeyifo*), those accustomed to revealing and interpreting occurrences in the invisible realm. Prophetess Akua Nyamekye's Jesus Divine Healing Church located at Agona Nsaba was founded in 1960. Originally a Methodist, Akua Nyamekye had spent most of her early married life in search of a cure for her infertility. In the African

context such cases, as with ill-health, need to be solved with any therapeutic system available. Patients therefore avail themselves of a multiplicity of therapeutic sources until a suitable remedy is found. The Akan of Ghana say *eton wo yarba a, nna enya edur*, those who advertise their ailments eventually discover the requisite therapy. This philosophical view underlies the Ghanaian attitude of 'shopping for health', which, as instigated by the ardent African belief in mystical causation, creates a transient clientele for the Sunsum sorè, thus contributing to their decline.

Akua Nyamekye visited several solution centres, ranging from hospitals to traditional shrines. Eventually she sought help from a Sunsum sorè prophetess who put her through intensive prayer with extensive fasting. The religious functionaries she consulted confirmed her suspicion that her inability to conceive was of mystical causation, *onnye gyan*—there was more to it than met the eye. Such spiritual problems in the African context demand spiritual solutions. In the course of a prescribed period of fasting and praying, Nyamekye went through a trance or visionary experience through supernatural visitation. The Holy Spirit took possession of her. She became what Van der Leeuw calls 'a witness to revelation', making her a person of 'sacred power'.<sup>4</sup> The experience moving her into a spiritual dimension of life was to act as a launching pad to a prophetic career and ministry.

Max Turner has argued that many modern experiences of healing are spiritual gifts that stand in theological continuity with healing conducted in the New Testament. He argues that such healing may be experienced as a fresh in-breaking of God's reign into the lives of beneficiaries. These religious experiences, as Turner puts it, have in instances 'freed the believer to fresh service that would have been impossible (or very difficult) without it'.<sup>5</sup> This is true of Nyamekye's experience. Such healing, however, may not always be physiological, as is shown in the case of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' in II Corinthians 12. Healing could also come through the realisation of God's will even in the midst of persisting physiological limitations. What comes to mind here is Dr Lambourne's definition of healing

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<sup>4</sup> G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J.E. Turner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 650, 651.

<sup>5</sup> Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: Then and Now* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), 339, 340.

as 'a satisfactory response to a crisis'.<sup>6</sup> In further explication of this definition, Michael Wilson considers that it is legitimate to use the word 'healed' in reference to people 'who [have] been enabled to take up a life of self-giving, without having been cured physically'.<sup>7</sup> This is what happened to Nyamekye. Her immediate desire for a child remained unfulfilled, but God gave her something else. She began manifesting the gifts of 'seeing', prophecy and healing with an added insight into the preparation of a particular herbal medicine through which she became a blessing to many. Her healing was socio-somatic. It came in the form of liberation from the deep-seated shame, anxieties, pains and social stigma normally attached to infertility in Africa. Through her religious experience, to go by Wilson's definition of healing, Nyamekye was 'restored to purposeful living in society' as a helper of others in crisis.

It is not uncommon for such radical religious experiences to lead to the adoption of a more 'Christian' name meant to symbolise the new identity of the candidate following conversion. Such change of name is normally meant to commemorate the experiences of biblical figures like Abraham and Jacob who had their names changed after their encounter with God. Subsequently Nyamekye tended more to use her baptismal name, Christina, although the public continued to refer to her and the Church she later founded simply as 'Akua Nyamekye'. This was itself significant as it indicated an inseparability between founders and the churches they lead. For, in such religious movements as the Sunsum sorè, the leaders often saw themselves as sole vehicles for the Holy Spirit and thus became, as Otto would put it, 'the centre' of everything.<sup>8</sup> Nyamekye moved out of the local Methodist Church when the elders refused to create the required forum for the exercise of her healing gift so she ministered to people from home. Her growing clientele led eventually to the formation of Jesus Divine Healing Church.

Jesus Divine Healing Church has, since its foundation, been housed in a shed adjoining the home that Akua Nyamekye shared with her husband and extended family. A number of small infirmaries located on the compound served as living quarters for clients requiring quar-

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Michael Wilson, *The Church is Healing* (London: SCM, 1966), 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Otto, *Holy*, 157.



antine. Quarantining patients in the African religious context is an important part of the ministry of healing. The premises of Sunsum sorè are also considered to be what Otto expresses as 'numen-possessed places'.<sup>9</sup> Here the Spirit of God may be domesticated to effect healing and restoration. Some of these sacred places may be provided with pools of water that the angel of God, it is believed, comes to stir for healing purposes (see John 5:1–9). Others are marked by the erection of large wooden crosses, often painted white and meant to restrain intrusive evil powers and to symbolise Jesus' victory over sickness, pain and death. At Mozano, the 'holy city' of the MDCC, a mausoleum has been erected at the burial place of the church's founder and his successor and their wives. Here I encountered a queue of supplicants waiting for their turn to go and pray for their needs. Written requests from other supplicants had been placed on the graves in the hope that answers would come, as the leaders had gone to be with the Lord. The supplicants did not appear to confuse the position of the deceased leaders with the intercessory role of Jesus Christ. These departed forebears of the church were, however, believed to care for the members in the same way as the ancestors continue to care for their descendants in African traditional religions. Harold Turner articulates the significance of such sacred places as being regarded as the centre of the religious person's life, the place where 'life finds its unity and ceases to be merely a chaotic flow of experiences'.<sup>10</sup> For those in the Sunsum sorè the sacred space, 'garden' as it is called in the Twelve Apostles Church, is the place to bring worries, confess failures, invoke God's mighty power against threats or danger and seek his guidance through life. It is believed, as discovered at Mozano, that quarantining patients also provides opportunity for the ministry of angels whose role as God's messengers the Sunsum sorè strongly affirm. The belief in angels and their roles is not the same across all Sunsum sorè. However it is noteworthy that they are often cited in the Jesus Divine Healing Church, as indeed in many other independent churches, as the carriers of revelation. Angels frequently appear in Sunsum sorè hermeneutic as God's messengers who protect from evil. The Church premises are

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>10</sup> Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), 9, 10.

considered to be the place most conducive to the reception of dreams, visions and angelic visitations. A number of people apparently come to sleep at Prophetess Nyamekye's premises seeking God's intervention in their extreme difficulties.

The reputation of Nyamekye as a healer was by no means limited to Agona Nsaba. Regular church attendance did not reflect huge numbers, but she could count on the patronage of many other clients, including affluent public officials, politicians and business executives—people who believed that their favourable economic circumstances and positions made them prone to attacks from evil spiritual forces, like witchcraft. They came in their numbers from across the country in search of protection for their wealth, families and business interests and to solicit divine intervention through the Prophetess in various predicaments. Particular attention to such problems meant that the Church had an adult orientation which, as will be noted later, led to a demographic imbalance. Attachment to the person of the leader, holy places and the 'cult of angels' also combined to give the Sunsum sorè a rather strong mediatory form of ministry. It will be argued that centring the activities of a religious movement like Sunsum sorè on a founder-prophet-healer is a recipe for short-lived congregations as people shop around for the most satisfying results.

Prophetess Nyamekye's own high-profile clientele was most noticeable during her church's annual thanksgiving services. These were normally occasions on which beneficiaries of her services came to 'give thanks to God' and by extension express appreciation to the Prophetess. In the Ghanaian context, there can be frustrating difficulties in every endeavour, including building projects, obtaining visas, business, academic success, and even survival in a precarious Diaspora. Impediments encountered in achieving such ends are often considered to have been instigated by evil spirits and witches. Many people think such endeavours need supernatural intervention to succeed. It is therefore not uncommon for religious functionaries like Nyamekye to receive donations in the form of foreign cash and commodities from those who have been assisted to travel abroad. The inspiration for such thanksgiving comes principally from Old Testament practice. In the Ghanaian context, this forms the Christian alternative to pilgrimages made to traditional shrines by beneficiaries of a deity's protection, either to redeem pledges or to solicit help for impending endeavours. Sacrificing by giving to God or directly to the prophet

or prophetess, it is believed, ensures God's speedy response to one's needs. Thus in the Sunsum sorè a belief in the coercive force of sacrifice over the supernatural seems to underpin giving. Such direct giving to the leader often blurred the lines between the personal resources of the leader and those of the church. This problem of financial unaccountability is linked to the wider issue of concentrating power in the personality of an individual and the absence of institutional controls to mitigate the excesses accompanying the use of such powers.

Besides the core group of regular members, significant numbers among those attending Prophetess Nyamekye's thanksgiving services could be considered her clients rather than church members. Many of these, according to informants, came periodically either to offer thanks for services received or because their prayers had not been fully answered and they needed to maintain contact until this happened. Maintaining contact with the 'man/woman of God', it is believed, is important not just for the realisation, but also for the sustenance of results. It will be argued that, by centring their activities around the gifts of the leader, the Sunsum sorè engendered a situation of spiritual vagrancy and under-utilisation of pastoral capacities which led to fluid and unstable membership.

Nyamekye had an assistant, a preacher/pastor, with whom she formed an essential partnership and who shared some pastoral responsibilities. According to this assistant she never took part in ministering to the needs of people. 'Divining' the cause of affliction and prescribing remedial action remained the preserve of the Prophetess. In effect the 'peculiar power of her personality' meant that, whether in the use of spiritual gifts or in church administration, Nyamekye was neither answerable nor accountable to anyone. She was not only the religious person par excellence, but also as founder she was the sole custodian and administrator of Church funds. The appropriation of the funds had become a subject of much speculation among inhabitants of Agona Nsaba. The concentration of spiritual and administrative responsibilities in the personality and hands of Nyamekye literally mystified her, reinforcing the lack of accountability in the body of Christ. This is how we explain the decline of the Sunsum sorè as the 'demystification of prophecy'. Such lack of accountability, one would argue from the New Testament, is antithetical to the expected role of the body of Christ in the use of spiritual gifts and

in the administration of the local community of believers. This has served to heighten suspicions about the motives for the founding of independent churches that lead people away from Sunsum sorè.

The therapeutic methods of Prophetess Nyamekye included prescriptions of the usual fasting and prayer for varying periods depending on the seriousness of the problem. Fasting is believed to enhance the ability of supplicants to withstand temptation and helps them to focus during prayer. She also dispensed the divinely revealed herbal preparation in the form of pills, which patients took as a purgative. This was required intake for all sick persons irrespective of their ailment. Interview with a former client revealed that the medicine dislodged from one's system any 'filth' located there. It supposedly cleansed patients as part of the preliminary preparations towards healing. There was also 'holy water', 'holy (olive) oil' and other prophylactics that people called in to collect without an appointment. These remedies were provided to assist followers to cope with the influences of evil. It is one area in which the Sunsum sorè differ from the CMs, which generally stress an unmediated access to God. The Sunsum sorè have come under incessant attack, particularly from new Pentecostal churches, for over-reliance on objects and symbols or 'extensions of faith' as some call them, as a means of contact with God. One result of such attacks is that in recent times some Sunsum sorè have had to transform their churches by scaling down such practices in order to survive.

The lack of continuity of ministry is a major problem of the independent churches. By 1992, Prophetess Akua Nyamekye had reached 80 years of age and was no longer active. Numbers consulting her and attending services had dwindled considerably. She died in 1994. Services are still held, but attendance has slumped from an average of approximately 300 per Sunday to less than 50 and it continues to dwindle. The Jesus Divine Healing Church had been built, in effect, around an individual's spiritual gifts. It appears, therefore, that sufficient steps had not been put in place to ensure that life in that Christian community continued after the Prophetess. Not only did the Church lack continuity in terms of ministry but the preoccupation with peoples' immediate needs and concerns rather than Christian growth 'at the deeper levels' led to a transient clientele. This also meant that it lacked stability. Nyamekye, through whose prophetic and healing ministry many had been restored to wholeness and through that come to a saving experience of Jesus Christ, had virtually died with

her Church. The case of the Jesus Divine Healing Church can be taken as typical of the rise, experiences and decline of the Sunsum sorè in Ghana. The causes of their decline have useful lessons in independent indigenous church history and for understanding aspects of current developments within Ghanaian Pentecostalism.

*'Demystification of Prophecy': The Factors Examined*

The history of the Sunsum sorè has been fraught with difficulties generally symptomatic of religious movements in crisis. Among these the deaths of founders around whose strong personality the movement is normally built, death and relocation of members, and opposition from established religion may all affect membership in negative ways. Because the Sunsum sorè did not have their own facilities, meetings of Traditional Western Mission Churches often took place in public school classrooms owned by traditional mission churches. In Ghana, opposition to Sunsum sorè from TWMCs was carried to the extent that some were banned from meeting on government and mission school premises. For any religious movement, some loss from 'natural causes' is unavoidable. An instance is the 1970 Ghana Aliens' Compliance Order in which aliens were asked to leave the country. Nigeria was one of the countries most severely affected by the Order. There was hardly a village or town in Ghana without a community of Nigerians. Not only was petty retail trading in Ghana dominated by them, but the gold mines and cocoa farms also depended almost entirely on their labour. Given that a number of Sunsum sorè, like the Church of the Lord (Aladura), had been initiated in that country, many of the patrons were also Nigerians. A number of Sunsum sorè lost members and some churches operating under Nigerian leadership even had to close. As another example, in Ghana, leading Sunsum sorè figures seeking secular privileges had themselves co-opted as uncritical patrons of governments. Their integrity was called into question when they gave tacit support to policies that were morally suspect, socially disastrous, counter-productive or economically oppressive. Subsequently, when ruling governments were discredited, the image of churches and church leaders providing them with legitimacy through uncritical allegiance was also severely dented.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore

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<sup>11</sup> For a useful study on the relationship between various Ghanaian governments

a litany of financial and sexual scandals, coupled with an obsession with sometimes bizarre rituals, all served to demean the Sunsum sorè in the eyes of the public.

For many of the Ghanaian Christian public, their experience of Sunsum sorè prophets and leaders has been one of false prophets prophesying 'false visions, lying divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds' in the name of the Lord (Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 13:6). The modern history of the Pentecostal movement, particularly that of North American televangelists, only underscores the fact that these scandals are not peculiar to the Ghanaian context. In *The Glory and the Shame*, Hocken reflects on how every fresh outpouring of God's Spirit unleashes fresh outbursts of renewal in which hearts, minds, and faculties of transformed persons may be freed and 'energised in creative worship and service of the Creator and Redeemer'.<sup>12</sup> Yet waves of renewal, as he points out, may also be mixed with the dross of the world.<sup>13</sup> This is one lesson that the experience of Ananias and Sapphira taught the early church and teaches her modern extensions. The rise of the Sunsum sorè at the turn of the century and the renewal they generated are explained by members in terms of the activity of the Holy Spirit. In some cases, however, prophets of dubious integrity have also been found in sectors of the movement. On how the tarnished image of a few could affect the integrity of the whole, a Ghanaian proverb says *se guan kor do ntwem a osaa hon nyina*, 'the image of the black sheep reflects on others in the same fold'. There are many Sunsum sorè that remain credible. So, while there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of Prophetess Nyamekye's Church or to imply that she was out to cheat anybody, the deviant ways of a few Sunsum sorè have had significant effects on the general image of these churches.

Of particular significance for this discussion are the religious and theological factors leading to the decline of the Sunsum sorè. From the experience of the Jesus Divine Healing Church, three principal interrelated religious/theological factors may be considered as accounting for the present peripheral status of the Sunsum sorè in Ghanaian

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and independent churches and their leaders see John S. Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the 20th Century Outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (Guildford: Eagle, 1994), 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Christianity: (1) their vertical or pyramidal model of ministry, which relies too much on the personal spiritual experience and charismatic gifts of the leader, 'the holy man/woman' of God; (2) the Sunsum sorè preoccupation with what Wilson refers to as the 'particularistic' salvific concerns of followers in which specific help is sought for cures, protection and general well-being;<sup>14</sup> (3) religious changes previously identified as occurring within Ghanaian Christianity since the early days of Christian independency. These amount to substantial changes in the religious field that have increased Sunsum sorè difficulties beyond their own internal problems. The three factors are now examined in turn.

*Pyramidal Model of Ministry and the Outpouring of God's Spirit*

In theological terms one of the strongest points of the Pentecostal movement has been its lay-oriented model of ministry, a model that gives practical outworking to the biblical concept of the 'priesthood of all believers'. In Pentecostal discourses, reference is often made to Joel's anticipated outpouring of God's Spirit upon 'all flesh'. Joel anticipated a day when the life-giving breath of Yahweh would be granted to all people irrespective of sex, nationality or social status. The understanding here is that every Christian will have access to God's 'prophetic Spirit' to be a public witness in the cause of Christ. As I have discussed elsewhere, this element of anti-clericalism has been significant in the modern expansion of the Pentecostal movement in Ghana.<sup>15</sup>

This lay perception of ministry seems to have fizzled out of the theology of the Sunsum sorè a few years after their inception. The decline in the activities of African prophets is referred to as 'the demystification of prophecy' because, as charismatic figures, their style of ministry is based mostly on the mystical posture they assumed following the religious experiences culminating in their calling. The involvement of the Spirit in the Sunsum sorè is particularly evident in the person of the leader, who, as Anderson notes, is pre-eminently

<sup>14</sup> Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Missionaries without Robes': Lay Charismatic Fellowships and the Evangelization of Ghana', *Pneuma: The Journal for the Society of Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 19, 2 (1997), 167-188.

a person of the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> On account of this, Wilson refers to the African prophet as a 'thaumaturge'.<sup>17</sup> The result of this type of ministry is that the ranks of the Sunsum sorè, as is evident in Nyamekye's experience, were often swelled by casual followers of the leader as a purveyor of spiritual blessing. The leaders often cast themselves in the image of Old Testament priests and prophets with 'exclusive' access to God's counsel, with some presenting themselves as the sole interpreters of the dreams and visionary experiences of members. There are instances in which some Sunsum sorè leaders even offered to 'fast on behalf of members' who were not in the position to do so themselves. For such a pastoral service, payment in cash was in many cases expected from the beneficiary of the fast.

In informal interviews with members of Sunsum sorè, it was obvious that significant numbers in these churches were there because a prayerful need had been met through the powerful effect of a prophet's intercession. Such beneficiaries of the services of prophets had then gone ahead and introduced others to the church. God's Spirit according to Paul has been poured out 'on all flesh' in order that each member may assume his or her rightful place in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13). In contrast to this New Testament view of ministry, Prophetess Nyamekye, like other Sunsum sorè leaders, maintained a very strong theology of the ministry of mediation, a pyramidal style of ministry that compares closely with traditional African priesthood where the priest or priestess acts as mediator and medium. The role of Christ as the sole mediator of salvation is not necessarily denied, but the leaders often come across as special religious practitioners on whom followers rely to bring them a 'supernatural' understanding of events and guidance for action in life.

In the Old Testament, from which much of the inspiration in African prophetism is derived, what gave the prophets their compelling sense of call were their encounters with the Spirit of God. Thus, in contrast to the false seers, Micah could boldly claim 'I truly am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord' (Micah 3:8). Similarly Isaiah speaks of his profound encounter with God before his call (Isaiah 6:1 ff.), as does Ezekiel (2:2; 3:12; 11:1, 5, 24). In a positive

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<sup>16</sup> Allan Anderson, *Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1991), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Bryan Wilson, *Magic and the Millennium: A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest Among Tribal and Third-World Peoples* (London: Heinemann, 1973).



sense, then, the Sunsum sorè sought to show that in the Christian context a prophet, minister, pastor or leader among God's people must above all else be a man or woman of the Spirit. Yet particularly from a New Testament perspective and more so in Pauline thought, those who used their gifts were expected to affirm the ultimate reason for the gifts, which is, to build up the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-8). It will be argued in the next chapter that this 'democratisation of charisma' accounts not only for the growth, but also for the style of ministry that differentiates the Sunsum sorè from the CMs. Historical developments within the Sunsum sorè clearly show that the strong mediatorial style of ministry could be critical to the survival of the religious organisation. The loss of the leader who is the pivot of the group, as happened with Nyamekye's church, often throws the church into disarray. A similar trend was encountered at the Life and Salvation Church at Winneba, one of the churches studied by Wyllie in the late 1960s. The founder's death in April 1998 immediately sparked a leadership crisis. The founder's son tried to succeed his father, but the church decided that the founder's grandson, Prophet John C. Pratt, was more suitable for the position. This decision infuriated the son, Apostle Peter Paul Pratt, causing him to secede from the Life and Salvation Church. According to a leading pastor of the church, more than half of their members have left the church altogether. A further group of fifty persons also broke away in 1998 to form Life Chapel International, a move modelled on Charismatic churches.

Such secessions tend to occur mostly when the leader dies and those closest to him or her, whether relations or co-workers, begin to struggle for control of a 'spiritual empire', often motivated by the economic resources available to such a successor. A similar trend was discovered at the African Faith Tabernacle Church, popularly known in Ghana as 'Nkansah' after the founder *Odeyifo* James Nkansah. The founder died in 1987 and a contest among his children, nephews and grandchildren has generated at least five factions. A core group that survived in Anyinam is now led by *Odeyifo* Nkansah II. The other factions are United Faith Church in Accra, Christ Faith Church at Akroso, Christ Faith Tabernacle in Accra and United Reformed Church at Akim Oda. On the face of it, it may appear that the many factions help the Church to spread, but, as my informant pointed out, the splits put the credibility of all the factions into question with the result that each of them is struggling to survive. But

the local body of Christ is expected to survive the demise of its most charismatic leader. In significant instances involving Sunsum sorè, this has not been the case. The personal charismatic authority of the founder ensured the group's unity in her or his lifetime or active years. Incapacitation or death often led to secessions, or, as evidenced by the case of Jesus Divine Healing Church, a gradual decline until the church became extinct. In other words the fate of the Sunsum sorè became tied to the personal fates of their founders and leaders, thus making it difficult for individual churches to endure beyond the survival of the 'men and women of God'.

The case of the African Faith Tabernacle demonstrates how the over-dependence on the charismatic gifting of the founders of Sunsum sorè made such churches uncontrollably schismatic. Schism and dissension could occur through uncontrolled legitimisation of communication with the divine through visions and revelations. A consequence of such claims to exclusive 'communication with God' is that everyone who so indulges may form a new church, a possibility that poses a constant threat of cleavage within a religious movement. The threat does not lie so much in the claims to new revelation as in the non-availability of arrangements to verify such claims. The possibility of falsehood in charismatic manifestations is the basis of John's injunction to the believing community not to believe every spirit, but to test spiritual manifestations in order to verify whether they are from God, 'because many false prophets have gone out into the world' (I John 4:1). More often than not, secessionist revelations are only a veneer for discontent resulting from organisational and relational problems with founders of churches. In the process of constant fission and mutation, a number of churches were formed which consisted of very few members, and in not a few cases only family members and close associates. Many such have ended up as footnotes in the history of the independent indigenous Pentecostal movements in Ghana. Such unavoidable schisms also affected the integrity of the movement as a whole, and the ability of the Sunsum sorè to function as credible Christian churches continued to be in question.

In telling the story of the rise and fall of the Jesus Divine Healing Church, the issue of accountability was raised. An important function of the body of Christ is for each member to be accountable to the others. In the experience of the early church, believers (including leaders) were expected to be accountable to the community in the exercise of ministry. Such accountability did not exclude actions taken under specific

divine revelation and direction, like the call on Peter to respond to queries regarding ministering to a Gentile household (Acts 11:18). It is instructive that in this instance Peter appeals neither to his credentials as the spokesman for the community of disciples nor to his privilege as 'the rock' upon whom Christ's Church was to be built. Accountability within the community of believers enables claims to spiritual experiences to be shared, received and evaluated in the light of Scripture. It is significant that in the Bible even the utterances of Paul were to be subjected to such scrutiny (I Corinthians 7:25, 40; 14:37). This did not happen with some Sunsum sorè. One study mentions the case of a prophet who retained the right to appoint or revoke the appointment of elders under divine guidance and revelation. Further to this, all actions of elders in relation to the movement must be sanctioned by the prophet 'who [alone] hears and speaks to Jesus Christ'.<sup>18</sup>

Questions also arise, as in Prophetess Nyamekye's case, regarding the difference between a founder's private finances and those of the church. Financial impropriety is one of the most common causes of public discontent with the operation of independent churches. The auditing role supposed to be exercised by the community of believers is absent from some Sunsum sorè. Revelations and visions from the Holy Spirit may often be cited as validating decisions otherwise emanating from the leader's own interpretation and selfish motives. In the absence of structures in which leaders may be accountable, 'mystical powers' may operate unchecked and prophets and prophetesses easily exploit their powers for personal gain. Many members of Sunsum sorè have been led into decisions that have proved disastrous for themselves, their families or their business enterprises. In the middle of 1996, a Ghanaian weekly reported the case of Alexander Kwesi Prah, a Ghanaian employee of the Zimbabwe Embassy in Berlin. Prah's numerous attempts to secure a cure for a perennial stomach ache had all failed. When he attempted to secure treatment at home in Ghana, a Sunsum sorè prophet told Prah that his mother was the cause of the ailment, ostensibly through witchcraft. Armed with this 'prophetic revelation' and with a machete hidden in his clothes, Prah lured his mother into the bush and murdered her.<sup>19</sup> To borrow the explanation of Kiernan, in the absence of an institutional setting to act as a check on his or her activity, 'a prophet

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<sup>18</sup> F.W.B. Akuffo, 'The Indigenisation of Christianity: A Study in Ghanaian Pentecostalism' (Unpublished D.Phil. thesis: University of Oxford, 1975), 371.

<sup>19</sup> *The Mirror*, Saturday, May 25 (1996), p. 3.

in Zionist eyes is no better than an *isangoma* (diviner) or *inyanga* (herbalist) whose activities are regarded as commercial, anarchic and malevolent'.<sup>20</sup>

*The 'Problem-Solving Approach' to Ministry*

Related to the perception of the leader as possessing the charismata in a special degree (with the attendant abuses) is the Sunsum sorè approach to religion which, as has been noted, tends to emphasise 'problem-solving. Although salvation as new life in Christ may not be neglected in the Sunsum sorè, their concerns appear to be overridden by a preoccupation with immediate benefits derived from Sunsum sorè membership. The over-emphasis on particularistic concerns creates a situation where Sunsum sorè seem generally to be dominated not by people committed to membership, but by clients whose sole motivation is the search for answers to their own needs. An obvious result is that the Sunsum sorè were filled with 'marginal members' who went 'ensampling' for the best results. The Sunsum sorè may therefore be seen by those in need as clinics where patients go when they are sick, rather than churches where sustained fellowship may be developed and where Christian faith may be nurtured into maturity. A 38-year-old client of Sunsum sorè, a typist with four children from a previous marriage who was seeking to bear a child with her present spouse, narrates her experience as follows:

I wanted a child . . . I went to the Ark of Noah spiritual church, but the prophetess there could not help me, so I came to this church. I have conceived before, but the stomach was as it was [that is, the pregnancy could not mature] . . . The [prophet] . . . told me it was witchcraft and that [the witches] had sat on my stomach. I myself know it is witchcraft. It is not one person. There are several in my family . . . who have joined together. My present husband's previous wife is a notorious witch, and she is collaborating with a member of my *ebusua* [extended family]. I did not go to hospital because I knew very well that it was a spiritual matter . . . It is all witchcraft and nothing else. I have faith that *sofo* [pastor] Quartey through the power of God will destroy the witchcraft.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> J.P. Kiernan, 'Prophet and Preacher: An Essential Partnership in the Work of Zion', *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 11, 3 (1976), 363.

<sup>21</sup> Bridget Levitt, 'A Case Study: Spiritual Churches in Cape Coast, Ghana', in Asempra Publishers (ed.), *The Rise of Independent Churches in Ghana* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1990), 62.

For a large percentage of such clients, membership lasted only as long as their problems did. This attitude perhaps serves to confirm the common assertion that in African religiosity the prime concern is with power for overcoming the ills of life. For many Africans, there is no satisfaction until these are found. The Sunsum sorè problem-solving approach to Christianity reinforces and encourages the practice of shopping for health. The result has been that some Sunsum sorè, as Prophetess Nyamekye's experience shows, were unable to require long-term commitment from many of their followers. People either stopped visiting when their problems were solved, or went back into their original mission churches from which, in fact, they may never have withdrawn their allegiance.

The attitude of 'shopping for health' is inextricably linked with the monocausal explanations often given to crisis. This engenders a less than holistic approach to pastoral care by producing a dependency complex leading to a repudiation of personal responsibility. Such a complex encourages people in need of help to continue 'consulting', thus ignoring their own capacities and denying the availability of God's grace with its enabling power for coping in crises. The readiness to attribute failure to the activities of evil powers, found in Sunsum sorè diagnosis of problems, also ignores pastoral needs at the deeper levels. In the example above of the man who murdered his mother, the diagnosing prophet ignored the fact that relations between the two may have been already strained. It was therefore easier for the son to believe that his mother was 'hunting him spiritually'. In affirming such fears of mystical causation, it appears that people were thereby encouraged to hop from prophet to prophet in search of solutions. In addition the excessive consultation of prophets easily degenerates into fortune-telling and undervalues the aims of pastoral care. This has obviously affected the image of the Sunsum sorè, gradually culminating in the decline now being experienced.

The thaumaturgical response has affected the Sunsum sorè in other ways. When people expect answers to their questions, it pressurises charismatic persons into performances for their own sake. In other words, miracles are treated as ends in themselves. Bosch argues from Matthew that miracles are an integral part of a holistic gospel whose aim is disciple-making.<sup>22</sup> Jesus attached great significance to miracles.

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<sup>22</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 83.

Peter thus refers to him as ‘a man accredited by God through miracles, wonders and signs’ (Acts 2:22). But although miracles increased the fame of Jesus, popularity with the crowd was not the aim of his career (Mark 1:28). The problem with the Sunsum sorè approach is that, in the emphasis on miracles, the Christian life comes to be presented not as a mission in disciple-making, but as an uninterrupted manifestation of miracles. This emphasis on signs, wonders and the miraculous places pressure on Sunsum sorè leaders to perform. It also creates the conditions for false prophecy: ‘Thus says the Lord’, when the Lord has not spoken. The problem-solving approach to faith also tends to relegate to the background aspects of the Christian life having to do with struggle, weakness and powerlessness which constitute an important theological focus of the incarnation. This critique of miracle-oriented gospel is taken up again in the chapter on prosperity. For present purposes, it is worth pointing out that in several passages of Scripture those who would follow Christ are called to note that to emulate Christ is to follow the path of weakness (II Corinthians 13:4; Hebrews 5:12).

The desire for continuous performance thus leads to the neglect of the processes of discipleship. Evidence of this is that for some Sunsum sorè there cannot be said to exist any sustained study of the Bible. The Bible, if used at all, has often been employed more as a ritual symbol than as a tool for discipleship. In the Twelve Apostles Church, the Bible may be waved over water to make it holy for drinking purposes. Some patients would be struck with the Bible in the process of exorcising evil spirits from them. In some instances, the Bible would be tied to the stomach of pregnant women visiting the Twelve Apostles’ prayer garden, ostensibly to protect the foetus against the machinations of evil powers. It is not uncommon in Ghana for prophets to prescribe passages of the Bible to be washed with water for drinking, or to be kept open under one’s pillow as a form of protection against evil. From the 1960s and 1970s, when the evangelical movement with its strong emphasis on Bible reading, personal prayer times and disciple-making became very strong in Ghana, suspicions about Sunsum sorè methods grew, leading to the gradual loss of patronage.

One of the major criticisms made by those disaffected with Nyamekye’s church was that she wrongfully accused people of being witches. The Sunsum sorè attempts at synthesising ‘biblical belief, Christian liturgical forms and African religious and ritual concepts’

often blurred the dividing lines between Christian ritual and traditional divination methods. For both the diviners and prophets, misfortune was not seen simply as part of an isolated and random sequence of events. Crisis was usually traced to unusual occurrences in the environment of the client. In Ghana, a number of prophets, like witch-finders, have been prosecuted for the maltreatment of alleged witches. In such ordeals the prophets and their churches have taken the role traditionally assumed by divination ordeals and anti-sorcery movements. The earlier story of Kwesi Prah, who murdered his mother on suspicion of witchcraft based on prophetic revelation and diagnosis, is paralleled by that of Edmund Debrah Fleischer who took similar action based on divination. Fleischer, a 38-year-old plumber of Adabraka in Accra, had not been on speaking terms with his brother-in-law, Abekah Sikafo Minnow, for three years because Minnow had sued him in court for an alleged assault. After the court action, Fleischer suffered a stroke and travelled to the Republic of Benin for treatment at a fetish shrine. According to the diviner's diagnosis, it was his brother-in-law who was the cause of his ailment. He made partial recovery after that, only to be incapacitated by another disease at the beginning of 1990. Fleischer made another visit to the same shrine for treatment where the diviner confirmed that his brother-in-law had been 'hunting him spiritually'. Fleischer was also told that whenever he found rashes around his genitals it was an indication of imminent death. In October 1990 Fleischer claims to have seen the rashes around his genitals and, fearing that death was imminent, waylaid Minnow and poured raw acid on him. The chemical completely disfigured Minnow. Subsequently Fleischer was arrested by the police and prosecuted for the offence.<sup>23</sup> In these two instances, we are confronted with identical diagnoses, one by a Christian prophet and the other by a traditional diviner, with both leading to tragic consequences for the victims and their families. Since crises are often diagnosed as caused mystically or through personal moral defects, the prophet is effectively involved in apportioning blame and responsibility.

In Prophetess Nyamekye's case, treatment often involved dispensing some strengthening substance like water, oil or a herbal preparation

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<sup>23</sup> Vance E.T. Azu, 'Man Sprays Acid on In-Law for Alleged Bewitchment', *The Mirror* (8 December, 1990), front page headline.

to protect the victim from further mystical attacks. The result is what Turner describes as the 'innocuous use' of holy water, oil or sand as physical agents for divine healing.<sup>24</sup> The church therefore loses its significance as a place of fellowship as people come in with these things in mind. The practice of dispensing such substances that are meant for use as 'extensions of faith' is fairly widespread among churches belonging to the Sunsum sorè tradition. In one church, Wyllie reports the wide use of prayer cards that are consecrated and sold by the prophet. This prayer card, when applied to afflicted parts of the body, is supposed to bring healing. Another church made use of *sunsum anhwia*, 'spiritual sand', also designated as *akodze*, armour. There was also *sunsum semina*, 'spiritual soap', consisting of a compound of ordinary bathing soap, selected herbs and blessed by the founder to be sold to members. These substances, when consecrated by the Prophet, may then be mixed with holy water to form a paste and applied to diseased part of the body to effect healing.<sup>25</sup> It is not just the extensive use of such faith extensions that are often a source of concern for critical observers, but also the fact that they constitute a source of income for the prophets who bless and dispense these prophylactics. This ritual use of aids to prayer has been the source of much criticism of the Sunsum sorè. Ritual needs to be repetitive in order to achieve designated ends. This requirement of exact repetition, Smart notes, 'gives great prominence to formulae, and gradually to the notion that the formulae become effective in themselves' thus imparting a manipulative character to ritual.<sup>26</sup> The therapeutic effect of rituals in African religions is not in doubt. However, there is danger in such rituals leading to what may be described as 'obsessive-compulsive behaviour'. Rather than being helped, people become ensnared by the pattern of rituals. They thus become dependent more on the power of the rite and the person who prescribes them than on the God in whose name and in whose power healing is supposed to be effectual. Similarly the recognition of angels as God's messengers may not be without biblical precedent, but again Paul attacks the gnostic veneration of angels because

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<sup>24</sup> Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa*, 167.

<sup>25</sup> Wyllie, *Spirit-Seekers*, 47, 88.

<sup>26</sup> Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), 73.



of the potential of such veneration to obscure the unique position of Christ as the only mediator between God and humankind (Colossians 1:15 ff.; 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 22:8–9). The image of the Sunsum sorè has thus not been helped by the close affinity between some of their rituals and taboos and those associated with traditional religion from which people, as they preach, are meant to dissociate themselves.

Research by Bibby and Brinkerhoff concludes that the ability to retain members and their offspring is as important to church growth as is a religion's ability to provide people with answers to ultimate questions in life.<sup>27</sup> Most religious groups grow as their members have children, who are then introduced into the church. During visits to various Sunsum sorè including the Jesus Divine Healing Church, it was striking that there were no arrangements to cater for the needs of children and young adults. Over the years, the Sunsum sorè managed to increase their following through some sort of 'quasi-proselytism', that is, receiving from the traditional churches disenfranchised members who were seeking a more responsive and interventionist brand of Christianity. This meant that, when the traditional churches started to offer the 'same services' for which people would normally join Sunsum sorè, a major source of recruitment was cut off. The principal method of recruitment into Sunsum sorè was via the issues they addressed, most of which—childbirth, employment, business success and so on—are adult issues. Sunsum sorè 'services' are tailored to meet the needs of those who stand in the midst of life's difficulties. The result is that there has often been an imbalance in their demographic structure in favour of adults in general, and women in particular.

The neglect of children's ministry is particularly striking, as the women who patronise Sunsum sorè take children of all ages to church. In Deuteronomy, parents are charged with impressing the statutes of the Lord on their children (4:9; 11:19). One of the clearest indications of the importance of ministry to children is seen in Jesus' indignation at the disciples for attempting to deny children access to him (Matthew 19:13–15). Based on such passages, it is arguable that, in the life of the local body of Christ, the ministry to

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<sup>27</sup> Reginald W. Bibby and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, 'The Circulation of the Saints: A Study of People Who Join Conservative Churches', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 12 (1973), 273–283.

children should be considered as important as the ministry to adults. A religious movement with a narrow appeal stands in danger of developing a demographic composition incapable of sustaining its ranks. By concentrating on particularistic concerns, the Sunsum sorè create churches with no undergrowth, which are clearly incapable of sustaining themselves. Some Sunsum sorè also fail to pay sufficient attention to the administrative structures necessary for the management of the body of Christ. The appointment of the seven deacons in Acts 6 to handle the distribution of rations provides a useful lesson in this direction. In Weberian thought, religious movements in which 'power' is not distributed to other personnel in a 'stable institutional structure' are susceptible to death with the failure or demise of a founding prophet. The case of Nyamekye's Jesus Divine Healing Church is just one instance of a common trend in religious innovation in Ghana.

*Religious Developments Affecting the Strength of Sunsum Sorè*

By the time Nyamekye died in 1994, the religious field had also become very competitive. The Methodists and Presbyterians at Agona Nsaba had, in response to the challenge posed especially by the Jesus Divine Healing Church, revived their own 'renewal prayer groups' and so were largely holding their own. The CoP was also flourishing and informants pointed to the fact that a considerable number of people had shifted allegiance from Jesus Divine Healing Church to the CoP. Nyamekye's assistant joined a new Charismatic church briefly when the prophetess died but has subsequently relocated in Accra.

*The Tolerance of Renewal Prayer Groups Within Traditional Mission Churches*

In chapter one, it was noted that renewal is aimed at recapturing for the church the life of the Spirit in order to revitalise its worship. In doing this, renewal movements, Fee observes, tend to make institutionalised Christianity nervous in both positive and negative ways.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, The Spirit, and the People of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 185.

In Ghana the nervousness created by the Sunsum sorè led to positive action by traditional mission churches. Patronage of Sunsum sorè by large numbers from traditional denominations helped the latter to rethink their pneumatology and to accommodate charismatic experiences in their own churches. This, as we have noted, has been done through the recognition granted renewal groups within traditional mission churches. Renewal prayer groups can be said to have stemmed the tide of members drifting into Sunsum sorè because, to begin with, a number of such people never really abandoned their roots in denominational traditions. They were just conforming to the spirit of African religiosity by seeking, elsewhere, solutions to problems in the face of which traditional churches often cringed. As a result, when 'the things of the Spirit' became available in their mission churches, many began to return 'home'. Patrick Ryan, a Jesuit priest and former professor of religion at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, was candid in his opinion on how renewal has helped Roman Catholicism in Ghana:

In His providence, twenty years ago God provided Ghanaian Catholicism with a partial answer to the problems posed by neo-Protestant Pentecostalism. Too few priests have recognised the importance of that answer and have tried to ignore or even relegate that answer to an insignificant corner. Catholic Charismatic renewal—fully Catholic and fully Charismatic—can and does offer Catholics all that might otherwise attract them away from humdrum Masses and devotional exercises to the religiously attractive realm of neo-Protestant Pentecostalism. When priests ignore charismatic prayer groups in their pastoral bailiwicks, the prayer groups sometimes go astray, as many of us have learned from sad experience.<sup>29</sup>

The renewal prayer groups, as noted in chapter 1, are lay-initiated, lay-oriented and predominantly lay-organised charismatic organisations operating within traditional churches. Their aim has been to recover the use of charisms within traditional churches in order to renew and revitalise them. It is revealing that, at the Ghana Methodist Conference at which the concerns of 'plural belonging' had been expressed, it was agreed that everything possible should be done to retain the spirituality of the renewal groups within the Church, to

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick J. Ryan, 'The Phenomenon of Independent Religious Movements in Ghana', *Catholic Standard* (15–21 March, 1992), 6.

enrich her life.<sup>30</sup> In effect renewal groups offer members of the traditional denominations the same spirituality—miracles, prayer, prophecy and healings—for which they would otherwise have consulted prophets or worshipped in their churches. This may not have halted the drift altogether, but it definitely reduced considerably the numbers of people who looked to the Sunsum sorè for spiritual support.

*The Church of Pentecost and the Demystification of Ghanaian Prophetism*

The other religious development accounting for the decline of Sunsum sorè is the presence of the CoP. The CoP has emerged as a Pentecostal denomination with rigorous evangelistic programmes, an uncompromising holiness ethic, a wider demographic appeal and extensive geographic spread, a community-oriented church planting method, a diversified ministry including provision for children and youth, with a strong women's movement and an emphasis on Pentecostal phenomena. The CoP therefore stands for what may be perceived to be a more accessible and 'more respectable option' in indigenous Pentecostalism. It is more accessible than other classical Pentecostal Churches like the Assemblies of God because, although the Assemblies of God has been in Ghana since the late 1930s, it has remained largely an urban-centred and mostly English-speaking church. In Ghana, churches that do not 'vernacularise' as the CoP has done find it difficult to attract significant following outside urban literate communities. The CoP, in contrast to the founder-administered independent Sunsum sorè, has a centralised administrative structure, so the pastors are under control. The CoP also combines its Pentecostal ethos with a very strict moral ethic, a very high standard of pastoral care and a liturgical simplicity that has given it a high level of integrity and attraction for a broad spectrum of Ghanaians. More importantly, and again in keeping with the Pentecostal ethos, CoP takes seriously the manifestations of the Spirit, the very phenomena for which people seek the intervention of the Sunsum sorè. The CoP has virtually captured the field previously occupied by the Sunsum sorè because it is generally viewed as a serious church—serious about the Bible, prayer, evangelism, and above all, serious about things of the Spirit.

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<sup>30</sup> Methodist Church Ghana, *Representative Session Agenda* (1969), 35.

The seriousness of CoP evokes a very high degree of membership commitment evident in the intensity of participation in church life. Stark proposes that, in order to grow, religious movements must offer, among other things, a religious culture that sets them apart from the general secular culture. This means, according to Stark, that movements must be distinctive and impose strict moral standards.<sup>31</sup> Quoting Iannaccone, Stark uses 'strictness' in reference to the degree to which a religious group maintains 'a separate and distinctive lifestyle or morality in personal and family life, in such areas as dress, diet, drinking, entertainment, uses of time, sex, child rearing and the like'.<sup>32</sup> In Christian terms, drinking and other such indulgences may be interpreted as being worldly, and this in the light of Paul's counsel to Christians to avoid conformity 'to the pattern of this world' (Romans 12:2). Such strictness, in the thinking of Stark, makes religious groups strong by screening out those he refers to as 'free-riders'. Free-riders are those who may want to share in the benefits of the movement without contributing to the collective enterprise. When free-riders are excluded, the average level of commitment increases, and this in turn greatly increases the credibility of the religious culture as well as generating a high degree of resource mobilisation.<sup>33</sup>

The Ghanaian public image of the CoP is that of a church which is making up for some of the failures and weaknesses—particularly in the area of morality—which have come to be associated with the Sunsum sorè and even the traditional mission churches. As a Pentecostal denomination, CoP is serious about religious experience and things of the Spirit, and as a religious organisation it pursues a strict and uncompromising stance in what the church perceives as biblical ethical and moral standards. The CoP maintains a very conservative outlook, setting the church apart as an organisation that refuses to be drawn into worldliness. On the relation of such strictness to church life and growth, the CoP is known to be particularly strict and swift in dealing with matters of marital infidelity and even more so when this occurs among church elders or pastors.

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<sup>31</sup> Rodney Stark, 'Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 11, 2 (1996), 137.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

In traditional African religiosity, the maintenance of high moral standards in response to prescriptions by the gods is well known. Religion functions as a means of social control. After nearly two centuries of existence in Ghana and with the benefit of the translated Scriptures, traditional communities are by no means oblivious of standards required by the God of the Bible. If their own deities, which are discounted by the Christian church as powerless and inferior, expect such high moral standards, then converts have good reason to expect the Christian God to demand even higher standards, issuing in a more venerable and passionate commitment on the part of worshippers. Against this background, and compared with what has come to be generally regarded as the dubious ways of African prophets, and the compromised and moribund Christianity of TWMCs, the CoP's serious and strict approach to the gospel helps to endear it to potential members and admirers. The official greeting of the CoP women, *ye kronkron ma Ewurade*, 'holiness unto the Lord', underlies its strong holiness ethic.

In *Translating the Message* Sanneh draws attention to a primary affinity between the vernacular and the gospel and the way in which, by carrying the gospel in its vernacular form into their communities, Africans have helped the church to grow.<sup>34</sup> Recalling a survey of how numerous congregations within one densely populated area of Nigeria had come into being, Walls notes how in almost all cases the initial impetus had come from the indigenous lay Christians. Missionary resources to support local initiatives often came later.<sup>35</sup> In the particular case of the CoP, the McKeowns were never able to communicate in the vernacular. However, from the outset the CoP relied extensively on the evangelistic passion of its local members. This was pursued as a deliberate policy by the missionary figure James McKeown: 'this has been our aim in allowing the work in Africa to retain its native characteristics and it has resulted in producing some of the finest Christians I have met.'<sup>36</sup> Informants also testify that McKeown consistently paid glorious tribute to the passion and commitment of the indigenous personnel he worked with,

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<sup>34</sup> Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 188–189.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 87.

<sup>36</sup> Leonard, *A Giant in Ghana*, 64.

and attributed the growth and expansion of the CoP to the hard work of the African agents of the church. Dissemination of the gospel in the vernacular has been one of CoP's strongest points. Thus until the CoP introduced a handful of English-speaking assemblies in the mid-1980s, the church's services were conducted almost entirely in the local languages of the places where they were located.<sup>37</sup> This vernacularisation, which is given expression in the use of locally composed choruses and songs, the narration of personal testimonies, public Scripture reading, and the preaching of sermons, helps to give the CoP a certain appealing simplicity found neither in the Assemblies of God nor in many of the TWMCs. Much of this vernacularisation may not itself be new, considering that Sunsum sorè services are also in the vernacular. Its import as a source of attraction to the CoP is best understood against the background of the CoP's wider demographic and geographic appeal, and in the context of the dwindling public image of the Sunsum sorè. The CoP's institutional structures also provide it with an air of permanence and stability that some Sunsum sorè do not have. Accessibility, vernacularisation and a decidedly Pentecostal spirituality make the CoP a preferred alternative to the 'discredited' Sunsum sorè which geographically may be located just a few metres away from a local CoP assembly.

One of the most important areas in which the CoP has gained an edge on the Sunsum sorè, and thus supplanted the activities of many prophets, is in the ministry of healing and deliverance found both in the local assemblies and at the national level. In order to avoid some of the excesses, suspicions and abuses surrounding the healing practices of Ghanaian prophetism, the CoP has institutionalised, integrated and therefore brought under the Church's administrative control the activities of those of their number manifesting the gifts of healing and deliverance. In the process, some of these healers seceded to form their own independent churches. However the healing camps set up and run by recognised CoP healers continue to function and they remain among the most popular and

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<sup>37</sup> The English-speaking assemblies were introduced to cater for people in the urban areas who might not speak the local language or who simply preferred that option. It was also an attempt to provide a less conservative setting for younger members who, as a result of the forces of modernity, had difficulty in identifying with some of the CoP's traditional restrictions, which included the covering of hair by women, and the separation of men and women in church seating arrangements.

respected in the country. The sick and afflicted from across denominations patronise these CoP residential healing facilities as alternatives to what the Sunsum sorè offer. The ministry of the CoP has therefore helped to demystify 'Prophetism in Ghana' by hastening the move of the Sunsum sorè from the centre to the periphery of Ghanaian Christianity. This is not just because the CoP is offering the same 'services', but also because they are doing so from a more respectable position with institutional structures to cater for abuses which undoubtedly occur.

Added to these, the CoP and CMs practise a degree of encapsulation regarding association of their members with the Sunsum sorè. Rambo uses 'encapsulation' with reference to a conversion strategy in which the converted are discouraged from contact with the 'outside world' by creating 'self-contained worlds' through which the process of conversion may be strengthened.<sup>38</sup> Encapsulation may be physical, a practice where members are isolated, as in the case of the early missionary communities for local Christians called 'Salems' in Ghana. It may also be social, with converts being encouraged to adopt patterns of lifestyle that limit significant contact with 'outsiders'.<sup>39</sup> What the CoP and CMs practise in relation to the Sunsum sorè is what Rambo refers to as 'ideological encapsulation' in which members are inoculated against alternative or competing systems of belief.<sup>40</sup> Interviews conducted for this study, sermons, and deliverance services in the CoP and CMs reveal that 'ideological encapsulation' takes the form of vicious attacks on the Sunsum sorè as occult and spiritist churches who manipulate their followers and drive them along the paths of evil spiritual bondage. Those joining the CoP or CMs from a Sunsum sorè, as will be shown in chapter 6, are thus required as part of the conversion process to undergo a symbolic severance from their former religious associations through the ministry of deliverance. The ideological encapsulation is part of the demonisation of African religious culture and its strong denunciation in Ghanaian Pentecostal hermeneutics as a 'demonic doorway'. Because of the assimilation into their worship of certain practices, rit-

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 103–108.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*



uals and taboos associated with the 'demonised' traditional culture, the Pentecostal movement generally vilifies the Sunsum sorè as unchristian and occult, thus adding to their unpopularity.

In 1965 Ghana's First Republic parliament accepted a private member's motion filed by A.W. Amoro, member for Bongo, calling on the Government to check what he expressed as 'anti-social practices by certain churches'.<sup>41</sup> With ostensible reference to the Sunsum sorè, the leaders of 'these sects', according to Mr Amoro, claimed they were capable of healing spiritually, making barren women bear children, freeing people from the clutches of the law, facilitating promotions etc. The MP, like many Ghanaians, had clearly become disenchanted with the Sunsum sorè for what he perceived as the general lack of genuine Christian and altruistic motives in the founding of such churches. Much of the MP's presentation was based on media propaganda built on not a few scandalous acts involving various founders of Sunsum sorè. The image of independent churches as shaped by the media would require separate research. It is worth pointing out here, however, that the exaggerated portrayal of the Sunsum sorè as a societal menace has been reinforced through television drama and local Ghanaian films. This has not helped their cause. In such TV shows and films, the prophets are always depicted as faking spiritual possession and divine communication through which they dupe and cheat unsuspecting clients. For our purposes, one would contend that the voices being raised about the activities of the Sunsum sorè were in many cases a genuine challenge to the general lack of accountability associated with these churches. The quantitative proliferation of independent churches by itself raises suspicions about the motives and claims to being called into ministry by many of the founders. Ironically there is also much grumbling in Africa about the dishonesty and wiles of many diviners. Evans-Pritchard observed with regard to Zande witchdoctoring that faith tended to lessen as witchdoctors increased and spread.<sup>42</sup> In the Christian context the accusations often clouded the genuineness and honesty of many prophets and their activities. However, it is also true that many, as men and women of the Spirit's power, became

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<sup>41</sup> *Christian Messenger*, August 1965.

<sup>42</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 112.

impervious to change. The result of their difficulties has been that, even for those who have survived, a large number remain discredited or are perceived with suspicion by the public. The persistent public claims of abuse and accusations of fraud, sexual impropriety, the employment of occult healing practices and so on against the Sunsum sorè were bound to have some effect. Some of these accusations, as has been noted in the course of our discussions, are based on the genuine stories of victims.<sup>43</sup> By the 1970s, the image of Sunsum sorè in the eyes of the public had been severely dented. Many African prophets and their churches became stigmatised as a result, a situation from which it would be hard to recover, in view of the alternatives now available.

There are still a number of prophets and Sunsum sorè who are highly respected in Ghana. But generally their image, particularly that of the single-congregation ones, is anything but credible. This negative image is evidenced by certain ludicrous epithets that these churches have attracted. Many commonly refer to them as ‘pray-for-me’, ‘kill the light’ (suggesting that prophets habitually pray with the opposite sex in the dark), ‘holy water’ or *abo-nsamu* (hand-clapping), all in a bid to portray Sunsum sorè Christianity as contrived and their prophets as fraudulent, or religious impostors who indulge in false prophecy, fortune-telling, lying visions and exploitative divination—the detestable ways of the false prophets of Israel which Yahweh consistently deplores (Ezekiel 13:1–9). This chapter has sought to argue that, in spite of the major contribution of the Sunsum sorè to Ghanaian Christianity, there have been problems with their ministry and theology. The search for individual counselling from church leaders is not at variance with the church’s ministry. But an overemphasis on ‘seeing the man/woman of God’ because he or she is perceived as the custodian of spiritual gifts devalues the theological import of the *ekklesia*, the regular local assembly of God’s people as an inclusive and participatory fellowship of the saints.

The work of ministry, contrary to the Sunsum sorè model, is thus expected to be a corporate activity in which members not only care for, but also remain accountable to each other. One would argue that,

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<sup>43</sup> In 1989 for example, the PNDC government disbanded the 500-member *Onyame Sompá* Church (God’s true worship) of Prophet Kwabena Ekwam for various offences including alleged illicit affairs with some married female members. A number of victims corroborated the accusations, and the government subsequently acted on it.

if the spiritual gifts were encouraged to function in their diversity, such an auditing role would have been possible. In that case the Sunsum sorè would have been spared the embarrassment of unfulfilled prophecies and prophetic messages that led others into inflicting irreparable damage on suspected witches and 'spiritual pursuers'. The problems of the church at Corinth as addressed by Paul serve to illustrate the consequences of the misuse of spiritual gifts. For, as with many Sunsum sorè, the use of spiritual gifts among the Corinthians on occasion failed the ultimate standard test of being beneficial to the charismatic community at large (I Corinthians 12:7). However on the whole this work takes a very positive view of the Sunsum sorè as authentic independent indigenous Pentecostal movements dedicated to the renewal of Ghanaian Christianity. The fact that a number of Sunsum sorè have not survived or have lost members does not justify their being indicted together as pretenders. Their problems clearly hide the contribution that they have made to Ghanaian, and for that matter African, Christianity. In regard to the view that not all of these 'holy men' should be considered charlatans, the following observation by Otto remains apposite:

Those who should know assure us that ninety-eight per cent of these 'holy men' are impostors; but, even so, we are left with two per cent who are not, a surprisingly high percentage in the case of a matter that invites and facilitates imposture as much as this does. The consideration of this remaining two per cent should continue to throw much light on the actual fact of the genesis of a religious community.<sup>44</sup>

In the midst of widespread disaffection with the Sunsum sorè, new stirrings have occurred in the field of independent indigenous Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana. These demonstrate significant continuities as well as discontinuities with the beleaguered Sunsum sorè. This point is made with particular reference to the CMs who seem to have embraced the 'democratisation of charisms' in their style of ministry. Within the last three decades the emergence of CMs has become the single most important development in Ghanaian Christianity. It is to the history, teachings, and theology of these new independent churches that we now turn in the next four chapters.

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<sup>44</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 157–158.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DEMOCRATISATION OF CHARISMA

The constitutive act of the Pentecostal movement is the offer of a direct and particularly intense encounter with God, which makes possible a profound change in the life of the person who experiences it. . . . Through the Holy Spirit, God makes himself directly accessible to the believer who seeks him, thus destroying the necessity of every kind of external priestly mediation (Juan Sepúlveda).<sup>1</sup>

America's premier healing evangelist, Oral Roberts, is arguably one of the most important of the foreign evangelists with varying degrees of influence on the evangelical and Pentecostal movements in Ghana. In July 1988, Roberts visited Ghana in person.<sup>2</sup> One of his hosts during this visit was Bishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the founder and head pastor of Christian Action Faith Ministries International. Roberts ministered on the crusade platform alongside the Nigerian neo-Pentecostal healing evangelist, Archbishop Benson Idahosa. At the time of this crusade the oldest neo-Pentecostal church in Ghana, Duncan-Williams's Christian Action Faith Ministries International was barely nine years old. The Charismatic ministries (CMs), as they are popularly designated in Ghana, have gained much prominence in sub-Saharan Africa since the late 1970s. This influence is underscored by the attention the charismatic movement has secured in books, dissertations and academic journals in the last decade. One of the most significant theological features of this movement is its radicalisation of the biblical idea of universal priesthood so that, unlike the Sunsum sorè and traditional mission churches, the leader is in principle only a first among equals. As the quotation above suggests, the CMs emphasise that God is directly accessible in the

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Sepúlveda, 'Reflections on the Pentecostal Contribution to the Mission of the Church in Latin America', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Issue 1 (1992), 100.

<sup>2</sup> Through the 1970s, Oral Roberts's religious programmes were broadcast on Ghana television, and continued until 1982.

experience of the Spirit, thus ‘destroying the necessity of every kind of external priestly mediation’.

After the last chapter’s discussion of the decline of the Sunsum sorè, this one begins with an examination of the historical development of CMs in Ghanaian Christianity. In Gifford’s article, ‘Ghana’s Charismatic Churches’, there is a summary of the individual histories of selected CMs.<sup>3</sup> This is helpful but the proliferation of CMs in Ghana demands that, in order for the nature of their Christianity to be appreciated, the antecedent religious and other factors accounting for their emergence be examined. Using the CMs’ own definition, this chapter also examines their main theological orientation that makes their basic ecclesiology different from that of other Christian traditions. Thus, although reference is made to individual CMs, the nature of their Christianity is approached through their collective history in order to provide the background for looking at their theological orientation in the next three chapters.

### *The Designation ‘Charismatic Ministries’*

In the Ghanaian context, as was noted in chapter 1, the designation ‘Charismatic Ministries’ carries both historical and theological significance. Historically, it refers to independent churches emerging from the neo-Pentecostal movement since the late 1970s. Theologically, the expression defines the ecclesiology of these new independent churches in which every believer is considered a potential recipient of a charism(s) or ministry gift(s) of the Holy Spirit. Their ecclesiology follows the New Testament principle particularly evident in Pauline thought that participating in Christ is like functioning as a member of the human body. Each part has by definition a function within the body, hence the reference to the believing community as the ‘body of Christ’ (I Corinthians 12:12–31). The charisms or ‘gifts of grace’, as exercised by an individual or groups of believers, constitute their ministry. The different ministries are co-ordinated within the local church to make it ‘charismatically functional’, thus de-legitimising the concentration of charismatic power in the ‘hands’ of prophets, ministers or pastors. In principle therefore CMs accept all

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Gifford, ‘Ghana’s Charismatic Churches’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 24, 3 (1994), 241–265.

believers as belonging to the 'holy priesthood' and qualified to act as 'stewards of God's manifold grace' (I Peter 2:9–10; 4:10).

Within a single local Charismatic church, one may find various team ministries such as praise and worship, healing and deliverance, counselling, welcome and ushering, video-recording and tape-recording, publications, prayer force, youth and children. On a visit to the Tabernacle of Witness Church International in Kumasi, Ghana, I found the names of their different ministries intriguing. 'Watchmen' referred to the prayer team, 'Life Hunters' the youth ministries, 'Kingdom Kids' the children's service, 'Achievers' the unmarried, 'Sarai' referred to the women's fellowship and the men's fellowship was the 'Eagles'. These ministries are built around the collective belief in spiritual gifts and that even natural talents are conferred by God and should be employed in his service through Christian ministry. The nature of these teams and ministries varies from one church to another. Charisma as in Pauline thought is viewed as being synonymous with *diakonia*, ministry, and therefore all gifts that mediate grace to God's people are considered ministry gifts (I Corinthians 12:4–5). These diverse ministries exist in addition to the recognition given to the five-fold ministry of apostle, evangelist, prophet, teacher and pastor outlined in Ephesians 4:11–12.

#### *A Local Movement with a Global Character*

The three names mentioned at the beginning of the chapter are representative of some of the key personalities and associated factors that directly spawned the CMs in Ghana. Oral Roberts represents the North American (foreign) factor, Benson Idahosa the African inspiration and model, and Duncan-Williams the local person and pioneering founder of a Charismatic ministry in Ghana. These new independent churches cherish the different transnational and international streams and networks to which they belong. There may be an undeniable foreign, mainly North American, inspiration behind the efforts of African neo-Pentecostals in general. In Ghana this inspiration is particularly evident in its Bible School culture and media consciousness. This influence is the basis for recent conclusions that the CMs are an American importation.<sup>4</sup> Brouwer, Gifford and Rose

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<sup>4</sup> Gifford is one of the main proponents of this view. See Gifford's various pub-

deny that the Christianity evolving through the CMs 'is a genuinely African construct, arising from African experience and meeting African needs'.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to this view, I would argue that the CMs reflect modern African ingenuity in the appropriation of neo-Pentecostal Christianity enamoured with a repertoire of global, mostly American neo-Pentecostal techniques, style and strategy in organisation and expression. In Ghanaian eyes, North America, with its technological superiority and material abundance, epitomises modernity. For a religion that seeks to be modern and preaches material abundance as a sign of right standing with God, as the CMs do, what comes from America is a great source of enchantment and inspiration. The core of the message of Ghanaian CMs is not American as such. It is the way it is expressed that betrays a predilection for the style of American media evangelists.

The internationalism of the CMs is in one sense an inevitable consequence of religious globalisation. Technological advance makes possible the flow of ideas from one culture to another, producing, as Wilson observes, 'a new kind of relativism in men's thinking'.<sup>6</sup> The mass media play a crucial role in this by revealing models and styles from other contexts which may easily become the norm for similar movements elsewhere. In October 1998, Ron Kenoly, the celebrated African-American gospel singer, was invited to hold a gospel concert at the Christ Temple of the International Central Gospel Church, Accra. The event, dubbed 'Make Us One' and sponsored by the local JOY FM radio station, attracted about 3,000 Christians, mainly from the charismatic sector. It affirmed the global view that the CMs take of their movement and the inspiration they receive from their international leanings. For in Africa's charismatic movements the use of the media, Hackett points out, acts as 'a tool of expansion' and 'a reflection of globalising aspirations'.<sup>7</sup> Preaching

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lications on these churches including, 'Africa Shall be Saved: An Appraisal of Reinhard Bonnke's Pan African Crusade', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 17, 1 (1987), 63–92; 'Christian Fundamentalism and Development in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 52 (1991), 9–20.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (New York/London: Routledge, 1996), 178.

<sup>6</sup> Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Rosalind I.J. Hackett, 'Charismatic/Pentecostal Appropriation of Media Technologies in Nigeria and Ghana,' *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 28, 3 (1998), 258–277.

tours have become very important to Ghana's Charismatic church leaders. The ability to travel abroad and in the process 'export spiritual power' or to 'import' foreign preachers has become in Ghana an index of a leader's charismatic credentials and success as a man or woman of God. It is also a source of great pride for church members. A research trip to the Jesus is Alive Ministries International in Accra coincided with the founder's return after trips to Israel, Canada and the USA. Colourful banners had been mounted on the doors and frontage of the church with the inscription 'Daddy *Akwaaba*' ('welcome'). During the service itself, about a third of the sermon (which lasted forty-five minutes in total) was spent recounting how the Lord moved mightily during the month-long evangelistic trip. In addition to the network of international friends and engagements the leaders of CMs covet, their desire to reflect an international character has been heightened by efforts to set up branches abroad, branches mostly made up of Ghanaian immigrants living in Western Europe.<sup>8</sup>

In the midst of changes occurring as a result of global influences, old religions that refuse to change could easily be edged out of the field. One result of this is the increasing cases of Sunsum sorè transforming themselves by abandoning recourse to rituals like the use of candles and African traditional herbal preparations in order to embrace what they now perceive as a more biblically oriented, but also modern Pentecostal form. The liberalisation of religious expression has rightly been identified as a distinctive trend of modernity.<sup>9</sup> It is not practical to expect young people today to go to church in cassocks or to leave their shoes at the door to the church. Ghana's CMs are operating in a relatively modern environment and have come under influences and resources that were unavailable to the Sunsum sorè, definitely not at the height of their popularity. All the CMs were born out of local initiatives. The driving force behind the international image they so keenly covet lies in the global mission to which the leaders claim God has called them. In recent times some, the International Bible Worship Centre for example, have set up Internet websites where information and glossy pictures of pastors, their wives and major church events may be accessed. It is therefore not by

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<sup>8</sup> For a study on the phenomenon see Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> J.P. Kiernan, 'Modernity and the African Independent Churches in South Africa', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 2, 1 (1999), 20.



chance that all the churches in question have either 'global' or 'international' in their names. In Ghana the popular ones include International Central Gospel Church, Global Revival Ministries, Word Miracle Church International, Resurrection Power Ministries International and Living Praise Ministries International. The existence of the CMs may therefore be interpreted in 'incarnational' terms. This in our thinking means paying attention to the diffusion of global influences, but, more importantly, highlighting the authenticity of the CMs as part of the indigenous innovation in the appropriation of (Pentecostal) Christianity in a modern African context.

*History of Charismatic Ministries: Roots and Related Factors*

Some work has been done on the origins of the CMs. Samuel Adubofour's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, 'Evangelical Parachurch Movements in Ghanaian Christianity', is the product of extensive research on the evangelical personalities and parachurch movements whose activities have contributed in no small measure to the rise of the neo-Pentecostal movement in Ghana.<sup>10</sup> Kingsley Larbi's study, 'The Development of Ghanaian Pentecostalism', complements Adubofour's work. Larbi pays considerable attention to the development of indigenous Pentecostal churches that have come from a classical Pentecostal background. The historical section of Larbi's work on the CMs deals mainly with the particular case of the International Central Gospel Church. The work of the two researchers may be considered 'emic'. They are not only participants in some of the Christian traditions they discuss, but their respective works are also based on very useful primary data obtained through extensive fieldwork. Much of what follows comes from personal fieldwork material and acquaintance. References are also made to the two theses in an attempt to arrive at a synthesised summary of the collective history of Ghana's CMs.

*Roots in Parachurch Evangelical Associations*

The neo-Pentecostal movement in sub-Saharan Africa has very deep roots in the parachurch evangelical associations that gained much

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<sup>10</sup> See Samuel Adubofour, 'Evangelical Parachurch Movements in Ghanaian Christianity: c. 1950 to Early 1990s', Ph.D. thesis: University of Edinburgh, 1994.

prominence from the 1950s through the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> ‘Parachurch evangelical’ in this context refers to nondenominational Christian prayer groups, fellowships, gospel music teams and individuals whose evangelistic activities aim to shore up the mission of existing churches in gospel witness and Christian nurture. The theological persuasion of these conservative evangelicals includes an ardent belief in the life-transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures, and the importance of fellowship. It is also characterised by a passionate desire to share the good news with others.<sup>12</sup> In Ghana such evangelical parachurch movements include individual, often itinerant, evangelists, nondenominational Bible study groups, and prayer associations and fellowships. Some are independent, but many are affiliated to the Scripture Union (SU), a movement that was set up in Ghana under the auspices of the UK-based branch with the aim of supplementing the efforts of existing churches and encouraging ‘responsible membership’. This policy of ‘responsible church membership’, it will be argued, led in time to a clash between official and grassroots spirituality leading to the formation of CMs.

In obedience to the policy of ‘responsible church membership’, many conservative evangelicals remained in their churches and contributed to their life and worship. In most cases, however, this was difficult. Tensions arose between traditional mission church authority and their often well-educated members claiming the ‘born-again’ experience and criticising liberal church traditions. In several instances these evangelicals were powerful lay preachers themselves and their sermons expressed their opposition to the ministers’ views. By the early 1970s, the SU policy of ‘responsible church membership’ had heightened these tensions, and in not a few cases strained relations between conservative evangelicals and their traditional denominations. It is the contention of this work that the proliferation of independent CMs in Ghana today is partly a culmination of years of imbibing an evangelical/Pentecostal spirituality, which was bound to look for expression outside existing churches and denominations.

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<sup>11</sup> For the Nigerian story, see Matthews A. Ojo, ‘The Growth of Campus Christianity and Charismatic Movements in Western Nigeria’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis: University of London, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> John Stott, *Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 15–39.

*SU and GHAFES*

The tremendous influence of the SU in particular on Ghanaian Christianity is evident in how the movement's name and affiliation with it became conterminous with conservative evangelicalism. SU fellowships from the 1960s became the main nondenominational Christian organisations operating in Ghana's post-primary educational institutions. In the secondary schools, they were known as SU. In the tertiary institutions they were known as the Ghana Fellowship of Evangelical Students (GHAFES) and belonged to the global International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). In order to sustain the evangelical persuasion of SU and GHAFES members as they settled into working life, around the early 1960s some of the former graduates initiated home fellowships mainly for prayer and Bible study. These were mainly urban-centred and attracted former members of SU and GHAFES from the various institutions of learning who were now in employment. By the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the home fellowships had grown and so were transformed into what eventually became known as Town Fellowships. In pursuance of the principle of 'responsible church membership', Town Fellowships met outside regular church worship hours. Members came mainly from traditional mission churches to augment their spiritual life, deepen their knowledge of the Bible and share fellowship with like-minded evangelical Christians. Such spirituality was felt by participants to be absent from the very denominations which evangelicals had been encouraged to stay in and help revitalise. The impact of the evangelical fellowships was also felt in workplaces as members of Town Fellowships organised lunchtime prayer and Bible study meetings for their colleagues.

Through the 1970s, it became evident that members of SU and its affiliate organisations were becoming increasingly Pentecostal in character and orientation. Emphasis was increasingly on the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the experiences of speaking in tongues, prophecies and healing miracles. This was particularly evident in the activities of these groups on university campuses, where religious life and activity enjoyed freer expression. A gap thus gradually developed, and widened with the years, between official SU policy on the Holy Spirit and what was being *experienced* at the grassroots by the generality of members. One of the main activities of GHAFES is the annual university mission, a major evangelistic outreach programme

that rotates among the major universities in Ghana. This mission in particular offered the opportunity to receive 'missioners', as the main speakers are called, whose Christian orientation was often Pentecostal in nature. In the schools, the Pentecostal posture of SU groups became a matter of much concern both for the SU leadership and for the heads of the institutions, who in many cases represented traditional Western mission interests. Meetings became excessively noisy as people prayed and celebrated the immediacy of God's presence. In the circumstance, SU, under whose umbrella all these school groups were supposed to operate, was forced to issue an official statement on its position on the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The main substance of the SU statement was that every truly converted Christian already had the Spirit and that there was no need for any subsequent manifestation such as speaking in tongues.

This explanation about the Holy Spirit was clearly at variance with experiences at the grassroots. First, the statement overlooked the fact that some students were members of classical Pentecostal traditions where such phenomena as 'speaking in tongues' were normative. More importantly, many born-again students were going through post-conversion fillings of the Spirit with manifestations of tongues, interpretations of tongues, prophecies and visions. What the official SU statement sought to accomplish was to show that the emphasis being put on 'tongues' and other spiritual gifts as indicative of Holy Spirit baptism and the 'chaos' accompanying the manifestation of charismatic phenomena did not have official SU backing. SU thus stated what may be seen as the general evangelical stance on this matter as indicated by Billy Graham, who denies that the Pentecostal teaching of 'initial evidence' has biblical support.<sup>13</sup>

Such a systematic rationalist approach to the study of the Bible was in contrast to the experiences of Christians 'growing up' in Ghanaian conservative evangelical movements. Official SU reservations about charismatic phenomena stemmed partly from the movement's Western European heritage. In the process many SU groups in Ghanaian schools unofficially denounced the leadership of the movement by refusing to recognise the jurisdiction of the SU head office over their affairs. The growing gap between the official attitude of the evangelical movement in Ghana and grassroots experiences

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<sup>13</sup> Billy Graham, 'The Holy Spirit', in *The Collected Works of Billy Graham* (New York: Inspirational Press, 1993), 367–368, 369.

reflected what was happening in western countries like Britain. Goldingay, writing on developments in 1960s Britain, observes how, as a result of the insistence on right doctrine, evangelicalism had become 'vulnerable to a take-over by a [charismatic] movement which emphasised experience of God and the emotions, or had become in need of the counterbalance of such an emphasis.'<sup>14</sup>

The CMs in Ghana emerged under similar circumstances in the late 1970s. The overwhelming sense of the reality of God's presence being experienced by many members of SU groups and at SU meetings had been accompanied by much emotion leading to a desire to pray in tongues, prophesy and shout during gatherings. In contrast to the climate of the times, evangelical leaders, particularly those belonging to the generations before the 1970s, consistently warned people not to make too much of their feelings. This rationalist approach to religious experience ignored biblical testimonies to the felt presence of God in religious experience with which the emerging Pentecostal spirituality within Ghanaian evangelicalism identified. It overlooked the fact that Africans tend to be quite emotional in the expression of their religiosity. Above all, conservative evangelical reservations were too far removed from the experiential reality on the ground. Theologically there was much wisdom in the SU position that the experience of God was not to be reduced to just emotional exuberance. Nevertheless, it failed to provide a satisfactory response to the spiritual outbursts of charismatic phenomena and emotion in public worship for which people knew there were biblical precedents. In the words of Goldingay, it ignored the reality that 'the Holy Spirit draws people into fellowship with a God before whom we are invited to stand and shout and to kneel and bow (Psalm 95), but not to sit and snooze.'<sup>15</sup> The rise of the CMs in Ghana was therefore partly a protest against the 'restrictions' that the leadership of the conservative evangelical movement sought to impose on charismatic manifestations that grassroots participants felt God was restoring to their generation. One of the best illustrations of the desire by local Christians to institute something different from the Western conservative evangelical heritage was the formation of the Prayer Warriors movement within SU.

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<sup>14</sup> John Goldingay, 'Charismatic Spirituality: Some Theological Reflections', *Theology* (May/June 1996), 179, 180.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

*Prayer Warriors Movement: A Shift in Grassroots Conservative Evangelical Praxis*

The Pentecostal shift in evangelical witness was taken further by Ghanaian evangelicals with the formation in 1974 of the Prayer Warriors movement (until 1976 'Ammunition Warriors') to give active expression to the power of God, particularly through healing and deliverance. This, together with the charismatic phenomena already evident in most SU groups, heightened the Pentecostal edge within Ghanaian conservative evangelicalism. The Prayer Warriors gave to evangelicalism the ability to rise above creed and ceremony and thus affirm the experiential reality of God's power. True to the spirit of African religiosity, the movement showed respect for the demonstration of spiritual power, a power that is able to overcome evil forces capable of blighting the abundance of existential life. The annual gathering of the Prayer Warriors is appropriately referred to as 'the War'. It is a forum set up to equip the leaders of the movement to serve in their respective groups. The SU, on the other hand, has never been fully at home with the attention that its Ghanaian members have often given to the 'principalities and powers' hermeneutic. The persistent hostility of SU authority to pneumatic phenomena, therefore, continuously alienated the movement from local patrons and reduced its influence in Ghanaian Christianity.

Reference has already been made to Sundkler's observation that in the spirituality of the African independent churches one is able to discern what African Christians 'when left to themselves' regarded as important and relevant in the appropriation of Christianity.<sup>16</sup> The theological path pursued by the Prayer Warriors movement emphasised Sundkler's words in the Ghanaian context. The membership has pursued a theological agenda that, as the lessons from the Sunsum sorè have shown, lies close to the heart of Ghanaian religiosity. Shenk has also noted that, before the wide usage of the term 'contextualisation' in missiological circles, African independent churches 'had become laboratories of that which had to come about if the churches in the non-western world were to take root and survive.'<sup>17</sup> The Prayer

<sup>16</sup> Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets*, 17, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Wilbert R. Shenk, 'The Contribution of the Study of New Religious Movements to Missiology', in A.F. Walls and W.R. Shenk (eds.), *Exploring New Religious Movements: Essays in Honour of Harold W. Turner* (Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus, 1990), 191.

Warriors movement, by emphasising similar theological themes to the Sunsum sorè, effectively ensured their own survival at a time when SU and its affiliated institutions were experiencing a serious decline. In fact, the future for evangelical movements like the SU and GHAFES in Ghana is not too promising. In a sense, the rise of the Prayer Warriors movement amounted to a contextualised version of the Western conservative evangelical piety proffered in Ghana through the SU.

### *Evangelistic Youth Music Teams*

The emerging pneumatic spirituality in Ghanaian evangelicalism manifested itself in other directions with the rise of youth gospel music groups. Gospel music and Pentecostal/charismatic renewal are inextricably linked. Hollenweger thus points to the Pentecostal style of music as accounting partly for the movement's phenomenal growth in the Third World.<sup>18</sup> It is not surprising that one of the most significant harbingers of the neo-Pentecostal movement in Ghana were evangelistic youth music teams and ministries. These started in the early 1970s with Joyful Way Incorporated. The fact that these groups were made up mostly of students with strong affiliations to the conservative evangelical movement was itself remarkable. Their radical shake up of the Christian music scene came through the use of mainly Western jazz instruments and contemporary gospel musical forms in evangelism. Joyful Way Incorporated (JWI), a group still strong in Ghana, is on record as the first evangelical music group to use a guitar at an SU gathering. There are testimonies of the spontaneous outbreak of Holy Spirit phenomena, that is, speaking in tongues, weeping, loud cries, and healing, in schools where groups like JWI ministered. They also broke with the conservative evangelical holiness ethic, particularly its aversion to fashion and its association of modern musical instruments with profanity and worldliness.

JWI and the groups they subsequently inspired—Calvary Road Inc., Come Back Inc., Abundant Life, New Creation and Jesus Generation—innovatively modernised Christian music and helped to chart a new course for Ghanaian Christian worship. This was done in two ways. First, the groups unearthed the talents of young Christians,

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<sup>18</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (London: SCM, 1972), xxviii.

talents that lay dormant or, in the case of those who were not believers, had been channelled into playing in hotel dance bands and at bars. Second, the musical instruments they employed were at the time condemned by the traditional Christian community as unsuitable for Christian worship because of their use in secular places and for profane purposes. The teams travelled to other African countries and created an awareness within African Christianity of the potential of disseminating the gospel in modern cultural idioms. They also, through the incorporation of diverse musical abilities into Christian service, underscored the fact that the spiritual gifts available to God's church need not be limited to those specifically mentioned in the New Testament. If there is validity in Cox's belief that the roots of both jazz and Pentecostalism are to be found in Africa, then the evangelistic style of the music teams of the 1970s and 1980s represented a great and ingenious recovery for Ghanaian Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Following this tradition, music using modern Western instruments now defines the very substance of worship in Ghana's CMs. Pastor Mensa Otabil of the International Central Gospel Church once remarked that the efforts of JWI over the years marked what he referred to as 'a major revolution' in the way Christian worship is conducted in Ghanaian churches. In a souvenir brochure to mark the Silver Jubilee of JWI, Otabil also wrote as follows: 'This is not an anniversary for you alone but for the entire Body of Christ. Your contribution will continue to remain in the annals of church history in Ghana.'

*Evangelist Enoch Agbozo's Ghana Evangelical Society*

The leaders of the CMs are unanimous on the contribution of Enoch Agbozo to the 'Pentecostalisation' of conservative evangelicalism, and therefore the rise of the CMs. Many of the leaders who pioneered Charismatic churches in Ghana, especially in the first ten years, had varying levels of influence from Agbozo's Ghana Evangelical Society (GES). Pastor Ebenezer Markwei, founder of the Living Streams Ministries, is one such person. He describes Agbozo as 'the one who took the Holy Ghost out of the closet' of conservative evangelical Christianity in Ghana:

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<sup>19</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 148.



Through Agbozo many in our generation got fired up and carried the brand. In the classical Pentecostal churches, speaking in tongues was sporadic and limited. In SU, where most of us had been trained, speaking in tongues was even opposed, but through Agbozo, many of us were baptised in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues freely. He encouraged us to use our spiritual gifts.<sup>20</sup>

Enoch Agbozo claims a Presbyterian parentage. He was 'born again' in 1968, and his conversion was followed by baptism in the Holy Spirit which was manifested in speaking in tongues. Following this experience, he had brief stints with the Apostles Revelation Society and later the Apostolic Church. Agbozo became a well-known figure as an itinerant evangelist to schools, colleges and universities around the country. In 1973, he established the evangelical/Pentecostal parachurch fellowship, Ghana Evangelical Society, based in Accra. The main activity of GES was a weekly Friday all-night prayer vigil to which scores of young people were attracted. GES vigils offered opportunity not only for prayer, but also for Pentecostalist activities such as Holy Spirit baptism accompanied by speaking in tongues, baptism by immersion, the unrestrained exercise of gifts of the Spirit and evangelism. This pneumatological emphasis was something that Agbozo thinks the evangelical face of Ghanaian Christianity represented by the SU lacked. For, according to Agbozo, one his main ambitions was to 'Pentecostalise' evangelicalism through the youth. The exposure of young evangelicals to charismatic experiences thus contributed to the growing dissatisfaction with SU restrictions on the Holy Spirit, virtual marginalisation of the Spirit in the traditional churches and the 'ordered' acceptance of spiritual manifestations in classical Pentecostalism. These are the church traditions to which many of the young people and students belonged. In 1980, Agbozo, who was influenced somewhat by the American evangelist Morris Cerullo, instituted a church for the growing number of GES all-night vigil participants. These patrons of GES activities were people who either remained 'un-churched' or were simply unwilling to go to church because their spiritual experiences were unwelcome. In Accra, some found 'a place to feel at home' at the Calvary Baptist Church, then under the leadership of the charismatic African-American pastor, Rev. Steve Williams. Agbozo called his initiative, 'House of

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<sup>20</sup> Personal communication.

Worship’, for according to him ‘God asked me to set it up as an example of how he should be worshipped’ and to ‘give the young people an opportunity to use their gifts of the Spirit.’

*Other Evangelical Parachurch Associations and Personalities*

Evangelist Isaac Ababio formed the Hour of Visitation Choir and Evangelistic Association (HOVCEA) in 1967. Through the 1970s Ababio had a great influence as one of the most powerful and sought-after speakers in Ghanaian evangelical circles. His weekly sponsored radio programme, ‘Hour of Visitation’, had a forceful evangelical tone and remained one of the most popular until sponsored religious programmes were banned in the early 1980s. A host of other parachurch evangelical groups emerged outside the SU network in the 1970s, among them the Tears of Jesus, led by Brother Yamoah of Takoradi in the Western Region, the Upper Room Fellowship, led by Emmanuel Asante and based in Kumasi in the Ashanti Region, and the Youth Ambassadors for Christ Association (YAFCA), based in Accra and led by a former SU Travelling Secretary, Rev. John Owusu Afriyie. Many of these groups described themselves as evangelical, but in practice they were Pentecostal as they incorporated speaking in tongues, healing, deliverance and other charismatic phenomena into their activities.

*Influence from Foreign Evangelists*

These local developments together with the exposure to the ministries of foreign, mainly US-based, globetrotting and media evangelists intensified the Pentecostalisation of Ghanaian evangelical Christianity. In addition to the Oral Roberts television programme and his 1988 visit mentioned earlier, Billy Graham, Derek Prince, Reinhard Bonnke, T.L. and Daisy Osborn, Morris Cerullo and Benny Hinn have all visited Ghana to hold crusades. Billy Graham’s ‘International Conference(s) for Itinerant Evangelists’, hosted in Amsterdam in 1983 and 1986 and to which many Ghanaians were invited, also inspired many participants to initiate their own churches. Religious books, audio- and videocassettes on the ministries of the foreign evangelists mentioned, together with those of others like Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, are also in wide circulation in Ghana. Evangelists with the most enduring influence include Morris Cerullo, who, following his ‘School of Ministry and Evangelism’ programmes in Accra in 1983 and 1985,

has now set up a School of Ministry in Ghana with a permanent Ghanaian representative, a qualified surgeon Rev. Dr Seth Ablorh. One of the main features of the Cerullo initiative has been the encouragement given to participants to found their own ministries.

Archbishop Benson Idahosa is credited with being the African evangelist who inspired the 'new dimension' that African Christianity has taken since the late 1970s. Although his biography portrays him as the protégé of several well-known American media evangelists, Idahosa's ministry is not imported from the West. He is described in his biography as having emerged 'literally, from the oblivion of a garbage heap to a position of leadership' as the most popular African televangelist.<sup>21</sup> Idahosa's role as the leading African exponent of the prosperity gospel had much influence on his Ghanaian students. He taught, contrary to popular evangelical teaching at the time, that being 'modern', including the wearing of fashionable and flamboyant clothes, was not at variance with the gospel. Benson Idahosa's maiden crusade in Ghana took place in Accra in 1977. Isaac Ababio, who was chairman of the planning committee, testifies to great miracles, signs and wonders that accompanied the event. The effect of the Idahosa crusade, which eventually culminated in the rise of the CMs, was twofold. First, together with the influence of a 1977 visit by Morris Cerullo, the Idahosa crusade heightened the spiritual revival and fervour in the existing evangelical fellowships in cities, especially Accra and Tema. Second, at the end of the crusade, Idahosa offered scholarships to willing young men and women who wanted to train for ministry in the Christ for All Nations Bible School. Graduates of the school are specifically charged to start their own ministries, and this was faithfully carried out by many Ghanaians who trained with Idahosa. These include, among others, Pastors Christina Doe Tetteh of Solid Rock Chapel, Godwin Normanyo of Fountain of Life Ministries, George Ferguson-Laing of Living Praise Ministries, Charles Agyin Asare of the Word Miracle Church International and Cephas H. Amartey of the now defunct Liberty Valley Temple Ministries.

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<sup>21</sup> Ruthanne Garlock, *Fire in His Bones: The Story of Benson Idahosa* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1981), 148.

*Nicholas Duncan-Williams: Christian Action Faith Ministries*

Nicholas Duncan-Williams was one of the first to benefit from the scholarships offered by Idahosa. The son of a politician-diplomat, Duncan-Williams cites his wild youthful life in testimonies of his conversion. He was converted on a hospital bed through an Indian Christian nurse and subsequently had a brief stint in the Church of Pentecost. In 1978 he proceeded to Nigeria and returned in April 1979. Duncan-Williams's initial ministry was conducted mainly in secondary schools around Accra and Tema. He combined this with a non-denominational fellowship at the Association International School car park near Accra Airport and later moved into the International Students' Hostel also located at the Airport junction. Here Duncan-Williams was assisted by close associates like Pastor George Ferguson-Laing, also a Ghanaian product of Idahosa's Bible School, and together, as a leaflet from the Christian Action Faith Ministries put it, 'they brought the word of God to hungry hearts with power.' This ministry was persuasively Pentecostal in character and thus heightened the expression of the presence of the Holy Spirit in student Christian groups in the cities. In a personal interview, Duncan-Williams explained the reason for his success as follows:

The youth responded because they saw something new, they knew me. There were miracles, healing, salvation, deliverance and they responded. They saw a young man who was just like them: I smoked, I was on drugs, I went to the discotheques like them and now here I come on the scene, turned around for God and telling them my testimony. Suddenly there was a revolution among the young people, we effected a change wherever we went.

At the time, many of the young people had been affected either by the evangelical movement or by the various Pentecostal fellowships like GES and crusades that had become common in the country. Such people who had now been touched by this new wave of renewal felt even more uprooted and alienated from the existing traditional churches. Out of the fellowship meetings, Duncan-Williams started a church, the Christian Action Faith Ministries, which was the first of its kind in Ghana. According to Duncan-Williams, foundation of a new church was necessary, because these spiritually 'uprooted' and 'alienated' people had to go back to the traditional churches, but 'the traditional churches could not accommodate the anointing that

the young people had received, there was no place for them'. In their dilemma, Duncan-Williams says,

Many of [the young people] came back to me, they did not know how to fully use their baptism of the Holy Spirit in worship, so in May 1979, I decided to give them a place to worship . . . we started with Saturday afternoon revival meetings, but, after Saturday, there was no where to go, they were lost because they had to go back to the old churches.

As the pressure of the young people mounted and in his desire to see the new anointing given the fullest expression, Duncan-Williams finally decided to form a church:

In May 1980, I took a courageous move under divine guidance. I was called to *pioneer* a new move of God, there was nothing like a charismatic church at the time, . . . I started the Sunday morning services for the people . . . this was something *nobody* had done before, Enoch Agbozo, did not have churches . . . so I gave the people going through the Holy Spirit experience a place to worship and use their gifts.

In the years following this innovation, Duncan-Williams's pioneering move was to have a tremendous effect on Christianity in Ghana as his initiative inspired several other ministries. The message the new CMs carried was very similar to that which media evangelists like Roberts and Idahosa carried around the world. It was a message that affirmed the goodness of God and his desire to work miracles in the lives of believers. This message was proven through the insistence on the need for personal encounters with God, the reality of baptism of the Holy Spirit and the right that Christians had to communicate with God and interpret Scripture without relying on any trained theologians or spiritual leaders claiming arcane sources of power.

#### *Metamorphoses of Other Fellowships into Churches*

In reading *Reinventing American Protestantism*, one is struck by the similarities between North America's 'new paradigm churches' and Ghana's CMs.<sup>22</sup> Donald Miller quotes one leader of a former charismatic

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<sup>22</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*.

non-denominational fellowship as telling his first few members to 'stay plugged' into their churches as his initiative was only meant to provide Bible study to supplement their growth. The leader in Miller's story did not want to be accused of 'sheep stealing', so his intention was to let the group decide when it was appropriate 'to formalise this gathering of Christians as a church'. Under pressure from the members the leader eventually gave in and incorporated the fellowship as a church body.<sup>23</sup> If the story of the transformation or incorporation of this fellowship into a church were told in Ghana, very few people, if any, would believe that the actual incident took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It replicates the stories of many CMs across Ghana.

Pastor Christina Doe Tetteh, for example, was converted during the 1977 Idahosa crusade in Accra. At the time she was the receptionist at the Riviera Beach hotel where the 'man of God' lodged. What impressed her was Idahosa's intense prayer life. She joined Idahosa in Nigeria and trained at his Bible School, later working as Idahosa's secretary until she returned to Ghana in 1989. She started holding early morning public prayer meetings under a mango tree near her home. Soon 'signs and wonders' which had become a regular part of the meetings extended the boundaries. When she discovered that many of the participants were not going to church, she 'sought the face of the Lord'—by a prolonged period of fasting and prayer—and with pressure from the people, and direct encouragement from Idahosa, Solid Rock Chapel was formed in October 1994. In a considerable number of cases, secessions occurred within SU Town Fellowships as some of its dynamic leaders led factions to start independent Charismatic churches. Thus during the 1983 annual camp meeting of the Accra Kanda Fellowship, for example, Mensa Otabil, the then president, announced his intention of forming a church. In February of the following year, the International Central Gospel Church was established.

From their inception, the CMs propounded a theology that suggested that God intended parachurch evangelical fellowships as 'a stop-gap measure' in dealing with 'nominalism' (i.e., superficiality) in Ghanaian Christianity. This meant that, with the emergence of CMs, the time of the fellowships in God's scheme of things had elapsed.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 157–158.

With this polemic, the leadership of the new CMs deflated the SU 'responsible church membership' policy. Such polemics against SU groups in particular were inevitable because of the gap between their pneumatology and that of the CMs. The CMs thus encouraged people to leave their 'dead' and 'irrenewable' churches, including association with parachurch organisations, and transfer their allegiance to the burgeoning CMs. In each case the leadership claimed members of fellowships wanted more than just a Bible Study group, a gospel music group, a prayer fellowship, more than a non-denominational evangelistic organisation: they wanted a church. Over the years the CMs have increased through the formation of new churches, incidental branches and splits. Splits do not always occur as a result of differences. Most of the 'splits' occurring within CMs are controlled. 'New visions' to form churches are recognised as signifying an authentic call from God. Potential leaders seeking to be independent may therefore be sent away with special anointing services dedicated to the purpose.

*Tradition, Rootlessness and Renewal in Ghanaian Christianity*

Reference has been made to the place of traditional mission denominations as pioneers of the Christian evangel in Ghana and the correlation between their presence and the rise of the Christian new religious movements. By the middle of the twentieth century TWMCs had already started losing a lot of ground. The government of Ghana from about 1951 took over the management of mission schools.<sup>24</sup> With the expansion of the economy following Ghana's independence and the proliferation of non-governmental organisations, social services like medical care also became available through other secular and non-Christian religious agencies. From that time, belonging to a TWMC ceased to offer any social or economic advantages. This has meant that the mission churches have had to compete for members with other churches on the basis of their proven spiritual excellence and relevance. This, in my view, is what made tolerating

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<sup>24</sup> The takeover of missionary schools by the government began with Kwame Nkrumah's Accelerated Development Plan for Education in 1951. For full discussion on this and its implications, see John S. Pobee, *Kwame Nkrumah and the Church in Ghana 1946-1966* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1988), chapter 5.

internal renewal movements even more urgent. The previous ability of established churches to count on a ready supply of members through their schools, together with an almost negligible emphasis on salvation as a conscious personal experience and the virtual silence on the Holy Spirit, engendered nominalism within the ranks of the traditional churches. Among many post-first-generation Christians in Ghana, that is, those initiated into mission churches through the routine rites of infant baptism and confirmation, the spirituality of the evangelical and Pentecostal movements, with its emphasis on conscious individual religious experience, consistently challenged the routine manner in which they became 'Christian'.

The high rate of nominalism in mission churches was in one sense inevitable, as any vitality and commitment tended to wane as new religious movements grew beyond the initial generation of converts. Shenk has also argued that this high rate of nominalism should not surprise us because, 'nominality has cropped up wherever Western missions have gone'.<sup>25</sup> That the challenge initially posed by the Sunsum sorè to the spirituality of the traditional mission churches did not entirely evaporate even with the tolerance of renewal groups is evident in the numbers of young people who regularly drifted from traditional mission churches to populate CMs. The losing churches have responded and this is evident through the 'renovations' that all the traditional churches have initiated within their liturgical structures. In some traditional mission churches, youth services have been introduced. In others, attempts are being made to organise healing and deliverance services. The Methodist Church in particular has started reviving its camp meeting tradition, but now foreign evangelists with charismatic credentials are invited to lead such revivalist campaigns, in keeping with the spirit of the times. These measures, it must be added, may have slowed down but have by no means halted the continued proselytisation by the Charismatic churches. The reasons for this are many, among them the fact that these changes are dependent on the Christian leanings of particular ministers. In effect they have not been pursued as part of any conscious attempt to seek the renewal of the whole church. The continuing drift of members from traditional mission churches may therefore be

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<sup>25</sup> Wilbert Shenk, 'Mission, Renewal, and the Future of the Church', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 21, 4 (1997), 154.



a partial index of how shallow and unsuccessful some of these 'renovations' have been.

During the second half of the twentieth century, many young people thus became sceptical of inherited denominational and ecclesiastical traditions, and it is among such 'rootless pathfinders' as Cox calls them that Ghana's CMs have become most appealing.<sup>26</sup> To a question about their previous church background covering four CMs, more than 90 per cent of the about 400 Charismatics polled responded Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian or Roman Catholic. In the CMs, religious allegiance has now become for young people a matter of personal conscious choice and not just an automatic part of inherited traditions. Such a Christianity that functions effectively at the personal level engenders commitment and seriousness on the part of those embracing the new forms of faith.

One of the most important achievements of the CMs therefore has been to break the influence of the 'brand loyalty' Christianity associated with existing denominations. The Sunsum sorè attracted a clientele belonging to a different generation, consisting mainly of adults with little or in many cases no formal education. They had also been too slow in responding to modernisation. Moreover there were too many question marks surrounding their *modus operandi* in the minds of people. The Christian Action Faith and House of Worship initiatives attracted many people who had gone through the Holy Spirit experience and/or were looking for a place where the manifestations of the Spirit enjoyed uninhibited expression. Together these two places became important breeding grounds for many young people with ambitions of starting their own CMs.<sup>27</sup>

Consider the case of Ebenezer Markwei, the founder and head pastor of the Living Streams Ministries International. He was of Presbyterian background but his charismatic religious experience had

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<sup>26</sup> Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 104.

<sup>27</sup> For example, when American evangelists T.L. and Daisy Osborn visited Ghana in 1984, Agbozo was away in Europe. One of his assistants had been nominated to serve on the Osborn crusade planning committee. The pastor gave T.L. Osborn the opportunity to give a series of teachings at GES. The focus of Osborn's teaching was that the Pentecostal experience must *always* and *constantly* be validated with miracles, particularly by the leader. According to Agbozo, by the time he returned, this teaching had resulted in secessions led by four members, out of which secessions four charismatic churches had been started. In Agbozo's estimation, this teaching on miracles had the effect it did because, although the Holy Spirit was moving at GES and House of Worship, Agbozo was not performing many spectacular miracles.

distanced him from that tradition. Through secondary school to university, he served as a leader of the SU and GHAFES consecutively. For eleven years, he was also the president of the gospel youth music group, Calvary Road Incorporated. By the time he completed a degree in biochemistry at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, he had developed a desire to enter full-time ministry. This desire was initially channelled into evangelising in schools and local communities. According to Markwei's story, he and his friends had led scores of people to Christ. Some of these converts had also experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues. 'We had made gains in the field' is how he expressed it, but there were not enough suitable places of worship for these converts. Markwei therefore initiated the Living Stream Ministries to provide an ecclesiastical setting for the full expression of the gains they had made in evangelism and the visitations of the Holy Spirit. Based on such individual stories, one may safely conclude that the CMs are indigenous attempts to cater for the 'spiritual homelessness' resulting from the rootlessness that had occurred as a result of years of evangelical and Pentecostal activity in Ghana.<sup>28</sup>

Ghana's CMs often meet in converted warehouses, cinemas, school and public auditoriums, or wherever space can be found. The meeting place of the average Charismatic church has no religious symbols like stained glass windows, crucifixes, pictures of Jesus or angels, communion tables or pulpits often found in traditional mission churches and Sunsum sorè. This marks a theological shift that is linked to the CMs' belief in 'unmediated access to God' made possible by the experience of the Spirit. Prayer that is based on biblical promises without recourse to 'faith extension' material aids is often considered enough to achieve a breakthrough. A personal experience of the Holy Spirit means that Charismatics generally feel able to pray for healing and other needs without recourse to holy water, handkerchiefs and other substances or allegiance to holy places and reliance on 'priestly mediation' as was found with the Sunsum sorè. On a carpeted front stage there is normally a simple podium, sometimes a few potted plants. The front wall often has some inscription such

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<sup>28</sup> At the time the leadership of Calvary Road Inc. insisted that their constitution did not permit them to associate with a church. They could not hold on for long. A year or two after their former president had seceded to form the Living Streams Ministries, Calvary Road itself became the Harvesters Ministries International.

as Central Gospel's 1998 'Greater Works'. Tabernacle of Witness in Kumasi had 'Reaching People Everywhere with the Word and Spirit of God'; at the Living Streams Ministries, the front banner was 'Champions, Reach Out and Build'; and at the Manna Mission Ministries 'You Will Make it'. These inscriptions are elaborate, brightly coloured and professionally done and may be changed periodically depending on a church's vision at any particular time. A number of churches, as with their counterparts in other contexts, mount flags of various countries with which the church or its founder has connections.<sup>29</sup> In the CMs, unlike classical Pentecostals and Sunsum sorè, male and female are not separated in church. In all cases the items mentioned, including the meeting places themselves, are not ascribed any sacramental value. In other words, no religious purpose is served by keeping vigil in the place of worship. Except for occasions like ordinations, the clergy are normally indistinguishable from the audience by dress. The dress code tends to be more relaxed, modern and fashion conscious. To appear nice, modern and well dressed is considered an affirmation of God's blessing and prosperity and to some extent a measure of right standing with God. Most people carry their own Bibles and sermon notebooks to church. The congregation is youthful and worship is very exuberant, high in musical content and participatory. The sermons generally challenge listeners to rise above any difficult circumstances and, as the front banners suggest, 'they can make it'. In the words of Pastor Markwei, the vision of his church, Living Streams, is to inspire people to have 'powerful encounters with God that will leave a lasting impression on their lives'.

In the previous chapter the neglect of youth and children's ministries was cited as one of the most serious disadvantages of the Sunsum sorè. The CMs have rectified this by holding children's services. The integration of young people into church life by the recognition of their ministry gifts is one of the outstanding features of the renewal spawned by these new churches. The youth in the CMs occupy positions of leadership. They exercise their ministries because the spiritual gifts needed for such integration are dependent on neither theological academic achievements nor seniority. The pastors are predominantly male and often in their mid-thirties to mid-forties,

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<sup>29</sup> The practice is not unique to Ghana. See Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 273, 276, 277.

slightly older than the average age of their congregations. Many of them are professionals, and, as may often be found in similar North American churches, have had their wives ordained to serve in supportive roles in their churches. In our view then, another important contribution of the CMs to Christianity in Ghana is the space created for young people to exercise their spiritual gifts within an ecclesiastical environment. One way to appreciate the nature of these developments is to consider the theological self-definition of the CMs to which we now give some attention.

*'God's End-Time Militia': A Charismatic Ministries' Self-Definition*

The self-definition of Ghana's CMs is approached through a series of messages given over a five-day period by Pastor Joseph Eastwood Anaba at a Holy Ghost Action Campaign programme, hosted by the Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry at Legon in August 1993. His teaching later appeared as a bestseller within the neo-Pentecostal movement, *God's End-Time Militia*.<sup>30</sup> Anaba is the founder and leader of the Broken Yoke Foundation Ministries. The book is placed within the context of religious, political and socio-economic changes that occurred in Ghana during the mid-1970s to mid-1980s when the CMs also emerged. Living conditions became harsh and the political situation so turbulent that it engendered apocalyptic visions in the minds of Christians. The troubles seemed to defy human comprehension. Christians of evangelical and charismatic persuasion appealed to biblical prophecy for help in understanding the troubled times that Ghana was encountering. Two political revolutions occurred within this period in which many lives were lost. One ramification of this was the popular demand for God's intervention that yielded a multiplicity of creative new Christian movements in Ghanaian society. Developments in Ghana were reminiscent of those of the early nineteenth-century Second Great Awakenings in North America in which religious innovators democratised access to God by encouraging religious spontaneity and refusing to defer the interpretation of Scripture to learned theologians.<sup>31</sup> Following the radical piety of

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Eastwood Anaba, *God's End-time Militia: Winning the War Within and Without* (Accra: Design Solutions, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratisation of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 57.

the Great Awakenings of the 1740s, the new religious reformers kept faith with the political spirit of the times, and, according to Hatch, relentlessly hammered the themes of sin, grace and conversion and 'denounced any religion that seemed bookish, cold or formal'.<sup>32</sup> These religious developments occurred within the ambience of democratic political revolutions. Consequently, much of the revolutionary rhetoric crept into the language of new religious movements emerging at the time.<sup>33</sup>

With reference to 'revolutionary rhetoric', it is ironic that the rise of the neo-Pentecostal movement in Ghana coincided with the first populist military insurrection led by Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings in 1979, the 'June Fourth Revolution'. The period from 1978 through 1983 was one in which independent Ghana was confronted with one of her harshest economic realities. The closing years of the Supreme Military Council government following years of economic mismanagement threw Ghana into economic, social and moral chaos. This chaotic situation was not helped by severe droughts that resulted in nation-wide bush fires, famine, poverty and squalor. The economy was on the brink of collapse, and bribery and corruption had led to widespread moral decay in Ghanaian society. Corruption became virtually institutionalised during the General Acheampong era (1972–1979) as it became increasingly difficult to make ends meet without acquiescing to its evils. 'Kalabule' ('clear bully', i.e., unfair advantage<sup>2</sup>) crept into popular language as an expression for profiteering, corruption, black marketeering, creation of artificial shortage of essential goods through deliberate hoarding and thereby aggravating already galloping prices of scarce commodities.<sup>34</sup> These were days in which Ghanaians had to queue for necessities including milk, sugar, rice, toiletries and fuel. The situation has been appropriately described as 'sickening'. There was ostentatious display of ill-gotten wealth by a few. Top officials including government functionaries issued 'chits to young women who paraded the corridors of power offering themselves for libidinal pleasures in return for favours'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>34</sup> Opinions are divided on what 'kalabule' actually means. Some think it is a derivative of the Hausa expression *kere kabure* meaning 'keeping it quiet'; others think it is a corruption of 'corner and bully.' For these thoughts see, Joshua N. Kudadjie, *Moral Renewal in Ghana: Ideals, Realities and Possibilities* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1995), endnote 94, 88.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 31.

Among the interpretations given for the hardship of the times was the fact that it was God's judgement on the country for the immorality of the government and nation, particularly the elite. Others interpreted the situation as a fulfilment of an Old Testament curse on nations that fraternised with Libya as the revolutionary government of Ghana was doing. The Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, had become one of the strongest allies of Rawlings's revolutionary government. This was a strategic alliance. Rawlings had failed to gain acceptance in the West, particularly the USA, so by identifying with the Libyan revolution he managed to secure for Ghana scarce logistic support, especially crude oil, from that country. Prophecies abounded in those days with the unanimous theme that God was calling Ghana to repentance. When seen in the light of Old Testament salvation history the call to repentance had a measure of theological credibility. A favourite scripture around which many prayer meetings were initiated at the time was II Chronicles 7:13–14,

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

It is to the credit of the Ghanaian Christian community in general, and to the burgeoning neo-Pentecostal movement at the time in particular, that it drew attention to the spiritual implications of the troubled times that had come upon the nation. But the general Christian interpretation that the suffering was due entirely to the sins of the nation and her leaders only served to divert attention from the economic causes of the nation's woes. This interpretation indirectly served to absolve the government from assuming direct responsibility for the nation's troubles.<sup>36</sup> The Kutu Acheampong government responded with a call to a week of national prayer and repentance. It became public knowledge that the Head of State had also developed an obsessive indulgence in superstitious consultations of spiritualists and the acquisition of other occult sources in the frantic search for solutions to the ills of the country and for his personal security.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> John S. Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana: A Case Study of the Acheampong Era* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Many Christian churches resorted to prayer, asking for God's intervention to assuage the ills of Ghana. In churches across the country, and in Christian gatherings, people openly asked God for a 'Moses' to deliver the nation. In effect Ghanaians wanted a change of government. The situation was so desperate that, when the military strongman J.J. Rawlings intervened to overthrow the government, his initials became for Ghanaians an acronym for 'Junior Jesus'. It was from the same prayer gathering called by the group of Christian women mentioned above that the neo-Pentecostal movement, Women Aglow, Ghana, was formed.<sup>38</sup>

An initial palace coup that toppled the Acheampong government did little to help matters. Rawlings, a junior officer in the Ghana Air Force, intervened in 1979. He handed over to a civilian administration that same year, only to usurp power again on 31 December 1981. His promise of immediate recovery in the economy did not materialise in the short term. Within the early years of Rawlings's second intervention, hunger had become so severe that the term 'Rawlings' chain' (i.e. necklace) was coined as a euphemism for a person's collarbone that was protruding because of malnutrition; it signified that Rawlings's rhetoric of turning the economy around had failed to deliver results. The problem was further aggravated by the repatriation from Nigeria in 1983 of hundreds of thousands of Ghanaians who had gone there in search of a better life.

A number of CMs, beginning with the Christian Action Faith Ministries in 1979, were born during the lifetime of the two Rawlings revolutions. The militaristic idiom of the two revolutionary eras thus became a part of the hermeneutic of the CMs. As the title of Anaba's book suggests, the CMs are *God's End-Time Militia*, called to wage the war which earlier Christian churches and movements had presumably not been able to stand up to. The concept of the militia

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<sup>38</sup> The encouragement sought for and received from Daisy Osborn by the women is particularly instructive. The Osborns were visiting Nigeria at the time when Daisy received a letter from the Ghanaian Christian women requesting her to 'come and encourage us in our plight'. She responded and her visit led to a four-day revival crusade in Accra in August 1983. It was after this that the small group of about ten Christian women decided to maintain the group eventually culminating in the formation of Women Aglow, Ghana. For details and history, see Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Missionaries Without Robes": Lay Charismatic Fellowships and the Evangelisation of Ghana', *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, vol. 19, 2 (1997), 167–188.

was borrowed from the designation of one of the paramilitary organisations set up after the coup, the Peoples' Militia. The subtitle, *Winning the War Within and Without* is revealing of the extent to which developments in the nation were linked to the activities of the supernatural realm. In other words, the 'war' was not just economic or moral, but was also spiritual. It was believed that supernatural agents had instigated the socio-economic and political problems of the nation, and what was needed to fight it was a new army, 'God's End-Time Militia', who are alive to their spiritual responsibilities.

In reference to the role of the Charismatic churches in contemporary Christianity and society, Anaba writes that some men are born for continuity but the Charismatics are born for change.<sup>39</sup> The political revolutions were also for change and so traditional mission churches and the traditional socio-economic, socio-political and religious structures of society came under siege from separate directions. Rawlings's revolutions were very contemptuous of the elite because they were blamed for the nation's high level of corruption and moral decadence. There was much disdain for tradition and authority as the junior flying officer took over the reins of government in a violent coup and returned 'power to the people'. In the spirit of disdain for tradition, the emerging leaders of new CMs also castigated the traditional mission churches as cold, old, dead, bookish and moribund institutions with no sense of the supernatural and as having lost sight of God's purpose for the nation. In those days, for example, the founder of the International Central Gospel Church, Mensa Otabil, often denounced Trinity College, the theological seminary of the Protestant mainline denominations in Ghana, as a 'cemetery' from where nothing 'living' could emerge. In his powerful messages, Otabil questioned the legitimacy of the 'unbelieving ministers' pasturing God's flock. He went further to challenge the born-again to 'come out of them' because they were places of darkness.<sup>40</sup>

The attacks on the traditional mission churches were derisive, unsympathetically sharp and scathing. They seemed to ignore the abiding contribution that traditional mission denominations had made both to the spread of Christianity and to the socio-economic and

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<sup>39</sup> Anaba, *Militia*, vii.

<sup>40</sup> Otabil has since recanted some of the harsh words spoken at the time. He now acknowledges having gone too far in denouncing the traditional mission churches during the formative years of the CMs.



political development of Ghana.<sup>41</sup> The fact that the CMs have been able to evangelise only in areas where traditional mission churches already exist is testimony to the important foundations that these older churches have laid for the gospel. The attacks of the CMs also overlooked the fact that the traditional churches were generations old and that post-first-generation Christians almost inevitably tend to build their Christianity around beliefs inherent in institutionalised Christendom. In what is traditionally referred to as Jesus' High Priestly prayer, he asks his Father on behalf of the disciples: 'May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me . . .' (John 17:23). In other words, it is in the unity of the Christian community that the world might come to believe in the integrity of the mission of Jesus. By attacking a cross section of the Christian community, the CMs created a gulf between themselves and the mission churches that did not help Christian witness in Ghana.

In *God's End-Time Militia*, Anaba, like Otabil before him, compares the CMs to the 'regular army', overthrowing the traditional churches because of their complacency, compromise and ineffectiveness, just as Rawlings had overthrown the military government of the Supreme Military Council in the first coup and the democratically elected government of Dr Hilla Limann at his 'second coming'. The CMs, on the other hand, are likened to the Civil Defence Organisation (CDO), set up by the Rawlings revolutionary government as a grassroots paramilitary movement to champion the cause of the revolution. Thus the standing prayer team of the Solid Rock Chapel is named the 'Striking Force'—a name borrowed from the still operational anti-armed-robbery police squad. The real Striking Force of the Ghana Police Force was set up during the heady days of the Rawlings revolution to instil a tough approach into policing as the traditional police had become corrupt, compromised and inefficient.

Anaba notes that, because the members of the CDO are selected from the ordinary citizenry, they are better disposed to identifying with the feelings of the people they are called upon to help. In a euphemistic reference to the traditional churches, he says the 'regular army' is distant from the people. Their long period of training and confinement to the barracks, he continues, separates them from

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<sup>41</sup> See for example, S.K. Odamtten, *The Missionary Factor in Ghana's Development 1820–1880* (Accra: Waterville Publishing, 1978).

the people. He writes that, 'in a similar manner many ministers of the gospel and church folks have become so confined to their little islands, that God has [had] to raise a fresh breed of militia-men from the midst of the people'.<sup>42</sup> In direct comparison with the place of the traditional churches therefore, the CMs are God's end-time militia who have been raised in these end-times to replace 'institutionalised Christendom'. God's end-time militia with their short, non-academic and less sophisticated training are supposedly better equipped, because they are armed not with cerebral theology, but with the Spirit of God to battle the forces of evil.<sup>43</sup> This makes them better disposed to identify with the needs and feelings of the people they are called to help. In Anaba's words, when ministers with seminary training become complacent and lackadaisical, 'a new breed of ministers without formal education are raised as a back-up force'.<sup>44</sup> The point of this hermeneutic is the declaration of the democratisation of charisma or the priesthood of every believer. Since the 'regular army' has become bureaucratized and set in its ways and has thus lost the ability to deliver God's word with power, God has now raised ordinary men and women, and given them spiritual gifts for a more relevant and dynamic ministry.

The attitude of denouncing established Christianity as irrelevant is not untypical of Pentecostalism in general. In their zeal to establish churches meant to represent God's new paradigm for Christianity, they tend to throw the baby out with the bath water. Many CMs in Ghana are realising their error in dismissing theological training and academic work as irrelevant to Christian mission. Not only are CMs now setting up Bible schools to train prospective pastors, but some of the teachers of these Bible schools are drawn from among the previously considered 'spiritually dead' clergy of mainline denominations.<sup>45</sup> Many CMs are also encouraging their leaders to seek higher theological education and it is instructive that the very first Christian university to be accredited by the board of higher education in Ghana was set up by a Charismatic church, the International

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<sup>42</sup> Anaba, *Militia*, 4–5.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> An instance of this is the School of Theology and Mission of Central University College and the Bible School of Christian Action Faith Ministries, where significant numbers of lecturers are drawn from the Trinity Theological Seminary owned by the traditional mission churches.

Central Gospel Church. These are healthy developments and undoubtedly indicate a movement that is coming of age in a system where collaboration is inevitable for success and survival. Having said that, our main concern at this point is to consider a little more closely the challenge that the self-definition of the CMs poses to traditional conceptions of ministry in the church.

*Charismatic Ministries: Challenge to Traditional Concepts of 'Ministry'*

Two main themes, also evident in the nature of the CMs generally, may be delineated as recurring in the self-definition of these churches as offered by Anaba. These are first, that God has raised the CMs as his 'end-time militia' to empower members to fight Satan and the forces of darkness, stumbling blocks to the world's redemption. Through victory over these forces, God's people will be free to enjoy the abundant life that God promises in Christ. The mode of articulating a response to evil is taken up in chapter 6 on 'healing and deliverance'. What concerns us here is how the self-definition of the CMs marks out their concept of ministry as different from that of existing Christian traditions, which is the second main theme evident in the definition outlined above. The people God has raised as his 'end-time militia' are not trained specialists like priests but ordinary men and women who through their experience of God's Spirit share in the work of ministry. The CMs thus constitute a new priesthood born of the Spirit. Through this 'end-time militia' God is supposedly carrying out a revolution by 'overthrowing human traditions from the Church'. The reference to human traditions here has to do with the over-concentration of 'priestly power' in the hands and personalities of ordained clergy who may not necessarily be people of the Spirit.<sup>46</sup> By extension, such 'democratisation of ministry' includes in principle the de-legitimisation of the reliance on what Eliade calls hierophanies, that is, any special sacred places, sacred persons, private home altars or any sacred objects and images considered to be imbued with special capabilities to mediate the sacred or the presence of God.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Anaba, *Militia*, 97, 100.

<sup>47</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Significance of Religious Myths, Symbolism, and Ritual within Life and Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1959), 11–12.

Indeed Paul seems to discount such mediated access to God when he speaks of the individual Christian as ‘the temple of the living God’ (II Corinthians 6:16). The religious innovation of the CMs thus advocates the democratisation of religious experience. Theologically, the CMs emphasise that the experience of the Holy Spirit is personal and direct and does not need to pass through any priestly filter. An obvious result is that generally one does not encounter queues of clients waiting to consult a Charismatic pastor as with the Sunsum sorè and individuals do not need bureaucratic assessments before they preach as in TWMCs. The whole point in Anaba’s hermeneutic is that in the CMs God has democratised spiritual gifts, rendering the reliance on any kind of priestly mediation unnecessary. The key phrase is ‘unmediated accessibility’. ‘Speaking with tongues’, as indeed with seeing visions, prophesying, and so on, is above all else a symbolic illustration of this conviction that all people can have access to God in an intensely personal way. In the words of Anaba:

Every believer is called by God as a Priest, King, Prophet and Soldier. The problem has been that most of the functions of the Church as a divine priesthood have been abandoned to ministers of the gospel. Believers also look on helplessly as the ministers or clergy monopolise divine authority given to us to rule as kings, casting out devils, healing the sick and exercising authority.<sup>48</sup>

Leaders in the CMs are expected to possess what was constantly referred to in our conversations with Ghanaian Charismatics as ‘the anointing’. That means they are expected to demonstrate evidence of the fullness of the Spirit in special measure as a result of their leadership roles. But as far as spiritual gifts are concerned, as the concept of ministry in the CMs shows, the leader cannot present himself or herself as the expert. Anybody at all could stand up at a Charismatic meeting to prophesy, relate a vision or invoke the name of Jesus to heal the sick. In any one Charismatic church, there could be people with the gifts of prophecy, healing, interpretation of tongues, vision, etc. Thus in the ecclesiology of the CMs ‘your spiritual gift determines your ministry’, an indication that the purpose of charisms is to service the body of Christ:

Every believer is God’s mouthpiece, and we, as His ambassadors, must declare his word with boldness. I appreciate the place of the five-fold

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<sup>48</sup> Anaba, *Militia*, 1.

ministry. Without these gifts of men we cannot move, nevertheless they were put there to equip and motivate the saints and not to monopolise the ministry (Ephesians 4:12).<sup>49</sup>

The understanding is that ministers may be expected to lead in the body of Christ by virtue of their special calling, but most importantly they are only expected to inspire others in the employment of their gifts. This ecclesiology seen in the praxis of Charismatic spirituality challenges its traditional understanding. In an expository essay on 'the Charismatic renewal's challenge to traditional ecclesiology', Dunn sums up this challenge in two expressions: 'experience' and 'ministry'.<sup>50</sup> 'Experience' is used to mean 'the discovery that when we talk of the Spirit in biblical terms we are talking also about the inspiring, transforming, and empowering *experience* of the grace of God in the life of the believer and of the church.'<sup>51</sup> We have already discussed the importance of personal experiences of the Spirit in the theology of the CMs in Ghana. The experience of God who is Spirit and who is Holy brings renewal in the form of transformation and empowerment to the individual and to the church. The CMs present the paradigm of Pentecost as an event whose continuing relevance helps the church to integrate 'experience' as an indispensable ingredient in developing dynamic ministries. Any individual who has experienced the Spirit is a 'minister' and, therefore, through his or her charisms including natural abilities and talents can minister to others. The fact that renewal straddles all denominations is indicative of the fact that gifts of ministry are not tied to particular individuals or church traditions.

The traditional interpretation in which 'the ministry' is retained as an expression for ordained ministers and their functions, Dunn argues, is limiting because it confines the concept of the 'priesthood of all believers', making it a reserved area that remains 'unaffected in practice by the assertion that priesthood belongs to all believers'.<sup>52</sup> The CMs, on the contrary, affirm that priesthood belongs to all believers, and this leads to an inclusive mode of ministry. This explains

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>50</sup> James D.G. Dunn, 'Ministry and the Ministry: The Charismatic Renewal's Challenge to Traditional Ecclesiology', in Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (ed.), *Charismatic Experiences in History* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 81–101.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 83.

why the principle of ministry in the CMs dispenses with the dependence on mediatory services, 'cultic' centres and substances as sources of spiritual power. This democratisation of charisma or ministry is built on the dominant theological image in Pauline ecclesiology of the church as the 'body of Christ'. Here each member is expected to function in his or her spiritual gift in order that 'the body' can function charismatically (Romans 12:4–8; Ephesians 4:7–16).<sup>53</sup> This democratic, diffused and inclusive praxis of ministry is premised on the Pauline meaning of charisma as functions, words, or actions that contribute to the corporate life of the Charismatic community.<sup>54</sup> Paul not only highlights the diversity of spiritual gifts, he also emphasises the role that every Christian has to play in their practical manifestation and functioning. If charisma is not the preserve of a few, it is also not, according to Dunn, restricted to particular sets of clearly defined gifts, for 'whatever word or act mediates grace to the believing community is "charisma"'.<sup>55</sup> In practice the CMs create room for the recognition of people who are specially anointed by God to provide leadership by recognising the 'regular ministries' as listed in Ephesians 4:11–12.<sup>56</sup> The bottom line here is that in the midst of the recognition of the ministry of those called to lead, practical expression is also given to the ministries of the laity whose active role in the body of Christ in the context of the shared experience of the Spirit is duly recognised.

The democratisation of charisma, therefore, has made the style of ministry in the CMs a task-oriented one. This style of ministry is one in which, instead of relying on hierarchies of ministers or on so-called extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, the laity have been mobilised on the basis of their spiritual gifts and talents to minister in the power of the Spirit in leading worship, personal evangelism, healing, deliverance and others. There is much reference in traditional Western denominations to the priesthood of all believers and to the ministry as belonging to the 'whole people of God'. In spite of this the ordained clergy in these churches hold a virtual monopoly over things pertaining to ministry just as the prophets of the Sunsum sorè

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 82. See also Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, pp. 553, 554.

<sup>54</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, second edition (London: SCM, 1990), 110.

<sup>55</sup> Dunn, 'Ministry and the Ministry', 82. Italics in original.

<sup>56</sup> Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, 112.

tend to monopolise access to spiritual gifts. Within the ecclesiology of the CMs, the basis of ministry becomes a person's encounter with the Spirit and not theological competence or dynastic succession. The emphasis on experiencing the Spirit and making use of one's gifts in ministry stands as one of the key factors accounting for the growth of the CMs, which would also ensure their survival for generations.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SALVATION AS TRANSFORMATION AND EMPOWERMENT

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us . . . through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3–7).

One way to discern the theological orientation of Ghanaian Pentecostal movements is to listen to the testimonies of participants, the songs they sing and the emphases of the messages preached. Here ‘message’ is preferred to ‘sermon’ because it is the term used by the CMs themselves and also because, as their preachers often emphasised, what was being delivered was normally ‘a message’ that had been inspired by the Spirit. The hermeneutic of such inspirational preaching tends to be subjective and speculative, but that is not the concern here. Listening to such messages, some of which reach a wider audience through TV and FM radio stations, and the songs and testimonies of participants, one finds that in the CMs generally there is a distinctive soteriological emphasis that may not be found to the same degree in other churches, including the Sunsum sorè. The renewal of Christianity in Ghana advocated by the CMs is as much about putting the right emphasis on salvation as it is about the normalisation of pneumatic experiences in worship. Salvation has been delineated as the basic *function* of religion.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Wilson notes that ‘the explicit and manifest function of religion’ is to offer humankind

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<sup>1</sup> John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 14.



the prospect of salvation and to provide appropriate guidance on how to attain it.<sup>2</sup> The Christianity of the CMs is about salvation and how to mediate it in a more relevant manner for their generation. But what is salvation?

In *An Interpretation of Religion*, John Hick uses the hybrid term salvation/liberation in reference to ‘the transformation of our human situation from a state of alienation from the true structure of reality to a radically better state in harmony with reality’.<sup>3</sup> What constitutes ‘alienation’ and ‘transformation’ depends not only on the theological presuppositions of the religions concerned, but also on the religio-cultural contexts of religious practitioners and devotees. Irrespective of the variegated nature of religious contexts in which salvation may be used, Hick proposes that ‘soteriological goals’ offer the basic ‘criteria by which to assess particular religious phenomena as totalities’.<sup>4</sup> In the Christianity of the CMs, salvation is seen as something to be *experienced*. Their key ‘soteriological goals’ therefore include the realisation of ‘transformation and empowerment’, ‘healing and deliverance’, and ‘prosperity and success’ in the lives of believers. In an experiential movement, the emphasis on ‘personality transformation’ underlying the spirituality of the CMs is evident in these soteriological goals. The chapters in this section of our study are dedicated to looking closely at the nature of these soteriological goals in Charismatic Christianity. This chapter begins the section with one of the fundamental emphases in the spirituality of Ghana’s CMs, that is, ‘salvation as transformation and empowerment’.

### *Salvation in Context*

In chapter 4, Bishop Duncan-Williams was quoted as interpreting his mission for initiating the Christian Action Faith Ministries as geared towards bringing ‘the youth of this generation to God’. This mission begins with calling the world to repentance from sin and conversion to God. Those who respond become members of the body of Christ so that they can also be of service to others in the power of the Holy Spirit. One pastor of a Charismatic church encapsulates

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 27.

<sup>3</sup> Hick, *Interpretation*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

this mission on his business card in the biblical verse ‘filling the earth with the knowledge of his glory’ (Habakkuk 2:14). Such statements articulating the visions of pastors for their ministries and found on business cards are not uncommon among Ghana’s Charismatic pastors. Another pastor expresses his vision as follows: ‘reaching Africa and the world with the Word and strong Bible-based local churches’. These mission statements are basically saying the same thing. For most of those whose stories are examined as part of this study, renewal comes in the form of salvation from sin and, in true African understanding, from one’s spiritual enemies, that is the devil, evil spirits, witchcraft and other such inimical forces who are only out to ‘steal, kill and destroy’ the children of God (John 10:10). Subsequently people testify to having been transformed and empowered to live lives devoid of fear and intimidation from what the Bible refers to as ‘rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms’ (Ephesians 6:12). It is with a related vision in mind, according to Pastor Otabil, that the church he founded was named ‘Central Gospel’. The International Central Gospel Church, like the others, aims to restore to the world a renewed emphasis on the message and nature of the Christian salvation that is *central* to the gospel but which, like the experiential emphasis on the Spirit, lies neglected in established Christianity. What this chapter and the next two do is attempt to reconstruct the basic understanding of aspects of the theology of salvation of the CMs, based on messages preached, songs, testimonies, observations, publications, interviews and conversations with participants.

Some of the most informative moments of this research have come from observations made during times of ‘ministration’ and ‘praise and worship’ at neo-Pentecostal gatherings. Ministration, as was explained in chapter 4, refers to what happens at the climax of meetings when people are prayed for, so that what is preached at any particular gathering may have *concrete* effect in their lives. In other words, the CMs encourage experiential participation in biblical or doctrinal truths. Testimonies abound of people experiencing various liberating signs and wonders during ministration. In one instance a woman who had been infertile for five years of marriage claims to have felt ‘something heavy’ fall out of her womb. It was discovered later that in due course she did in fact give birth, which confirmed her own interpretation of that experience.

The overall picture emerging from observing Charismatic Christianity suggests two fundamental emphases in their soteriology. First, to be saved means to accept Christ as one's personal Lord and Saviour and to be assured of God's forgiveness. Second, this salvation becomes a stepping-stone to being empowered by the Holy Spirit. If the event of receiving Christ may be seen as the period in which transformation begins through bearing the 'fruit of the Spirit', empowerment could be taken as the privilege of receiving the 'gifts of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:16–25). This is not to suggest that there is a qualitative differentiation between the 'fruit of the Spirit' and the 'gifts of the Spirit'. On the contrary, they are both considered, as in Pauline thought, to be essential expressions of the transforming work of the Spirit accomplished in Christ. To be empowered in the context of Charismatic Christianity is the expectation that, after their adoption as children of God, believers could actively experience the Spirit of God arousing in them a passion for God's Kingdom. What follows is an examination of the practicalities and nature of this salvation in Ghana's CMs.

#### *The Centrality of Personal Testimonies*

Personal testimonies are cherished as important indicators of how radical personal salvation is expected to be. The testimony of Bishop Charles Agyin Asare, founder of the Word Miracle Church International, is representative of the nature of such testimonies. Now in his late thirties, Bishop Asare claims to have started smoking when only eleven years old. Within three years not only had he become a chain smoker, but he was also deeply involved with all the vices associated with being in the 'world': taking drugs, sexual promiscuity, drinking, gambling and going to discos. In Pentecostal testimony, as Sepúlveda explains, 'world' is not an objective category such as society or history, but a way of life.<sup>5</sup> In this context then, 'being in the world' meant 'worldliness' in the sense of one's life being controlled and dominated by things that effectively alienate a person from God. Personal choices may be involved in one's 'being in the world'. However, in the hermeneutic of neo-Pentecostals generally,

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<sup>5</sup> Juan Sepúlveda, 'Pentecostalism as Popular Religiosity', *International Review of Mission*, vol. 78, (January 1989), 82.

worldly choices are believed to be instigated by spiritual forces beyond a person's control. Evil spirits may even control emotions and so Charismatics may speak of the spirits of anger, lust, stealing, adultery, lies and so on. In the Charismatic church services observed, these spirits were constantly bound and ordered out of people's lives during ministration. Not only do Ghanaians believe that evil powers could, by making a person wayward through drinking and other anti-social habits, bring potentially capable people to ruin, but also according to Paul it is the 'ruler of the kingdom of the air' who is at work in those who are disobedient to God (Ephesians 2:1-2). Bishop Asare's desire for fulfilment according to his testimony also led him into occultism and fraternising with Oriental religious movements such as Buddhism. Through these religions, often castigated during preaching as deceptive instruments of Satan, Bishop Asare claims to have been made to believe that Jesus was only one among a number of Grand Masters who could lead people to God.

Bishop Agyin Asare's life was to undergo a dramatic change when a young woman to whom he was sexually attracted invited him to church: 'I would like to yield to your advances', the woman told him, 'but before then, I would introduce you to a special "boyfriend" I have'. That 'boyfriend', Bishop Asare was later to find out, was the Lord Jesus Christ. The metaphorical reference to Jesus Christ as 'boyfriend' is itself revealing. It connoted for the woman a deep, virtually unbreakable involvement with and commitment to Jesus. Becoming a Christian would thus involve completely reordering all other forms of identification and all other relationships. This inseparable communion with Jesus is what belonging to Christ is expected to involve for the believer, a marriage to Christ (I Corinthians 6:17). According to his testimony, at this service Agyin Asare responded to an Altar Call amid tears and grief over his past. The Altar Call is a very regular part of ministration at neo-Pentecostal meetings. The expression describes an invitation by a speaker or his representative for people to come forward to the 'altar' and publicly commit their lives to Christ. The step of giving one's life to Christ often involves repeating a sinner's prayer, typically rendered as follows:

Lord Jesus, I (name may be supplied), realise I am a sinner. I cannot save myself. You suffered, died on the cross and rose again in order to save me from sin. Come into my life and wash my sins in your blood. I confess you as my Lord and Saviour. Thank you that I am born again.

In Agyin Asare's testimony, he notes that at the Altar Call God touched his life and he accepted Jesus as personal Saviour and Lord. On the effect that this experience had on his existing lifestyle, Bishop Asare further testified: 'after conversion, the addictive power of smoking and going after girls was broken in my life by the transforming power of almighty God.' In Ghanaian Charismatic hermeneutics, God would be seen as having eventually won the battle with the forces of evil over Asare's life. According to Asare, it was after this experience that God called him into ministry. In other words he was not only renewed, but also empowered by being given a new sense of purpose in life. The lessons that arise from the emphasis given to such personal testimonies are what they reveal about the nature of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal soteriology.

### *Salvation as Transformation*

The message of Pentecost is about salvation. For, according to Joel's prophecy, when the Spirit is poured out 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Joel 2:32). When asked about what had changed since joining a Charismatic church, most participants talked about having come to 'know God better'. In almost all cases, coming to know God better meant that participants in the CMs, by confessing sins, by accepting Jesus as Lord, and by dedication through inviting Jesus into their lives, had developed a new intimacy with God through Christ. This new intimacy therefore results from what the Charismatic message presents as a non-negotiable critical transition involving conscious commitment that transforms all loyalties. The transition made from 'the world' to Christ is what was often referred to in testimonies as being born again, saved or converted. In conversion Jesus Christ, who, to adopt an expression from William James, was originally on the periphery, now becomes the 'habitual centre of a person's energy'.<sup>6</sup> This new intimacy with Jesus, Charismatic respondents often asserted, was something they did not realise in their previous religious affiliations. Most of the time, people talked about having been baptised as infants, having been confirmed, and having been regular as communicants and yet deep within themselves feeling that there was something lacking as far as relationship

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<sup>6</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books edition, 1982), 196.

with God was concerned. The bottom line in Bishop Asare's and other such testimonies is that in the CMs salvation is expected to be a decisive transition resulting in personal transformation, that is, a new life with a new lifestyle. Paul sees this change, involving a confessional commitment to the lordship of Jesus, as important and expresses it variously as justification, redemption, liberation and freedom. Those who make such a commitment are described as citizens of heaven and a new creation (Romans 5:9; Philippians 3:20; II Corinthians 5:17). In the conversion experience the individual who becomes born again, as Asare's testimony seeks to indicate, casts off old identities and through personal and social rebirth becomes incorporated into Christ as well as a new community of believers.

Thus salvation involves God's response to human sin as well as the way in which the saved relate to the world. So Van der Leeuw speaks of conversion as constituting 'new birth' embodying an 'inner experience' that must correspond to an 'outer process'.<sup>7</sup> The theological point being made by the CMs about the importance of such testimonies emphasises that one cannot bring about 'a new creation' merely by being religious, joining a church as part of one's parental heritage or by being confirmed. It is more than paying church dues, or tithes. This theological point is analogous to John's injunction to the Jews that, in the new dispensation inaugurated with the coming of Jesus, their Abrahamic heritage counted for nothing and that to enjoy the benefits of the kingdom they were required to 'produce fruit in keeping with repentance' (John 3:7-8). For the CMs such religious duties as paying tithes and supporting God's work are still considered necessary, and are expected to be the natural outflow of the experience of conversion and renewal. It is expected that renewal will lead to new ethical principles. This meant for Paul bearing the 'fruit of the Spirit' and implied entering into a life that was radically different because it was empowered by the Spirit (I Corinthians 6:18-20; Galatians 5:16-24). The ethical rigor of the CMs, as we will argue later, helps believers to deal with the moral relativism and permissiveness of modern society. Testimonies abound of how the religious experience of salvation has led to cessation from drunkenness, lies, cheating, quarrelsomeness, gossip, bribery, smoking, forni-

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<sup>7</sup> G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 529.

cation and marital infidelity. Religious experience must be genuine for converts, irrespective of who is present, to testify publicly and boldly (as can happen at Charismatic meetings) about their pasts in armed robbery, prostitution, white-collar crimes and in one or two instances even murder.

The essence of this transformative encounter with God the Holy Spirit is what is missed from the ethos of the CMs when the religious experiences of Pentecostals are de-emphasised in social marginalisation theories and analysis. Gifford, for example, explains away the conversion experiences of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals by attributing their cessation from 'worldly' pleasures, that is, gambling, drinking, cinema, concerts, discos and so on, to lack of money in an ailing economy.<sup>8</sup> In accounting for the growth of the Charismatic churches, Gifford does not seem to appreciate fully the import of religious experience in the spirituality of these new Pentecostals. According to Gifford, Ghana's youth are attracted to these churches because they have no money to visit nightclubs, discotheques or concerts for entertainment. The Charismatic churches, if Gifford is to be believed, are thriving because they address the preoccupations of youth by providing an alternative entertainment culture.<sup>9</sup> This is a reductionist analysis. It ignores the religious experiences of the membership of the CMs. Consider the case of a converted Muslim whom I met gleefully welcoming people to Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako's Jesus is Alive Ministries International. He was keen to tell guests how his encounter with the ministry had transformed him. 'This Church is the "last point"' he volunteered. 'When you have been to all the others, and nothing has happened, come here.' This 38-year-old man had been a Muslim since birth, and in the past had been an avowed critic of the 'new churches', whom he had perceived as using magical means to draw crowds and resorting to juju in the performance of miracles. 'A friend invited me here, that day all my past was revealed, I gave my life to Christ, and today I am a changed person.' In the past he had been an armed robber and an *azaa* (a popular Ghanaian word for impostors and tricksters), 'all that belongs to the past now'.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst and Co., 1998), 90.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 89–90.

According to Gerlach and Hine, one of the factors accounting for the growth of Pentecostalism is the ‘bridge-burning, power-generating acts’ such as we have described which set believers apart in some way from the larger social context.<sup>10</sup> Gifford does not make much of the emphasis on salvation through personal conversion as a major factor in the growth of the CMs. Such a reductionist approach misses the element of the sacred in the religious experience of participants. Further to this, many CMs are populated by professionals and gainfully employed university graduates—‘functional individuals’ as Miller calls them—who are anything but economically deprived.<sup>11</sup> A study conducted by Peil and Opoku, for example, places on record how several ‘functional individuals’ with promising careers have quit to serve as pastors in these new churches because they ‘heard the call of God’.<sup>12</sup> The view taken here is that in the face of the evidence, particularly looking at the social and educational background of the patrons of Ghana’s Charismatic churches, matched by their high level of monetary contribution, Gifford’s explanation appears too simplistic and not adequately informed. Our view is that one of the main reasons accounting for the growth of Ghana’s CMs is the result of something more profound, that is, the emphasis on the need for making personal choices concerning one’s salvation, a theology that does not receive the same level of attention in the TWMCs.

Drawing attention to the emphasis on personal religious experience in the theology of the CMs is important for another reason. Given the phenomenal growth of these churches in Ghana and the way the young people are enthusiastic about their participation in them, it is very easy for their spirituality to be defined solely in terms of paroxysmal phenomena attributed to the Holy Spirit. To the non-participant observer, this might indeed appear to be the case. Such exuberant phenomena as speaking in tongues, prophecy, dancing and shouting in the Spirit, including the attention given to healing, deliverance and prosperity, are definitely central to the Christianity of

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<sup>10</sup> Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, ‘Five Factors Crucial to the Growth and Spread of a Modern Religious Movement’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 7, 1 (1968), 32.

<sup>11</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 72.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Peil and K.A. Opoku, ‘The Development and Practice of Religion in an Accra Suburb’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 24, 3 (1994), 208, 211.



the CMs. Theologically, however, these pneumatic phenomena are seen by the CMs as the result of something more fundamental—the religious experience that leads to a personal ‘act of commitment’ to God. The central affirmation of the soteriology of the CMs as of Pentecostalism generally, therefore, is that the experience of the Holy Spirit transforms human life. This transformative experience, it is expected, will be evident in the lives of believers. Part of that transformation is what the CMs perceive as the pneumatological empowerment of the believer for victorious Christian living.

Ghanaian Charismatic churches teach that, unless one can point to a definitive turning point at which one’s life was ‘given to Christ’ through conversion, it is difficult to be considered a believer. This teaching is sometimes pushed in a way that makes it appear that the CMs are churches standing in judgement over other Christians who cannot point to any such definite turning points in life. In one or two instances observed at Charismatic services, invitations for people touched by the day’s message to give their lives to Christ seemed rather contrived. The pastors of the churches concerned appealed to divine revelation to support claims that God had revealed to them a specific number of persons who must respond to the day’s Altar Call. Being able to refer to turning points in conversion definitely helps to remove ambiguities about a person’s standing as a Christian. However, the subtle manipulation of people’s fears and emotions to get them to respond to Altar Calls also tends to play down the gospel as essentially a message of God’s love. The emphasis on Christian salvation as a process of personal conscious commitment to Christ may be absent from the preaching of TWMCs. In spite of this, there is no doubt that some of these older churches have within their ranks, as one would expect, some deeply committed Christians. Making particular sequences of conversion paradigmatic may raise questions about the authenticity of their different, but genuine, processes of incorporation into Christ for those who did not follow similar patterns. Jesus points to the subtlety of the Spirit in conversion when he likens the Spirit’s movement to that of the wind (John 3:8). For many equally committed Christians, the process of transformation effected by the Spirit has come in ways which make it difficult either to point to a definite crisis point or to recall when it occurred. These reservations, however, do not negate the importance of new believers being presented with the opportunity to make a personal conscious choice concerning their standing in the world.

*Principalities and Powers in the Process of Salvation*

In Ghanaian CMs, the crucial transition involved in the salvific process is conceived of primarily in terms of a cosmic battle between God and the forces of evil. The full implications of this cosmic battle are examined in the next chapter. It is worthy of note, however, that those going through the religious experience of salvation become ardent recruiters of others through their own testimonies of deliverance from alcoholism, sexual immorality and drug addiction. Such habits, as is explained in testimonies, not only had alienated their former victims from God, but had also prevented converts from leading responsible lives. My research revealed examples of people who received their born-again experiences outside a Charismatic church, but had now joined one because these churches, they believed, provided a better sanctuary for those seeking to resist the devil. The dramatic nature of some of the conversion testimonies explains not only why such old ways of life are seen as driven by supernatural powers, but also why believers are keen to invite potential converts to taste of the superior might of Christ.

The role of the devil in the process of Christian conversion in Ghana is the subject of Birgit Meyer's *Translating the Devil*, in which she offers a critique of Robin Horton's African conversion thesis. Horton had postulated that in 'African conversion' smaller deities fade into insignificance as people adopt the idea of the High God.<sup>13</sup> Meyer argues that conversion to Christianity in Africa is more than a turn towards the High God.<sup>14</sup> The import of Christian conversion as a turn to permanently face the High God is not disputed by Ghanaian Christians. But availing oneself of the salvation of God through Christ implies the simultaneous acknowledgement of Satan or the devil as the ruler of the realm of darkness.<sup>15</sup> Meyer's observation that the image of Satan plays a crucial role in the process of conversion and the appropriation of Christianity in the African context is important for understanding salvation in the CMs. In this hermeneutic, the devil is the thief who comes 'only to steal and kill

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<sup>13</sup> Robin Horton, 'African Conversion', *Africa*, vol. 41, 2 (1971), 86–108; 'On the Rationality of Conversion', Parts I & II, *Africa*, vol. 45, 3 (1975), 219–235, 373–399.

<sup>14</sup> Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 161–162.

and destroy' (John 10:10). As most testimonies would affirm, carnal attitudes and desires, the 'things of the flesh' as Scripture calls them, are of the devil who employs them to destroy God's creation. In the context of the CMs, therefore, every changed life is seen as the defeat of the power of the devil by the superior might of Jesus Christ.

Rudolf Otto refers to the elements of 'might', 'power' and the 'absolute overpoweringness' with which the Holy influences creatures in religious experience.<sup>16</sup> That seems to be the meaning of the transformations wrought by the Spirit in the lives of testifiers. They are simply overpowered by superior might. Listening to the way religious experience is expressed in testimonies emanating from the CMs, it sounds obvious that through encounters with the Spirit personal wills are broken and overpowered, often in ways so dramatic that they defy rational explanation. The transformation defies explanation except in terms of being invaded and overcome by the superior might of God. In the words of Frances Young:

Salvation . . . is God's rescue-operation. Because of the human predicament, however, it signifies more than mere rescue: it becomes essentially re-creation, the restoration of a wholeness which involves transformation into 'Christs', into bearers of the divine image.<sup>17</sup>

The reality of evil powers as instigating some of the habits, conditions and circumstances from which people are redeemed should not be discounted as escapist. The commission of Christ to evangelise the world includes not only preaching, but also casting out demons and healing. The torment of people by demons is both a biblical and an African reality. Significant numbers testify to having come to receive the Lord as a result of being delivered from the power of evil, being healed of disease or from some distressing condition. According to Taylor, mission 'means to recognise what the Creator-Redeemer is doing in the world and try to do it with him'.<sup>18</sup> In the context of the Christianity of Ghanaian CMs, what God is doing in the world in terms of mission includes freeing those bound by Satan and the demons that enslave them to alcoholism, gambling, sickness

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<sup>16</sup> Otto, *Holy*, 19, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Frances Young, 'Salvation and the New Testament', in Donald English (ed.), *Windows on Salvation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994), 35-36.

<sup>18</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972), 37.

and other debilitating conditions and circumstances. Testimonies also register as a useful pastoral strategy in helping testifiers to overcome the guilt of past behaviour, behaviour which it must be admitted is sometimes inconceivable apart from the collaboration and activities of malevolent powers beyond human control.

*Conversion and Religious Pluralism*

Following the born-again experience, Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals generally come to view non-Christian religions as demonic. The attitude of the CMs to non-Christian faiths and other religious traditions is a virtual extension of the attitude to African traditional religions. They are all considered instruments of Satan in blinding people to the truth about God's revelation in Christ. Thus in Bishop Agyin Asare's testimony narrated above, the process of conversion involved not just turning towards God and away from the 'world', but also a retreat from any non-Christian sources of religious allegiance. These include the Sunsum sorè, who are discounted as occult on suspicion of being in clandestine collusion with traditional spirit powers in solving the problems of members. Withdrawal from the traditional mission churches is also recommended. This is on account of their being considered too 'weak', set in their ways and their Christianity too cerebral to provide the needed spiritual context for the nurture and sustenance of people's new religious experiences. In the spirit of Christian exclusivism, Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals teach that the only thing to do with those affiliating with other religions is to bring them to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian exclusivism is used here to refer to the claim that Jesus is God's final revelation and that salvation is not available in anyone else. The demonisation of non-Christian faiths is thus linked to the biblical notion of conversion as turning from idolatry in order to enter into a covenant with God. Idolatry therefore denotes covenanting with other gods and spiritual powers, a practice considered as a perversion of the Christian faith.<sup>19</sup> Paul's antipathy to idolatry is particularly strong, as is seen in his denunciation of the idols in Athens (Acts 17:16–29).

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<sup>19</sup> John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, revised edition (London: SCM 1977), 260.

Scholars who write on religious pluralism generally tend to discourage active proselytisation of converts from other faiths on the grounds that one religion should not claim superiority over another.<sup>20</sup> Religion in Ghana involves a 'competition' for converts. Recruitment from each other's fold is therefore likely to continue, bringing in its wake great cost with many casualties. Recent outbursts of religious violence between followers of Charismatic churches and some practitioners of traditional religion, and between Pentecostal preachers and Muslims in Ghana especially through the 1990s, are cases in point. In both instances religious violence led to destruction of property and severe injuries to many. Dickson, who is a past President [Presiding Bishop] of the Methodist Church, Ghana, notes that 'no serious religious thinker today' would consider Christianity so distinctive as to imply the falsity of other religions.<sup>21</sup> In that case the CMs may not qualify as 'serious religious thinkers'. The problem of the traditional mission churches is that, because of the high rate of nominalism and compromise, their members easily associate with religious fraternities like Freemasons, Oddfellows, and Buddhist and Hindu organisations. Thus, in Ghana's religiously pluralistic environment, one of the greatest challenges to traditional mission Christianity is not just that it is in competition with other religious movements for converts, but its members have become easy prey for non-Christian faiths.<sup>22</sup> This is what the neo-Pentecostals are keen to avoid for their members. The tendency of the members of TWMCs to fraternise with non-Christian religious movements is a problem for the church authorities. This is evident in Conference and Synod resolutions passed by the Methodist and Presbyterian churches of Ghana banning ministers and church leaders in particular from the membership of non-Christian religious movements and fraternities. In effect, what the traditional churches try to accomplish through legislation, the Pentecostals are to a large extent able to achieve by personal choice. Members of Pentecostal churches are able to stay away from non-Christian movements as a result of their unambiguous emphasis

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<sup>20</sup> See for instance C.G. Baëta, *The Relationships of Christians with Men of Other Living Faiths* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1971).

<sup>21</sup> Kwesi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 4.

<sup>22</sup> See my study, 'Traditional Missionary Christianity and New Religious Movements in Ghana', especially chapter 4 on the neo-Hindu movement, Sai Baba.

on what it means to be in Christ, which for them includes non-fellowship with idolaters (I Corinthians 8:5–6).

Renewal for the CMs therefore includes making a decisive break with all religious associations in order that one may be fully integrated into Christ. This position, I would argue, is a non-negotiable element in the soteriological orientation of Ghana's CMs. Any convert from a non-Christian religious background is particularly cherished as a 'big catch' for Jesus. Testimonies of such converts are particularly valued for their ability to reinforce the perceived falsity of other religions and the superiority of Jesus Christ as 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' (John 14:6). To that extent it may be admitted that the CMs are being sincere to the spirit of the gospel they believe in. However, within the context of the current Ghanaian religiously pluralistic environment, the approach of the CMs has not always been discreet. The violent clashes between CMs and traditional religious practitioners referred to above have stemmed from the refusal of the Christians to observe an annual ban on drumming during the few weeks before the celebration of traditional festivals. Most TWMCs have wisely avoided confrontation by observing the ban, in spite of the fact that it would have been within the constitutional right of the churches to drum during such periods. Some Charismatic churches have refused to take this line, a response the traditionalists have interpreted as an affront to their gods and beliefs. The way of the Cross is the way of suffering but Christ does not encourage his followers to court martyrdom. On such occasions, it would seem that avoiding confrontation as Jesus sometimes did by withdrawing quietly from the centre of hostilities would have been a more Christian option. When Paul was speaking in the synagogue at Ephesus and some of his listeners became obstinate, refused to believe and 'publicly maligned the Way', he did not continue but just left them (Acts 19:8–9). In the current religiously pluralistic context a key solution to religious violence is tolerance and respect for what others believe, and the avoidance of unnecessary confrontation.

An in-depth examination of the relationship between the CMs and non-Christian religious movements and other non-Charismatic Christian organisations is beyond the scope of this study. The attitude of the CMs to traditional mission denominations has been dealt with in chapter four. However, for the purposes of this section it is worth looking a little more closely, albeit briefly, at the neo-Pentecostal attitude to Roman Catholicism in particular. This presents an interest-

ing case because, on the one hand, neo-Pentecostals do not find theologically acceptable the central place that icons and the mediation of saints play in Roman Catholic theology. On the other hand, Roman Catholics have in response to a growing and almost uncontrollable phenomenon tried to accommodate neo-Pentecostalism within their ranks through the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement.

### *The CMs and Roman Catholicism*

Hostility towards the Roman Catholic Church is particularly pronounced because of its recognition of saints, the Virgin Mary and the use of the rosary and other icons as aids to prayer. Catholic Charismatic theologian Peter Hocken has discussed within a wider context the nature of tensions between the Roman Catholic establishment and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement.<sup>23</sup> The case of the Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry (CEM) based at the University of Ghana, Legon, is a typical example of the tensions caused by attempts to accommodate a movement that cherishes spontaneity and direct religious experience within one that remains highly formal and hierarchical in Christian expression and liturgy. The leadership and initial core of the membership of CEM were originally part of the University of Ghana Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement. Steve Mensah and his twin brother Stanley were then two of its most prominent leaders. Steve is a preacher who exercises more the gift of a pastor and Stanley is a gifted singer in charge of music. Through the charismatic leadership of Steve and Stanley, the Legon Catholic Charismatic group became one of the most prominent in Ghana. Its meetings also attracted many non-Catholics. This ecumenical spirit and the reluctance of the Roman Catholic members to recognise certain cherished traditions of the mother church led to tensions with the Catholic authorities. After a series of misunderstandings, Steve and Stanley announced their independence from the Roman Catholic Church in 1990, and were joined by around twenty percent of the Legon group. Members of other Catholic Renewal groups also joined this independent evangelistic fellowship,

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<sup>23</sup> For this see Peter Hocken, 'Charismatic Renewal in the Roman Catholic Church: Reception and Challenge', in Jan A.B. Jongeneel (ed.), *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism: Essays on Intercultural Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 301–309.

swelling the numbers to approximately 600. In 1993 the fellowship was transformed into a church. On why they finally decided to sever links with their mother church, Pastor Steve Mensah explained that 'the Catholic structures were too stiff and we had to move out to do what God was calling us to do'.

Among the reasons for seceding from the Roman Catholic Church was the fact that the religious experiences and beliefs of the leadership and membership did not fit into traditional Roman Catholic structures. First, as has been observed, the CMs teach a direct access to the sacred, so the hierarchical and mediatory nature of Catholic priesthood and liturgy was a problem. The fact that the clericalism of the Roman Catholic establishment does not permit lay expressions of religious experience often led to secessions into Charismatic groups.<sup>24</sup> Secondly the leadership and membership of the Charismatic movements were manifesting spiritual gifts that lay virtually dormant in a traditional Roman Catholic church setting. In that situation it becomes easy for lay people manifesting gifts of the Spirit to defect to Charismatic groups more appreciative of their abilities. Recounting the experiences of one Nigerian community, Erivwo points to how members of Catholic Charismatic movements seceded to join Archbishop Idahosa's church. According to Erivwo, many of the members had religious experiences that they described as being 'born again'. This led them to reject such traditional Catholic doctrines as regular confession of sins to the priest, prayers offered through departed saints and the Virgin Mary, the habit of not eating meat on Good Friday, the use of the Rosary and the devotional habit of kissing the Cross.<sup>25</sup>

These observations are also verified by interviews with some former Ghanaian Catholics who abandoned Catholicism after their new religious experiences. On confessions to the priest for instance, Pastor Christina Doe Tetteh claimed that after her conversion she struggled to come to terms with confessing sins to a priest. 'When I confess my sins to the priest, to whom does the priest also confess his?' she asked. We noted earlier that the CMs question the reliance on

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<sup>24</sup> For examples from Latin America, see David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> S.U. Erivwo, 'A Consideration of the Charismatic Movement Among the Urhobo and Isoko Speakers: 1929 To Date', *Orita*, vol. 15 (1983), 26.



symbolic objects and aids to prayer because their emphasis on the immediacy of the experience of the Spirit makes them feel able to live the Christian life without any recourse to the mediatory assistance of saints and icons. This explains the difficulty in living with Roman Catholic practices, leading to tensions and secessions. It has also been argued in the previous chapter that the Pentecostal experience, in the thinking of CMs, is meant to confirm the biblical evidence that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is meant to enrich Christian fellowship with varieties of gifts and ministries. These gifts are meant to prevent the body of Christ from becoming a religious society, with the clergy as mere religious officials. The neo-Pentecostal movement in particular considers the attempt to institutionalise the Holy Spirit as inconsistent with the impression received in the Bible and through personal experience. According to Pastor Mensah of the Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry, their experience in the Catholic Church shows how the Holy Spirit is 'domesticated' and placed at the disposal of bishops and priests to be dispensed like the sacraments. The result of such institutionalisation of the Holy Spirit is that such gifts as healing and the privilege of being able to seek God's intervention directly for one's needs become the preserve of either priest or saints and icons. In the words of one Roman Catholic bishop interviewed for this work, 'the Catholic Church has its own priests, specially trained in the dynamics of healing and exorcism and lay people should not be allowed to dabble in that area'. Neo-Pentecostals generally find these reservations incompatible with their experiences. Thus the tensions existing between the Roman Catholic establishment and the Charismatic Renewal movement are likely to continue well into the future. For as long as the manifestations of the Spirit are not allowed freer expression, people will be forced to look elsewhere for opportunities to express their experiences of the Spirit.

### *The Empowering Effects of Salvation*

In the theology of the CMs, the religious experience of salvation is considered the gateway to the renewal and spiritual empowerment of the believer and of the believing community. What this empowerment entails is evident through the expectation that individual Christians through their charismatic gifting will function within the body of Christ. One of the key biblical verses around which the

Pentecostal theology of salvation is built is Peter's response to those inquiring about what to do following his sermon on the day of Pentecost: 'Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). In the hermeneutic of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals, to receive the Spirit is to be empowered. During one of his sermons at the Christian Action Faith Ministries, Pastor S. Bulla began by stressing 'if the Spirit does not hover over you, nothing happens, because there is no empowerment without the Holy Spirit.' He also referred to God so manifesting himself in acts of power through the apostles that the magician Simon Magus could not resist the temptation to offer money for the ability to impart this power (Acts 8:17-19). It is difficult to articulate through a single definition what empowerment means for the CMs. Its ultimate value for them however is that it verifies that God can be present in the lives of believers and his church in the power of his Spirit. Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, born-again Christians speak in new tongues, they testify to experiencing a new confidence in praying for healing either for themselves or for others, they feel invested with a new authority with which to withstand fear and command Satan to flee from their affairs. In the words of Bulla, 'if the Spirit is with you, the devil cannot stop you from coming out of financial, marital, business and other difficulties'.

Empowerment could therefore mean many things to the CMs and how it is understood may be appreciated through what transpired during a visit to Pastor Steve Mensah's Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry. Mensah preached on the theme 'Understanding the Foundations of our Faith'. In his message he noted that 'when you are transformed into God's kingdom of light, first your goals in life change, and then you must be prepared to engage in spiritual warfare'. According to the message, God's command to humankind to subdue the earth meant that from the beginning 'God gave us power and authority. This means God empowered us. All Jesus did in his ministry was a demonstration of the kind of power God has given the Christian.' The Christian who is plagued by evil has therefore no need to panic. Mensah encouraged his hearers to 'simply take authority in the name of Jesus over their problems'. This was supported with reference to Philippians 2:9-11. Mensah explained that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—"sickness knee", "marital problems knee", "financial difficulties knee", "business problems

knee” and “demons knee”’. He then contrasted the authority of the believer with that of a uniformed police officer. The authority of the police is vested in them by the state. So for example when the traffic police raise their arms, traffic must stop. This means drivers recognise the authority of the police, which is symbolised by the uniform. According to Mensah the authority of the believer, unlike that of the police, is bestowed by God who is a higher authority. Since traffic would not halt for plain-clothes police officers, the believer must always ‘put on the whole armour of God’. In ‘full armour’, the believer must be able to stand in the middle of the ‘road’ and stop the demons. ‘The devil must be resisted and chased out of our homes, marriages, lives, and businesses like a thief.’ The congregation was then reassured that as believers they have power over the forces of evil: ‘When your children are sick, lay your hands on them; do not think it is only the ordained who have authority; as simple as you are, you have been given authority, you have power, you are worthy.’ Making extensive references to Ephesians 1:15 ff., Mensah assured the congregation, ‘you are above sickness, cancer, tuberculosis, etc. You shall never die of these diseases. “My cup runneth”, means you are heavily anointed.’ In conclusion, he reminded the congregation, that all that has been said was possible only in the lives of ‘the redeemed of the Lord’. The congregation was then asked to repeat—each person symbolically appropriating for himself or herself the benefits of the message by pointing to the chest—‘I am the redeemed of the Lord, nothing shall hurt me. Power is given unto me, nothing shall hurt me.’ In the course of this symbolic appropriation of the power available to believers, the congregation broke spontaneously into the chorus:

We conquer Satan  
 We conquer demons  
 We conquer principalities  
 We conquer powers  
 Refrain: *Shout Hallelujah*

Martyn Percy has identified ‘a sound focus on power’ as having the potential to create what he refers to as a ‘master key’ for theology and religious studies.<sup>26</sup> What stood out of the observation at the

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<sup>26</sup> Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (London: Cassell, 1998), vii.

CEM is a pneumatology in which the Spirit does not only renew, but through transformation also empowers. In the ministry of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles and also in Pauline thought we find that acts of power are an obvious accompaniment of the proclamation of the gospel (I Corinthians 1:18–25; 2:1–5; Colossians 1:29). In the sense in which the word empowerment is employed in this context, it refers to ‘being filled’ with the Spirit in special measure in order to be able to live and act like a child of God endowed with his authority. The experience of the Spirit of God means the effective working of the power of God in the lives of believers and in the church. Some of the implications of empowerment in the CMs include seeing empowerment as resulting in: (1) the experience of a ‘redemptive uplift’ in the life of the believer; (2) the anointing of the Spirit; and (3) restoration and manifestation of Spiritual gifts. This chapter concludes with a brief examination of these implications of empowerment.

*Empowerment as a ‘Redemptive Uplift’*

The believer, as a result of the ‘break with the past’, is expected to experience what Maxwell has referred to as a ‘redemptive uplift’ in life, that is, the ‘re-socialisation’ of new believers which is evidenced through a new lifestyle embracing smartness in appearance, trustworthiness, marital fidelity and hard work which then contributes to making previously ‘wasting lives’ employable.<sup>27</sup> For the CMs the embrace of a modern lifestyle through the ability to acquire modern goods like television, video, new clothes and so on helps to underscore the new image that new life in Christ has the potential to bring. This is made possible by re-channelling resources previously diverted into buying alcohol and maintaining extra-marital relations and other such pursuits into more productive purposes and family support. Reference has already been made to the belief that the previous lifestyle is interpreted as being enslaved by the devil and demons, but through conversion Christ overcomes the forces of evil and thereby redeems people for more purposeful living. This is made clear in Mensah’s encouragement to believers to stand up and with their empowerment by Christ ‘resist the devil’ out of their affairs (I Peter 5:9). The CMs anticipate the ‘return of Christ’, but this theme does not fea-

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<sup>27</sup> David Maxwell, “‘Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?’: Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 28, 3 (1998), 354.

ture too prominently in their teachings. Thus Pastor Otabil states unambiguously that the new breed of Charismatic preachers in Africa, 'cannot continue singing about flying away and wearing a shoe in heaven whilst our people battle the harsh realities of life'.<sup>28</sup>

The emancipation of believers through overcoming the forces determined to keep them down is particularly evident in Mensa Otabil's 'black emancipation theology'. In sermons and radio programmes, Otabil places significant emphasis on black emancipation and self-actualisation. Pastor Otabil encourages blacks to rise up and work towards the realisation of their God-given potential. The black emancipation theology aims to encourage hard work and discourage fatalism and resignation. The thrust of Otabil's black emancipation theology, believed by some to have been inspired by the writings of African-Caribbean Pentecostal pastor Myles Munroe, may be accessed through his main publications.<sup>29</sup> Whatever the influence of Munroe may be, it is to the credit of Otabil that he has given those ideas a contextual relevance by speaking not just of the need for blacks to rise above a slave past and racial discrimination, but also of the need to take their destiny into their own hands and deal with the economic and social difficulties in which African nations like Ghana find themselves. In Otabil's reading of the Bible, God did not mean blacks to trail behind whites in anything. The key theme running through Otabil's teaching of black emancipation is that believers can do something about their life's circumstances because of the victory of Christ over evil and the empowering effect of God's presence through the Holy Spirit. The significance of such spirituality is that it gives adherents of the Pentecostal movement value and dignity, something that we find in Jesus' attitude to the poor and marginalised of society. The Christian does not grow or acquire such dignity in isolation. The rescuing, renewing, transforming and elevating experience of salvation is considered to be best nurtured in the context of a Charismatic church community. There is every attempt to re-socialise the new Christians by providing alternatives to what might otherwise draw them into the world. The CMs therefore make provision for different professional and gender-based fellowships and programmes to cater for this need. With such involvement by the

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<sup>28</sup> Mensa Otabil, *Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia: A Biblical Revelation on God's Purpose for the Black Race* (Accra: Altar International, 1992), 12.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

membership, time previously spent in ‘worldly’ pursuits becomes available for the service of God through the transformed community.

*Empowerment as Anointing*

In the CMs, empowerment is also spoken of in terms of an ‘anointing’ that the Spirit bestows on the believer, especially those who are called to lead. Although individual Christians are encouraged to seek the anointing of the Spirit in addition to the baptism of the Spirit, the leader is always expected to have the anointing in special measure. Anointing, it is thought, makes a leader’s ministry extraordinarily effective. One of the main proponents of anointing theology is Nigerian Charismatic pastor David Oyedepo whose Accra branch of Winners’ Chapel, established in Ghana in 1997, has become one of the largest in Ghana’s capital. He writes that ‘every believer requires the anointing for sustenance, performance, success, breakthrough and fulfilment’. Levels of anointing, Pastor Oyedepo continues, also make the difference between the impact preachers make on audiences and so ‘two people may preach the same message, but have different results’.<sup>30</sup> This is a view that Ghanaian Charismatic pastors share. In Ghana people flock to Charismatic churches where they perceive the anointing to be, and this was the explanation given by some of those flocking to Winners’ Chapel. The line between ‘anointing’ and ‘power’ appears very thin indeed. The meaning is best captured through occurrences that members of CMs ascribe to the anointing. Consider, for instance, an incident narrated by Pastor Mensah of the Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry when asked about the meaning of anointing. On the last day of a week’s evangelistic crusade he had felt spiritually and physically drained after much preaching and ministration. On this final day, the crowd was thicker than usual. Mensah managed to preach, but, finding himself lacking the physical strength needed for ministration, he just shouted through the microphone, ‘Lord! Release your anointing’. What followed, he said, was screaming, falling, that is, being ‘slain in the spirit’, shouting, loud piercing cries and spontaneous confessions of sin, weeping and other pneumatic manifestations. Mensah explained that through the anointing the Spirit accomplished what would have

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<sup>30</sup> David O. Oyedepo, *Anointing for Breakthrough* (Lagos: Dominion Publishing House, 1992), 63.

gone into the ministration, as many testified to healing and deliverance from burdens. The anointing came from the Lord but for participants its release was an indication of the leader's spirituality. The thinking is that leaders like Samson who compromise moral standards cannot count on the empowering presence of the Lord in their ministry (Judges 16:20). The effectiveness of a person's anointing depends on moral uprightness and enhanced spirituality achieved through fasting, Bible study and prayer.

The impression one gets is that 'anointing' is used in reference to 'the power of God in action' through his Spirit. In the context of the CMs, the power of God is taken as given, in accordance with the promise of Jesus, 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you' (Acts 1:8). This power is authenticated in things and persons by virtue of which they become influential and effective. Anointing, it is believed, could be on an individual or it could come through previously blessed olive oil that is used as an aid to healing or empowerment especially during ordinations. The oil supposedly 'upgrades the authority' of the pastor's tongue and 'makes your words effective when you speak, causing the things you declare to come to pass'.<sup>31</sup> One person who is also widely acknowledged to have the anointing is Pastor Anaba. He gives the following account of what occurred at a meeting where the anointing was manifested:

I was led on one night to walk around the church building praying in tongues in order to break every hindrance to the progress of the church. That night the power of God was very strong as we sat in the presence of the Holy Ghost. Many souls were won to Jesus . . . At certain points in the meeting people fell under the power as they took hold of my cufflinks, touched my shoes and clothing. Several were healed. Offerings were taken under the anointing and the figures were great.<sup>32</sup>

Once the anointing builds up at a meeting, what follows is healing, deliverance from demons, prophecies and speaking in tongues, falling under the power of the Spirit and other violent reactions as demons struggle to lose their grip on victims. In talking to Ghanaian Charismatics about how they felt after services where such manifestations had occurred, they almost always used the phrase 'the anointing was

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>32</sup> Anaba, *Militia*, 10–11.

great'. For according to Pastor Anaba, 'the anointing strikes like lightening, shakes like an earthquake, and devours like a fire and rushes like a wind for quick accomplishment of divine purpose'.<sup>33</sup> The anointing thus seems to be a performative force/element in the power of the Holy Spirit. It comes across as being akin to what Van der Leeuw describes as 'the power of God poured out and absorbed', which enables recipients to perform miracles and operate in 'the gifts of grace'.<sup>34</sup> In the theology of the CMs, what effected the healing as Peter's shadow fell on the sick is explained in sermons as evidence of the anointing upon his life (Acts 5:15). It is the anointing on Paul that made it possible for handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched his body to heal sicknesses and drive out evil spirits (Acts 19:11). The anointing accomplishes. It makes things happen.

The manifestations associated with the phenomenon of anointing are not entirely new to Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Similar occurrences characterised the ministries of African Pentecostal pioneers like Prophet Harris whose evangelistic work was referred to in chapter 1. The manifestations described as signifying the anointing are also an important feature in the ministries of North American neo-Pentecostal evangelists like Morris Cerullo and Benny Hinn.<sup>35</sup> Participants in CMs stress the need for those 'set apart' to lead not to take their leadership status for granted. Leaders are expected to realise the enormous responsibility that their calling lays upon them to maintain a dynamic relationship with God and lead morally upright lives. If these are not forthcoming it is taken as a weakening of charisma due to a weak spiritual life. Indeed Paul leaves Christian leaders in little doubt about the high spiritual and moral qualities and standards expected of them (I Timothy 3:1–13; 6:11–16; Titus 1:1–9). The Christian leader, in addition to all else, is expected to be a person filled with the Holy Spirit. The unfortunate development here is that because people normally gravitate towards churches where they perceive the anointing to be, how big a church is or how fast it is growing has become for some a measure of the leader's anointing. It has consequently brought pressure on some Charismatic pas-

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> Morris Cerullo, *The New Anointing* (San Diego, CA: Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, 1975); Benny Hinn, *The Anointing* (Milton Keynes: Word Publishing, 1992).



tors to seek the anointing through the application of olive oil in order to enhance their own 'powers'. It is believed that such anointing may be imparted through being anointed by one who possesses the anointing in extraordinary measure.

Anointings by Cerullo and Hinn are very much sought after. Anointing participants is an integral part of Cerullo's School of Ministry programme. It is believed to produce results in the ministry of participants. Former participants often testify that Cerullo's anointing—often done by proxy through an associate—has turned their ministries and Christian lives around. Bishop Agyin Asare explains the increasing patronage of his Word Miracle Church International to being anointed by Cerullo. According to Asare, his initial attempts at preaching did not convert many people. He therefore sought a more powerful ministry in which, like Peter on the day of Pentecost, crowds would respond to his Altar Calls. God supposedly answered his prayer during the 1983 Morris Cerullo School of Ministry in Accra. Cerullo was not there in person but his teachings were presented to participants through videocassette tapes by a representative, Dr Alex Ness. In Asare's words at a Full Gospel banquet:

As Dr Cerullo spoke and wept, I also wept for my powerlessness to save this sinful world. On the last day of the conference, Dr Ness anointed our ears, thumbs and toes. When I got to my seat and knelt, I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit say, 'My boy, Charles, I send you out as I sent Moses. Go, and I will put my words on your lips and take the world for me.'

From that moment Asare claims there was a dramatic turn around in his ministry. He therefore encourages all believers and Christian leaders seeking to improve the quality of their ministry through signs and wonders to seek the anointing. The anointing or empowerment is therefore not considered the prerogative of the leadership of the CMs. It is that people need the presence of the anointing to be successful in life. It is as a direct result of this anointing teaching that the phenomenon has acquired such high value and importance in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal Christianity. During the 1995 Hinn 'Ghana for Christ Crusade', for example, a special anointing service was held for pastors at the National Theatre in Accra. Although an admission fee of 10,000 cedis (\$7 then) was charged, the 1,500 places available were oversubscribed, with hundreds of people unable to gain entry to the theatre.

The references to the influences of Cerullo and Hinn on the anointing phenomenon should not be mistaken as countering our position that Ghana's Charismatic movement is not an American import. It has been pointed out earlier that the neo-Pentecostal movement is very much at home in a high-tech world. This is a world in which success stories are constantly diffused through the distribution of audio- and videotapes and publications. It is not always easy to determine where some of the ideas initially originated. But wherever it originated, the anointing theology has in our view caught on in Ghana because it fits into the traditional perception of religion as a source of power and of religious functionaries as people who must be effective in delivering such power for solving life's debilitating problems. In other words the religious functionary must have the power with which to empower others. The fact that some CMs, so critical of the Sunsum sorè usage of healing aids and substances, now occasionally stray into those areas underscores the crucial role that religion plays in the African worldview as a source of power. The following testimony was delivered at a women's camp meeting hosted by the Victory Bible Church, one of the leading CMs in Ghana:

Someone owed me a huge sum of money in dollars that she had refused to settle, despite all the efforts I had made. During the [1997] camp meeting, I was prayed for and a handkerchief was blessed for me to take home. I followed all the instruction given me by the woman of God and the lady who owed me came of her own freewill as though she was being hounded by dogs and paid all the money. I thank God for giving me a breakthrough.

Olive oil, the principal substance for anointing, has now become an essential commodity in Ghana's pharmaceutical shops. Many Charismatic church meetings are now dubbed 'anointing services' where the focus of the service is to empower people through anointing them with oil. At one anointing meeting the participants expressed their desire in the following chorus:

Anointing fall on me. Let the anointing fall on me. We need your anointing. Let the power of the Holy Ghost fall on me; anointing fall on me. Touch my hands, my head, my heart, every part; let the power of the Holy Ghost fall on me.

It is consistent with biblical teaching for Christians and their leaders to seek to be spiritually effective. On a number of occasions prospective

leaders are commissioned through the laying on of hands. Timothy's spiritual gift was supposed to have been imparted through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on him (I Timothy 4:14). What is open to question is the belief among some Charismatic leaders that as a result of being anointed at the 'appropriate places', as Bishop Asare's testimony indicated, people can be certain of their ministries being accompanied by the power being sought. Effective ministry comes through the continuous dependence on God's empowering presence, the Holy Spirit. It has also been noted in this work that one of the outstanding features of the CMs is their teaching that God imparts his power to his people in a personal way. God's power is his personal presence that cannot be accessed merely through incantations, formulae and the application of substances. This has been one of our main criticisms of the Sunsum sorè. With the growing attraction of anointing services and the reliance on the value of olive oil and in a few cases 'anointing handkerchiefs', a number of CMs seem to be gradually slipping into the ways of some of the older independent churches whose practices they continue to denounce as occult.

#### *Empowerment as the Restoration of Spiritual Gifts*

In the CMs, being empowered also means the recovery of pneumatic gifts and their dynamic functioning among the community of believers. Although the normalisation of the use of spiritual gifts in the church is more indicative of their pneumatological emphasis, in practice it cannot be separated from their soteriological goals. Once people are born again, it is expected that they will yearn for and receive the gifts of the Spirit. Those who respond to Altar Calls in Charismatic churches are prayed for to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit as part of a period of teaching following conversion. Subsequently some become beneficiaries of other spiritual gifts. The relevance of spiritual gifts to the ecclesiology of the CMs has already been mentioned in chapter 4. Through the emphasis on the accessibility of spiritual gifts to all believers, many young people who would otherwise not fit into the monolithic type of ministry in traditional mission churches have now been empowered to function in their gifts as leaders, evangelists and Bible teachers in various CMs. A detailed study of the spiritual gifts is beyond the scope of this thesis, so it is considered sufficient to approach the issue of empowerment here through one of the key gifts, prophecy.

It is important to remember that, unlike apostolic authority, which is limited to apostles, prophecy is open to everyone (I Corinthians 14:1, 5, 24, 31). CMs believe in the spontaneous utterance of prophecies granted to individuals during gatherings of the Christian community. Spontaneous prophecies were a common occurrence at Charismatic meetings attended as part of this study. The belief by the CMs in God's ability to communicate with the believing community through any member he chooses fits into the 'democratisation of charisma' associated with their ecclesiology. Prophecy as a spontaneous utterance inspired by the Spirit during corporate worship, and aimed at addressing issues of common concern, is often delivered through tongues. The prophecy is then interpreted either simultaneously or after it has ended by another person who may have been granted the gift of interpretation by the Spirit. Such prophecy in most cases began with the phrase 'thus says the Lord' indicating that the 'prophet' is an instrument through whom the Lord is making his mind known to his people.

Prophecies mostly address contemporary issues and so are normally termed 'messages from the Lord'. The prospect that God through his Spirit can communicate directly with his children concerning matters on which they may have been praying, and that the church takes the prophetic word seriously as coming from the Lord, is significant as one of the ultimate signs of the empowerment of believers. It epitomises the fact that in the democratisation of charisma associated with the CMs no single individual has monopoly over access to God's counsel. Prophecy could come through any member of the believing community without notice, and is a sure indication of the extension of the gifts of the Spirit beyond a selected elite of leaders to all 'Spirit-filled' individuals. Paul writes of such prophecy that it has the potential to convict sinners and bring them into humble acknowledgement of God's presence among his people (I Corinthians 14:25–29).

The situation with prophecy has fallen short of this perfection. There is some difficulty with a burgeoning phenomenon of prophetism arising within Ghana's CMs. In the last couple of years, there has proliferated within certain CMs individuals recognised by *some* neo-Pentecostals as occupying the office of 'prophet'. A few of these are themselves founders of CMs, but most of them are itinerant prophets who minister mostly in Charismatic churches on invitation. Advocates of the prophetic ministry claim that its emergence connotes God's

restoration of the office of the prophet within the five-fold ministry referred to in Ephesians 4:11–12. According to some leading members of the movement, such as Pastor Obeng-Darko, since Charismatic churches, until the sudden emergence of prophets, had been able to identify the other offices of apostles, teachers, pastors and evangelists in their midst, the recovery of the prophetic office in the late 1990s marked the completion of the cycle of restorations initiated by God through the CMs. A detailed study of this burgeoning phenomenon of itinerant prophets within Ghana's CMs is beyond the scope of this book. Suffice it to point out that there is an indication from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians of the existence of prophets in the Church at Corinth.<sup>36</sup> To that extent one must not discount God's ability to endow a believer with the grace of prophecy. However in contrast to what is being claimed today, 'prophetic authority' for Paul in particular derived more from spontaneous prophetic inspiration than from appointments to the office of prophet.<sup>37</sup>

The recent phenomenon of Charismatic prophets has so far been accorded rather ambivalent reception. Pastors like Central Gospel's Mensa Otabil have on occasion expressed some scepticism about the increasing number of people claiming to have been called into the prophetic ministry. What is being claimed as a prophetic gift has often amounted to either proclaiming that people would prosper or revealing personal details of certain members of churches in which prophets are invited to preach. One such revelation that amounted to virtually branding a woman a witch had been particularly worrying, considering its social implications. The said prophet's explanation to a later enquiry by this author was that 'the revelations tended to reinforce the divine source of the prophetic message'. In short the revelations gave the prophet credibility. The purpose of such revelations is simply not clear. There is no biblical precedent for revealing the names of people's dead relatives, car numbers and names of parents under divine inspiration as this author observed. In one extreme and bizarre instance, the prophet even reveals the colour of underpants. Full names of people could be given, schools they attended, their occupation, names of dead relatives could all be revealed during ministrations. Sometimes the revelations take bizarre

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<sup>36</sup> James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 580, 581.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 581, 582.

and embarrassing proportions as the colour of people's underwear, particularly those of women, are revealed publicly. During ministration one prophet, Owusu Bempa, declared to those who came forward, 'the Lord has asked me to pray for you and change your destiny'. In my view, the practices of some of these Charismatic prophets betray signs of the re-emergence of some of the practices criticised among some Sunsum sorè. During one service conducted by Prophet Ewusi-Brookman, envelopes labelled 'Prophetic Seed Envelopes', which may have been distributed during the week, were due to be handed in towards the end of the service. There was space on the envelope for writing down one's needs. A man who sat close by me was very apt in his request as he wrote, 'for open doors'. As the congregation dropped their envelopes into the bowl at the front, they were requested to shake the hands of the prophet who then made various declarations to them, including declarations that people's poverty had ended.

Baëta was perceptive in his observation that African prophetism was not going to end with the Sunsum sorè.<sup>38</sup> In August 1998, Pastor Obeng-Darko's Tabernacle of Witness Chapel hosted a conference, according to him under divine injunction, of the leading prophets in Ghana. The event was dubbed 'the dawning of a new day: the prophets are coming'. The idea, according to Obeng-Darko, 'was to create a kind of network of leading prophets in order that the phenomenon could benefit from sound biblical teaching'. The positive sides of what was being described as a prophetic gift seemed to be closer to what Paul described as 'word of knowledge'. But whatever it is, some of those who are claiming to be occupying the prophetic office would really need sound biblical teaching if the gift is to become a genuine reflection of a spiritual gift granted by God for the building up of his church. In my view the evidence from some of the modern Charismatic prophets simply falls short of the ultimate test for granting spiritual gifts, that is, to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

This chapter has considered an aspect of the soteriological emphasis of the CMs. In the CMs, it has been noted that religious experience is evident not just in the pneumatic phenomena often associated with manifestations of the Holy Spirit, but more fundamentally in

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<sup>38</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism*, 6–7.

the conscious personal decision that a person needs to make to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Being born again, as the initial experience is called, is itself a transformation accomplished by the Holy Spirit who subsequently fills believers with power. The emphasis on salvation as requiring a definite confessional commitment, which then opens the way to the empowerment of the Spirit, is stressed as a critique of the theology of existing Christian traditions. The CMs bring a different emphasis to indigenous Pentecostalism by their consistency on the need for renewal through new birth in Christ. This is an emphasis that is not too clear in the message of the Sunsum sorè. Turner acknowledges this subdued emphasis on salvation from the guilt and power of sin in the Sunsum sorè, pointing out that the themes of the kingdom of God, of justification through faith, and the person and work of Christ as a whole, seem to escape attention.<sup>39</sup> The Sunsum sorè emphasis on healing has everything to do with Christian salvation. However, as a result of the emphasis on healing, many people, as we discovered in chapter 3, sought the assistance of these churches in times of need without the desire to 'give their lives to Christ'.

The CMs have sought to put an equal emphasis on salvation as transformation and empowerment, thereby bringing a fresh dimension into independent indigenous Pentecostalism. The passage from the epistle to Titus quoted at the beginning of the chapter speaks of salvation as rebirth in Christ and renewal in the Holy Spirit meant to prepare God's people for their eschatological end. These images of 'washing', 'rebirth', and 'renewal' in the passage underscore the point that coming to Christ is a process in which the life of the believer is invaded by the life-giving Spirit, who transforms the believer from within. Renewal as rebirth and empowerment are thus fundamental to the theology of the CMs who in their thinking have been raised by God as his 'end-time militia' to bring to the current generation a renewed emphasis on God's message of salvation.

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<sup>39</sup> Turner, *Innovation*, 98, 241.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SALVATION AS HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered. . . . Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics were healed. So there was great joy in that city (Acts 8:1, 4–8).

Salvation in the hermeneutic and praxis of Ghana's Charismatic ministries (CMs), as noted in chapter 5, is expected to produce a visible transformative and empowering effect in the lives and circumstances of believers. In Pentecostal spirituality this salvific transformation embodies not only new birth, a sanctification of the affections and being filled with the Spirit, but also healing from sickness and deliverance from the demonic.<sup>1</sup> Ghanaian independent Pentecostals pay considerable attention to healing and deliverance because they are considered part of the vital visible signs of the outpouring of God's Spirit. Healing and deliverance also fit into the indigenous view of religion as a survival strategy. This view is reflected in such Ghanaian sayings as *se rotwe adze fi sor na omba a, nna biribi dze mu*, now the theme of a popular song by Ghanaian highlife musician, A.B. Crentsil. The literal meaning of this Akan saying is that if efforts towards an endeavour continually prove elusive it probably means that the venture is being hampered by forces beyond one's control. In relation to the present discussion, healing and deliverance provide the ritual context for articulating a response to the inevitable shortfalls existing in the 'redemptive uplift' expected to accompany new life in Christ. If such transformation does not yield results in terms of victory over sin and prosperity in life, it is thought that evil powers might be hampering one's progress.

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<sup>1</sup> Cheryl Bridges Johns, "'Healing and Deliverance': A Pentecostal Perspective", in *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge, Concilium*, 1996/3, 45–51.



*Healing and Deliverance: Meaning and Resurgence*

Using information gleaned from interviews, messages, writings of exponents and observations of the phenomenon in practice, I offer the following definition of 'healing and deliverance' in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism: the deployment of divine resources, that is, power and authority in the Name or Blood of Jesus—perceived in pneumatological terms as the intervention of the Holy Spirit—to provide release for demon-possessed, demon-oppressed, broken, disturbed and troubled persons, in order that victims may be restored to 'proper functioning order', that is, to 'health and wholeness'; and, being thus freed from demonic influence and curses, they may enjoy God's fullness of life understood to be available in Christ.

The full implications of this definition will become clear below. Pentecostalism's promises to provide healing, well-being and relief from affliction are major attractions for many of its Third World adherents. As testimonies at Ghanaian Pentecostal gatherings show, personal crises like sickness, accident, bereavement, unemployment and marital difficulties provide the most propitious circumstances for conversion. The ministry of the Sunsum sorè, as discussed in chapter 2, testifies that healing and deliverance are not new to indigenous Pentecostalism. Within the last three decades, however, these ministries have been enjoying an enormous resurgence within Ghanaian Christianity. A recent invitation issued by one Assemblies of God Church in Ghana, captioned 'Breakthrough 98', read in part: 'Bring the blind, deaf, lame, and the spiritually afflicted. There will be a performance.' The phenomenon has effectively moved beyond the frontiers of neo-Pentecostalism and now exists as a subculture within Ghanaian Christianity. This wide influence is also evident in how traditional Western mission churches, in response to demand by members, now run courses to alert their pastors to the need for integrating healing and deliverance ministries into pastoral responsibilities. Ghanaian liberation theologian Emmanuel Martey, who is now an ardent 'healing and deliverance' practitioner, is one of the main architects of such courses.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Martey is author of *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995). He teaches at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra. Since returning to Ghana from his Ph.D. studies at Union Theological Seminary, USA, Martey has identified very strongly with the 'healing and deliverance' movement.

This chapter examines the praxis and theological implications of the phenomenon of healing and deliverance in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal soteriology. Saliba has suggested that a theological study of new religious movements must also take account of the pastoral concerns that follow in their wake.<sup>3</sup> Healing and deliverance is employed as a form of pastoral care, because it aims at restoring disturbed persons to proper functioning order. Thus in what follows the nature of the healing and deliverance ministry is discussed and its role as a means of pastoral care is also examined. The view taken is that healing and deliverance recovers for Ghanaian Christianity important dimensions of the Christian message of salvation that has everything to do with spiritual and physical well-being. In the Christ event, suffering is treated as evil. Jesus and the apostles, as shown in the quotation from Acts at the head of the chapter, thus spent considerable portions of their ministry dealing with its effects. This has always proved popular in the Ghanaian context because it takes indigenous worldviews seriously by addressing one of the central concerns of religious ritual in Africa, that is, to ward off what the Akan of Ghana express as *honhom fi*, evil spirits, from the affairs of humankind.<sup>4</sup>

*'Healing and Deliverance': Underlying Worldviews*

Healing in the context of our definition relates to the regaining of health through prayer. Prayers for healing may be accompanied by some form of touch or laying on of hands and/or anointing with oil. The cause of sickness may be natural or instigated by sin or evil forces represented ultimately by the devil. The belief that illness may be set in motion by sin is inspired by such biblical texts as James 5:14–16:

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He is now a much sought-after healing and deliverance practitioner. There is no indication in Martey's major publication referred to above that he held these views before his return from the USA. For some of his recent views advocating 'healing and deliverance', see Martey, 'The Importance of Fasting for the Deliverance Ministry', *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* vol. 7, 1 & 2 (1997), 44–55.

<sup>3</sup> John A. Saliba, *Perspectives on New Religious Movements* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 167.

<sup>4</sup> Max Assimeng, *Religion and Social Change in West Africa* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1989), 60.

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

On the basis of this and other passages referred to below, Ghanaian proponents of the healing and deliverance phenomenon generally believe firmly in a causal relationship between sin, the work of demons and sickness. This is why healing is tied to deliverance. Deliverance means more than exorcism, the expulsion of evil spirits. It has to do with freeing people from 'bondage' to sin and Satan. To be 'in bondage' could mean being *possessed* or merely being *oppressed* by evil spirits. In the healing and deliverance hermeneutic, *possession* refers to altered states of consciousness, conditions in which suffering or 'unnatural behaviour' is deemed to be the result of an invasion of the human body by an alien spirit. In that condition the 'executive faculties' of the victim come under the control of the invading spirit or demon. *Oppression* on the other hand refers to suffering or frustrations in life, including insomnia, poor financial management, frequent illness, failure to receive business contracts or even lack of academic progress, all of which may be interpreted as resulting from satanic or demonic activity. Victims of oppression may not necessarily be possessed, although possession and oppression could occur in the same victim. The difference between possession and oppression in healing and deliverance hermeneutic is often illustrated using two incidents in the gospels. The Gadarene demoniac was possessed, for he is described as 'a man with an evil spirit' and his actions were involuntary. Subsequently Jesus actually casts out the evil spirit (Mark 5:1–20). On the other hand the woman with a bent back is described as having 'been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years'. Her infirmity is later attributed to Satan (Luke 13:16). In her case however, the usual signs of uncontrollable behaviour associated with the possessed are absent. The woman's infirmity is thus often cited as a classic case of satanic *oppression* (Luke 13:10–17).

#### *Can Christians be Possessed or Cursed?*

Opinions differ among Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals on whether true Christians can be possessed by demons. The general belief seems to

be that a Christian can be oppressed by demons, but that, because he or she is in Christ, this could easily be dealt with by prayer. There are a significant number of individuals who operate as healing and deliverance practitioners in Ghana. Whereas Ghanaian deliverance evangelists like Esther Ampene and Aaron Vuha believe that weak Christians in particular can be possessed, some Charismatic pastors do not believe that demons can come and take away a person's new identity as a child of God. Whether Christians may be possessed or not, the bottom line in healing and deliverance theology is that demons can exercise considerable influence on the lives and endeavours of people until such lives are brought *fully* under the control of the Spirit. Demonic influence occurs either through being possessed, being oppressed, or in some cases, especially of unbelievers, both. Salvation is thus perceived as 'a package' embracing not just personal conversion or new birth, but also healing and deliverance. According to Evangelist Vuha, after being saved Christians must take steps to ensure that they are also free from curses, otherwise they will continue to be under Satan's control and will not enjoy abundant life. For example, although his clan does not eat pork for traditional religious reasons, Vuha claims to have delivered himself from the curses attendant upon eating pork. He now enjoys it freely without the *fear* of any consequences. Food taboos forbidding specific families to eat meat from their totemic animals are common in Ghana, and breaches of these taboos draw mystical sanctions from the ancestors.

In Ghanaian healing and deliverance discourse, being able to defy traditional gods and taboos is seen as one of the ultimate signs of a delivered and hence empowered Christian. For the individual, deliverance may therefore mean total liberation. A favourite text is Psalm 124:7, 'We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken and we have escaped.' But deliverance has other connotations for believers. It is used in connection with haunted places or spaces considered 'heavy' as a result of the presence of malevolent spirit powers. Consider the following case narrated by Pastor James Saah of the Christian Action Faith Ministries on one of Ghana's many FM stations. A Ghanaian Christian couple were offering their new house for rent, but it was not attracting customers in spite of its 'beauty and strategic location'. Suspecting that the presence of evil powers was driving customers away, the couple contacted Pastor Saah, who, after 'deliverance prayer', anointed the

premises with olive oil. Hours after this ritual, it is claimed, potential tenants came rushing, some even offering to pay more than the asking price.

In healing and deliverance theology, sickness, possession and oppression have one thing in common: they are all perceived as instruments of the devil in denying people, especially believers, the realisation of God's 'fullness' or 'abundance' of life in Jesus Christ. If the radical experience of new birth does not bring fruitfulness and prosperity to the Christian, or the Christian continues to live in fear, then he or she may be under a curse.<sup>5</sup> Derek Prince defines a curse as:

something like a dark shadow or an evil hand from the past—oppressing you, pressing you down, holding you back, tripping you up, and propelling you in a direction you do not really wish to take. It is like a negative atmosphere that surrounds you which seems to be stronger at some times than others but from which you are never totally free.<sup>6</sup>

This is a view shared by the Ghanaian exponents of the ministry of healing and deliverance. One of them, Rev. Fr Kwaku Dua-Agyeman, advises Christians going through 'inexplicable problems' not to console themselves with the idea that 'it is a cross' they are bearing or liken their difficulties to 'Paul's thorn in the flesh'. Initially ordained as an Anglican priest, Dua-Agyeman is the founder of Rhema World Outreach Ministries, based in Kumasi, Ghana. His view is that repeated failure in life, poverty, indebtedness, terminal illness, infertility, failure to secure a suitable spouse and other such conditions do not glorify God in any way. Suffering, he thinks, is at variance with the nature of the God 'who gives us all things to enjoy.'<sup>7</sup> This widely shared view among deliverance experts carefully avoids biblical passages in which suffering is not taken away, but the victims are given grace to endure it. A recent experience at a 'Breakthrough Meeting' for business people at the Christian Action Faith Ministries may serve to illustrate this point. The message for the evening was delivered by a leading member, described as a 'successful businessman'. His message stressed reorganisation, re-planning, and re-channelling of

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<sup>5</sup> So write Frank and Ida Hammond, *The Breaking of Curses* (Plainview, TX: Impact Christian Books, 1993), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Prince, *From Curse to Blessing* (Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Derek Prince Ministries 1986), 16–17.

<sup>7</sup> Kwaku Dua-Agyeman, *Covenant, Curses and Cure* (Kumasi, n.p., 1994), 13.

resources where business concerns were failing. Christian business people had to learn to plan, for, as creation attests, 'God is a master-planner'. When it came to ministration however, the emphasis was different. The 'breakthrough prayers' offered to support people did not focus on 'wisdom' and 'grace' to do what had been suggested, as one would have thought. As participants came forward for prayer, one person's problems were attributed to witchcraft, another's to curses and others' to diverse demonic influences. This came across as signifying a theology struggling to come to terms with inevitable shortfalls in the lives of the born-again. It leaves out of the Christian equation the common experience of the saints listed in Hebrews 11 who demonstrated enduring faith in God amid the pains and uncertainties of life.

*Roots of Healing and Deliverance in Ghana*

As indicated earlier, healing from sickness and deliverance from evil are by no means recent developments in Ghanaian indigenous Pentecostalism. In its current form the influences have come from diverse sources. One of these is the annual 'healing and deliverance workshops' of the Scripture Union Prayer Warriors movement discussed in chapter 4. In recent years the phenomenon has also fed off personalities and publications emerging particularly from North America. North American films like *The Exorcist* that drew crowds in the 1970s served to reinforce Ghanaian traditional notions of the reality of evil spirits and the need for Christians to articulate a response to their destructive powers. One of the leading outside influences has been Derek Prince. Through his visit in 1987 and the continuing availability of his publications, Prince's ideas have had significant influence on the practice of healing and deliverance in Ghana. Healing and deliverance ministries have also been popularised through an Annual Pastors' Prayer Conference instituted by Challenge Enterprises Limited in 1987.<sup>8</sup> The purpose, according to

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<sup>8</sup> The Challenge Enterprises Limited is a parachurch organisation originally set up in 1956 by the Sudan Interior Mission and in 1975 passed to a Ghanaian management. It sells Bibles and other Christian literature, mostly imported from Western Europe and North America, at discounted prices. Challenge Enterprises has outlets throughout Ghana and also runs a film ministry for schools, small towns and villages. They also serve as local agents for the daily Bible reading aids of Radio Bible Class.

the organisers, has been to equip Christian leaders for ministry, focusing on 'prayer and renewal'. In practice however, the emphasis has been on 'healing and deliverance'. Participation in the 'prayer and renewal' conferences is trans-denominational and aims at introducing church leaders and pastors to the dynamics of spiritual warfare. Speakers are normally international personalities renowned for their involvement in the ministry of spiritual warfare. Recent names have included Mark I. Bubeck and Sam Tippit from North America and the Nigerian Charismatic lawyer Emeka Nwankpa.

The prominence of the healing and deliverance phenomenon has also been heightened by the availability of local and foreign publications on the subject. The management of Challenge Enterprises acknowledge that such books are very popular with their Ghanaian customers. In 1988, Nigerian evangelist Emmanuel Eni's *Delivered From the Powers of Darkness*, in which he recounts his involvement with the occult and the spiritual underworld, became a bestseller in Ghana.<sup>9</sup> A number of the pastors of Charismatic churches, including Bishop Matthew Addae-Mensah of Gospel Light International Church, who trained in Nigeria with Archbishop Benson Idahosa, returned from there as strong exponents of the healing and deliverance hermeneutic. Parachurch movements like the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International and Women Aglow also provide the platform for the dissemination of the ministry of healing and deliverance message.

*Healing and Deliverance 'Surgeries': The Lord's Vineyard Ministry*

Within Ghanaian Christianity today, the healing and deliverance phenomenon has spawned several specialised non-church ministries, 'surgeries' as Hunt calls them, which are dedicated to catering for the needs of the troubled. The founders and leaders are recognised for a special anointing granted by the Spirit after dramatic transformations from lives spent in the 'service of Satan'—for example, as Sunsum sorè prophets, traditional priests, priestesses or medicine men. Many claim to have been witches or agents of various water spirits and mysterious forest creatures. Contact with *Maame Wata*, a

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<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Eni, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*, second edition (Ibadan: Scripture Union, 1988).

mermaid and supposed head of the marine spirits with whom satanic covenants are made, is especially prominent in such testimonies. *Maame Wata*, who is portrayed as having a female upper body with the tail of a fish, is often referred to in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal hermeneutic as the 'Queen of the Coast'. She prefers her spirit to be embodied in women. Such women usually display an insatiable greed for worldly goods and entice men with their charming beauty only to bring them to ruin. It is thus not uncommon to find the *Maame Wata* spirit, sometimes cast as the 'spirit of Jezebel' (I Kings 19:2; 21), being cast out of women at deliverance services.

Evangelist Vagalas Kanco, founder of The Lord's Vineyard Ministry based in Accra, is one whose testimony is very much in demand in Ghana. He is widely known as a leading healing and deliverance practitioner. Evangelist Kanco runs his own permanent offices where one daily encounters queues of up to 200 clients waiting for a consultation. In his testimony, Kanco is keen to emphasise his non-Christian background before conversion. He comes from a village named after a god, *Ve*. The god originally belonged to his ancestors, a situation which, according to Kanco, should make anybody a sure candidate for deliverance. The god was famous and people travelled from across the country and beyond to consult it. In traditional religions, as Lewis points out, 'shamanism and spirits are part of the clan patrimony'.<sup>10</sup> Thus Kanco's father became the custodian of *Ve*, and by the age of six Kanco himself had been initiated as one of the agents of the deity. He emphasised in our interview that his mystical powers so increased that by the age of nine he could turn himself into anything from snakes to butterflies to do evil.

Kanco attributes his present status as an evangelist who has all the material things he needs to the grace of God: 'it is grace that has brought me this far.' In Kanco's testimony he emphasises how many people do not understand grace because they grow up under Christian parents: 'many do not understand grace because they were privileged children; you do not understand grace because your physical circumstances have not changed.' To underscore the work of grace in his life, Kanco in a personal testimony contrasts his improv-

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<sup>10</sup> I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, second edition (London: Routledge, 1989), 47.



erished family background with the 'redemptive uplift' that has occurred since he became a liberated Christian:

We lived in one room, eight of us with our parents. All the leftover food, including the dog meat was all kept in that single room. When there was a chicken epidemic, that was when we 'celebrated Christmas'. If the Lord takes me out of such a situation, gives me a nice place to live, a university graduate to marry, a watchman, two house boys, a driver, and my own house, why shouldn't I die for the Lord? Do you see where I am coming from? . . . Who am I? It is just by grace.

Kanco's submission here is aimed at revealing the extreme level of poverty and destitution in his family background. Among most Ghanaians, the eating of dog meat, associated mainly with certain northern tribes, is very much frowned upon. Dog meat is not sold openly in markets and those who eat it are often suspected to have obtained it through poaching other people's pets or pouncing upon stray dogs. The inability of Kanco's family to afford chicken unless there was an epidemic means they were virtually living on contaminated chicken. In other words, it is the grace of God that has promoted him from rags to riches.

Through his mystical activities, Kanco further claims to have had contact with a wide array of spirits including marine spirits. He visited the spiritual underworld where he met *Maame Wata*, the 'Queen of the Coast' herself, together with all the marine demons. The impact of such testimonies on the imagination of the Ghanaian public is very strong. Many Ghanaians have stopped patronising a brand of canned sardine called 'Queen of the Coast' because of its supposed association with the marine spirit *Maame Wata*.

With hindsight, Kanco admits that the result of his supernatural activities was that 'I became heavily demonised and lost all sympathy for the sanctity of human life'. Ghanaian traditions believe in the availability of medicines (*eduro*) and the powers of supernatural forces that can be tapped for success and protection. Such views may perhaps pass as 'anti-modern' in Western thought. But in the Ghanaian context Kanco makes sense when he claims that when he was a medicine man his clients included people who wanted *sikaduro* (*sika* which translates as 'money' is also the Akan expression for gold), that is, medicine for gaining wealth. Those who solicited his services included coaches who wanted their teams to win sporting events. Others were politicians seeking to win or retain power, drug dealers

seeking protection against arrests and chiefs wishing to avoid destoolments. In Kanco's testimony, he also underscores the popular Ghanaian belief that people exchange the lives of close relatives, especially wives and children, for money, influence and power. The result is that such victims go through life as failures, become mad, stupid, academically weak and sexually impotent or even die prematurely. It all depends on what the recipient of the medicine asked to be done to their victims. In some cases actual ritual murders have reportedly taken place in which blood has been shed in the search for money, power and influence. One of the most publicised of such cases was the ritual murder of a nine-year-old boy, Kofi Kyintoh, at Sefwi-Bekwai in Ghana in the late 1980s. The case is now the subject of a local film, *Nkrabea—My Destiny*—which has become a bestseller in the Ghanaian film market.

Medicines or juju provided for clients, according to Kanco, may be an unhygienic mixture:

For all the rich men, chiefs, politicians, businessmen and women, we prepare concoctions for them to drink. Some even involve concoctions prepared from animal faeces and dog vomit. It is the educated who surprise me, they just obey and drink all those filthy things because of money and power.

In other words, people will do anything to gain wealth, power and influence. Accounts of nefarious relationships in popular discourse between diviners, sorcerers, fortune-tellers, medicine-men and the elite, including politicians, are quite popular across Africa.<sup>11</sup> The reference to politicians, chiefs and the rich and powerful among his previous clientele by Kanco is one that would be familiar in Ghanaian perceptions of how such people rise to power and fortune. A popular Ghanaian image of the rich and powerful is one that perceives them as obtaining wealth through evil medicines and other occult means. Such medicines may be lodged in the stomach by eating or drinking. They could be buried in the backyard, garden or farm. Others may have them rubbed into body incisions. They may be worn as waist or neck amulets or kept in bedrooms. In popular Ghanaian imagination, such medicines have a limited life span and

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<sup>11</sup> For a useful study on the resort to juju and diviners by politicians in the search for position and power in Africa, see Rosalind Shaw, 'The Politician and the Diviner: Divination and the Consumption of Power in Sierra Leone', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 26, 1 (1996), pp. 30–55.

may turn round to harm those who go for them. In healing and deliverance hermeneutic, associations with the wrong kind of supernatural powers are also considered to have a wider effect. Families, descendants and nations become vulnerable and susceptible to the influence of demonic powers and curses when leading members employ medicines and the occult for protection.

With regard to his former clients, Kanco's attack on the prophets and prophetesses of Sunsum sorè is particularly vicious. The leaders of 'koliko' churches, as he calls the older independent churches, came for medicine from him for their activities. The choice of the term 'koliko', puppet, in reference to Sunsum sorè is meant to signify that the churches in question manipulate their clients by spiritual means. Because of their perceived proximity to traditional religious practices, particularly in their employment of ritual symbolism, Sunsum sorè rituals are looked upon with suspicion as conduits of demonic intrusion into people's affairs. Such accusations against the Sunsum sorè are fuelled by the introspective confessions of 'converted' prophets who claim to rely on occult powers to attract a following. One such convert is Pastor Cobbinah. He claims that, before he made the transition as a Sunsum sorè prophet to set up the Redeemed Grace Ministries, he used to invoke spirits to help him deal with problems of his members. Pastor Cobbinah claims to have acquired this craft from a Muslim cleric. Muslim clerics in the African popular imagination are considered to be reliable sources of potent medicines for spiritual protection and other accomplishments. His transition therefore, according to Cobbinah, involved deliverance from his previous state as an 'occultic prophet'. Testimonies at healing and deliverance meetings commonly recount similar stories relating to rituals through which people claim to have contracted demons. The various objects employed as aids to healing in the Sunsum sorè are perceived as serving only to initiate 'the ignorant into the waiting hands of Satan' through 'demonic covenants'.<sup>12</sup>

Other evil and satanic activities Kanco claims to have practised include preparing medicines for wives wanting their rivals destroyed, rivals and girlfriends requesting the minds of husbands to be turned against their wives, making people go mad and afflicting people with incurable diseases like epilepsy. Epilepsy in particular, perhaps because it is characterised by fits and seizures, and also because Jesus dealt

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<sup>12</sup> Dua-Agyeman, *Covenant, Curses and Cure*, 3.

with a similar case, is widely held to be a condition instigated by demons (Mark 9:14–27). In addition to all these, Kanco claims he was also a ‘disco bird’, an expression used in reference to excessive clubbing, drunkenness and sexual promiscuity. Evangelist Kanco’s story is resolved in the Lord’s intervention in his life through a dream.

The Lord spoke to me one early Sunday morning. He asked me to get ready for church. Having no prior experience, it was all very confusing. But at 9:00 am on that Sunday morning I felt an invisible hand literally drag me into a nearby Assemblies of God Church. When the Altar Call was made the hand that dragged me to church seemed to just push me to the front. I was suffering and needed help. Eventually I accepted Christ. Jesus revealed himself to me. He spoke forgiveness into my life and promised to *lift* me up.

Evangelist Kanco attributes his present circumstances as a popular evangelist, the many people who have received healing, deliverance and success through his ministry, together with all the material things that God has provided, as testimony to God’s faithfulness and power in his life. He adds, when speaking of this uplifted status: ‘today I smell of the blood, and I have become a blessing to many.’

*Traditional Beliefs, Hermeneutics and Process in Healing and Deliverance*

There is much in the theological principles underlying Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal healing and deliverance that coalesces with African cosmology. We noted in chapters 2 and 3 that generally African traditions answer questions of cause and effect by attributing illness and misfortune to supra-human agents. Akan philosophical thought differentiates between *bonè* (sin), normally used in reference to ‘ordinary’ moral evils, and *mbusu* (mystical evil), both of which have the potential to bring misfortune to the whole community. ‘To remove’ is to *yi*. *Mbusuyi* therefore means ‘deliverance’ and is used in relation to the ‘ritual removal’ of curses, misfortune and sicknesses resulting from sin or breaches of the cosmic order. The philosophy here is not dissimilar to the Old Testament idea of covenant in which a breach or sin endangers the harmonious relations between God, his people and the created order (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 85). Healing and deliverance thus take on added meaning in the Ghanaian context where salvation connotes deliverance from evil and all misfortunes

for an unrestrained enjoyment of material and spiritual prosperity. In spite of this convergence of views, the intention of the practitioners of healing and deliverance is to be biblical rather than African. The Bible is the main point of its appeal. The Bible leaves Christians in no doubt about the destructive powers of Satan and of evil. Testimonies like those of Evangelist Kanco also stress that Satan is defeated through Jesus Christ. Jesus therefore gives authority to his disciples and by extension to all believers 'to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy' (Luke 10:19). In the last chapter we noted that the image of Satan as head of the 'realm of darkness' plays a central role in the process of conversion to, and in the appropriation of, Christianity in Ghana. In the Ghanaian Christian context, the forces of evil include not just Satan and his cohorts the demons, but also witchcraft, sorcery, magic, evil eye, ancestral spirits and traditional deities who may make their presence felt in the lives of people in order to oppress them. For example, Evangelist Vuha tells the story of a young girl called Densuaa whom he ministered to because she was in distress and frequently ill. Apparently the girl's name had come from River Densu in acknowledgement that her birth was made possible by the river deity. The girl's torments were therefore, according to Vuha, the result of the deity claiming possession of her.

In healing and deliverance teaching, it is believed that people become susceptible to the oppression of demons through personal sin, moral failure or ancestral curses. In the words of Evangelist Vuha, 'if your ancestors are cursed, you are cursed until you are delivered.' Since conversion does not automatically release a person from curses and demonic attacks, healing and deliverance are seen as by-products of spiritual warfare as Jesus is perceived to have demonstrated through his ministry. In the healing and deliverance hermeneutic, the demons through whose activity Satan exercises control over lives are fallen angels, thrown down together on the earth with Lucifer as a result of pride (Revelation 12:4, 1-10). The main activity of demons is to 'oppose the work of God', destroy God's people, oppose prayer, fight the saints, and blind people to the truth (Daniel 10:10-13; Romans 8:38; I Peter 5:8; Luke 8:27). Among healing and deliverance exponents, much reference is made to the book of Revelation, especially to verses like 12:12, 'But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.' However Christians,

especially Pentecostals, it is believed, have the power to resist Satan because Jesus has destroyed his works and rendered him powerless. Having triumphed over Satan and the demons, Jesus has delegated authority to believers by empowering them (Colossians 2:15).

### *Signs of Demonic Influence*

The need for deliverance in the lives of those who 'are held captive' is supposed to manifest itself through *patterns* of frustration and repeated failure in personal, immediate or extended family life. Some of the problems people recount for seeking deliverance are driven by typically African views of the world. Consider the case of young women who fail to secure spouses, or employees who fail to gain their boss's favour. It is widely believed in Ghana that witches in particular could erase a person's 'aura', translated in popular discourse as *anuonyam*, that is 'glory'. When that happens, a victim falls out of favour with others, and, unless such an aura or glory is retrieved, in this case through deliverance, no success can be achieved in the search for a husband, a job or promotion at work. Similarly ancestral spirits manifesting themselves as demons could 'marry people spiritually' as a result of which the spouses may be rendered impotent if they are men or fail to conceive or sustain a stable marital relationship if women. A number of women encountered at The Lord's Vineyard deliverance sessions were either looking for children or answers to repeated miscarriages, problems which in a Western context would normally be taken to a gynaecologist. Others relate to the stresses of coping with the demands of modernity, such as academic achievements as a route to success. So frustrations for which God's intervention is sought may include anything from physical ailments to failure in school examinations.

In the Ghanaian context as in Africa generally, the duration of an ailment and any resistance to medication are critical in interpretation, and hence determine the choice of therapeutic action. The passage of time is important in the causal explanation of disease. Feierman has argued that misfortunes which may initially be interpreted as 'naturally caused' may later be attributed to mystical sources.<sup>13</sup> This theory coheres with that underlying diagnosis in heal-

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Feierman, 'Struggles for Control: The Social Roots of Health and Healing in Modern Africa', *African Studies Review*, vol. 28, 2/3 (1985), 77.

ing and deliverance situations discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Evangelist Esther Ampene corroborates Kanco's teaching that, when several problems are present or when a particular one recurs repeatedly, the likelihood is that there is a curse in operation. The patterns of frustration according to exponents may be evident in one's business, professional career, relationships, financial affairs or health. Other signs of demonic influence include losing or gaining possessions mysteriously, delayed promotions at work for no reason, being prone to accidents, premature deaths in a family, being disabled, hearing voices, haunted houses, having nightmares, dreams of sexual intercourse, persistent indebtedness and poverty. Addictions and personality disorders are all believed to be mystically caused. Among these, gambling, drunkenness, homosexuality and lesbianism, masturbation, nymphomania, kleptomania and other psychosomatic problems are all in healing and deliverance discourse signs of demonic activity. In other words demons exploit and eventually dominate a person's life through the distorted ways of living like those listed by Paul in passages like Romans 12:11–14.

Moral lapses by Christians will often be interpreted as being caused by demons. Although this encourages the believer to struggle for moral control, it tends to play down personal will and freedom of choice and consequent responsibility that, for instance, Judas was expected to acknowledge for his betrayal of Christ. In the healing and deliverance ministries, demons are seen as also being responsible for people's negative emotions. The interpretation of sins and addictions as 'pathological conditions' are, however, not alien to the traditional Ghanaian view in which promiscuity and addiction to alcohol may be interpreted as demonic affliction. Alcoholism in particular is often interpreted in popular Ghanaian discourse as being caused by a mystical 'pot' placed in the victim's stomach and serving as a receptacle for the alcohol. As the 'pot' is mystical, the alcohol never reaches the brim. In the healing and deliverance worldview, all those deliberate acts seen as sin in the Christian context, and listed by Paul as 'works of the flesh', persist in the Christian's life as instruments of demonic oppression. According to Fr Dua-Agyeman, if a Christian has persistent moral failures, it means 'you are harbouring a "stranger" in your house'.<sup>14</sup> That stranger is the devil. It

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<sup>14</sup> Kwaku Dua-Agyeman, *Doorways to Demonic Bondage* (Kumasi: Payless Printing Press, 1994), 3.

is those who overcome who may benefit from the privileges of well-being that believers are entitled to. Altogether such moral failures are believed to be signs of curses in peoples' lives. They are issues that must be reversed through deliverance because they do not testify to God's goodness. In taking such a strong stance of morality, advocates of healing and deliverance articulate a response to the moral relativism found in modern Western thought and what is seen as compromised ethical standards among members of traditional mission churches.

### *Territorial Spirits*

The symptoms of demonic oppression are not restricted to individuals and families. Satanic forces are also believed to hold power over specific geographical areas. The books of former Fuller Theological Seminary professor Peter Wagner have contributed immensely in exposing this idea of 'territorial spirits' in African Christianity. The principal biblical reference to the existence of such spirits is Daniel 10, where the impression is given that demonic spirits influence the affairs of nations. Their oppressive influence is observable in national economies like those of African countries where socio-economic, moral and political problems are explicable in terms of their activities. A leading local exponent of this 'collective bondage' theory is Nigerian Charismatic lawyer Emeka Nwankpa, whose book *Redeeming the Land* is available in Ghana. Nwankpa interprets I John 5:19, 'the whole world is under the control of the evil one', to mean that Satan has expanded his hold over the earth by deploying his principalities and powers in the world. In so doing, Satan is supposed to have strengthened his hold over families, communities, cities and in particular African nations.<sup>15</sup> When demons have such a tight grip on the affairs of nations as a result of defilement through idolatry and moral perversion, the land 'vomits out its inhabitants' and so Africa's sons and daughters have become economic migrants in other countries.<sup>16</sup>

The suggestion is that countries stay poor not because of structural injustice or bad governance but because of a 'spirit of poverty' visited upon nations by demons. Thus topics on a flyer inviting all

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<sup>15</sup> Emeka Nwankpa, *Redeeming the Land: Interceding for the Nations* (Achimota, Ghana: African Christian Press 1994), 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, 85, 100.



Christians to a prayer vigil for Ghana included prayer for ‘any threat to God’s agenda for this nation [Ghana]’. African countries are considered particularly vulnerable to the influence of demons and curses because of the performance of rites and rituals associated with traditional religion. Many neo-Pentecostals have subsequently called on the government of Ghana to abolish the traditional practice of pouring libations during state functions. Ghana’s socio-economic difficulties, according to this theory, could only be reversed through some sort of national deliverance. It is notable that these views are held not only at the popular level, but also by some leading academics who identify with certain strands of neo-Pentecostal belief. Thus Nigerian theologian Chris Oshun argues that Nigeria’s present difficulties, and indeed those of African nations generally, are explicable in terms of the activities of evil powers. He thus strongly advocates what he calls a ‘power-approach’ to resolving his country’s socio-economic problems: it is only by countering ‘the powers and principalities’ through the power of the gospel and the employment of such ‘spiritual ammunition’ as fasting and prayer that Nigeria may receive the needed healing.<sup>17</sup>

### *Demonic Doorways*

Individuals, families, communities and nations come under the influence of evil powers through what are referred to as ‘demonic doorways’. ‘Demonic doorway’ is a term for areas of moral vulnerability that open doors to demons—or ‘spiritual gate-crashers’ as one author calls them.<sup>18</sup> Reference has already been made to curses, which according to healing and deliverance exponents are a major demonic doorway. Curses, it is believed, become operative when people live in disobedience to God’s word (Deuteronomy 27 and 28) or they may be pronounced by others upon people who have wronged the one pronouncing the curse. Curses can also take effect through ‘negative confessions’, as when people talk about poverty or death in relation to themselves even when they do not mean such statements. Those who bury medicines on their properties also risk exposing

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<sup>17</sup> Chris O. Oshun, ‘Spirits and Healing in a Depressed Economy: The Case of Nigeria’, *Mission Studies*, vol. 25–1, 29 (1998), 32–52.

<sup>18</sup> John Richards, *But Deliver Us from Evil: An Introduction to the Demonic Dimension in Pastoral Care* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 130.

such spaces to spirits who afflict them and subsequent occupants. Exponents of healing and deliverance also teach that there are 'seven demonic entry points' on the human body, referring to the body's orifices. This is how Evangelist Kanco interprets Jesus' discourse in Matthew 12:43–45. The fact that a demon previously cast out could return with 'other spirits more wicked than himself' if the victim's life remains empty, means that 'there are doors and windows through which demons either come in or go out'. Thus a person may be 'demonised' through the eyes by watching traditional rituals or even sexual scenes in movies and, in the case of children, violent TV cartoons. According to Evangelist Vuha the demonic nature of TV cartoons in the West has led to the increasingly violent disposition of children. Demons may enter through the nose when people breathe in unholy places like discos, and through the ears by listening to gossip. Listening to worldly music also 'pollutes the anointing of the believer' and gossip may kindle the 'spirit of anger'. Demons, according to Kanco, can come through the mouth and so people must not only avoid hard drugs, but are also warned to look out for what Evangelist Vuha described to me as 'spiritually contaminated' food and drink. Demonisation may occur through pores in the skin when one uses 'unholy pomade and deodorants' or medicines through bodily incisions. Demons may be introduced into the body when people inject herbal preparations through the rectum (enema). Finally the sexual organs also serve as entry points for demons through rape, adultery, fornication, masturbation and incest. In effect Christians are advised to avoid any substance, relationship, attitude or company that has the potential to make them easy victims of 'external spiritual aggression'. In healing and deliverance terminology, these 'demonic doorways' provide demons with the 'legal right' to intrude upon one's life and circumstances.<sup>19</sup>

The list of doorways is very long and covers a wide range of areas. We noted in the last chapter that the rigorous ethics of the indigenous Pentecostal movement help members to cope with the moral relativism of modern society. The problem with this extensive list of demonic doorways is that it becomes almost impossible to think of any area of life that is not controlled by demons in one way or another. The exegesis on which the hermeneutics is based

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<sup>19</sup> Dua-Agyeman, *Covenant, Curses and Cure*, 5.

is also in many cases either arbitrary or forced. The plain meaning of the Matthean passage cited by Kanco seems to be that it is not sufficient for a person to be liberated from demonic control, but that such persons must submit to the power of God, otherwise they stand the risk of falling prey to greater evils. That the healing and deliverance exponents appreciate this meaning is evident in the emphasis on Bible study, fellowship and prayer recommended for those who have been delivered. The references to 'seven demonic entry points' seems too far removed from the meaning of the passage. There may be a case for exercising caution concerning children watching television programmes that portray unrealistic images of life and have the potential for instigating anti-social behaviour.<sup>20</sup> However, there is simply no evidence to support the fact that by merely watching traditional festivals or TV cartoons people become vulnerable to demonic influence. C.S. Lewis writes that there are two errors into which people can fall concerning devils: 'One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.' He adds that the devils are equally pleased by both errors.<sup>21</sup> In the hermeneutics and praxis of healing and deliverance experts, the devil and demons seem to wield so much power and their influence is so diffused that it is impossible to be conscious of their presence and live a life devoid of fear and insecurity.

Demonic doorways include involvement with astrology, palmistry, magic, Ouija boards and sorcery. Alternative medicines like acupuncture are also believed to serve as demonic doorways. They may also be created 'deliberately' by participating in traditional rites of passage, Lodge fraternities or Oriental religions. Non-Christian religions are considered 'the abode of evil spirits' and therefore anyone associating with 'any religion apart from the one prescribed by God, puts himself under a curse'.<sup>22</sup> The situation with regard to non-Christian religions was touched on in the last chapter. Within the

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<sup>20</sup> A Birmingham newspaper reported that 17 American TV stations have taken a decision to boycott a cartoon series *God, the Devil and Bob*. The series allegedly depicts God as 'a beer-swilling hippy', and 'an ageing baby boomer' who enjoys a pint and sports sunglasses. Groups said to be campaigning against the series include the American Family Association who among others are complaining against episodes featuring dance nights in hell. *Birmingham Metro*, Monday, March 20, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, revised edition (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Ancestral Curses* (Accra: Pentecost Press, 1994), 8.

context of healing and deliverance one would like to add that it is part of the pastoral responsibility of the church to provide positive guidance to its members concerning the dangers of the occult and secret societies. For, as Paul counsels, 'there are deceiving spirits in the world and teachings which come from demons'. Elsewhere he warns against worshipping idols or participating in pagan sacrifices that he says are offered to demons (I Timothy 4:1–2; I Corinthians 10:20–21). The experiential nature of Pentecostalism and the centrality of Jesus Christ as God's ultimate revelation for the salvation of humankind give the movement a unique identity. Given that a number of their converts have come from other religions and cults, it may be unrealistic to expect Ghanaian Pentecostals to pursue an inclusive approach to mission in which the Holy Spirit is seen as active in non-Christian faiths.<sup>23</sup> However religious pluralism, as has been noted, is also an inevitable part of life and many Ghanaians belong to religiously pluralistic families. Consigning all non-Christian religions to the realm of Satan may thus smack of pastoral insensitivity. Instead of the extreme intolerance, the course of Christ may be best served if people from other faiths are evangelised by first seeing them as human beings also created in God's image and thus showing them love as Jesus recommended (Luke 6:27–28).

Another popular demonic doorway is what is referred to as ancestral curses or 'generational sins'. This is often explained by reference to the Jews shouting at the trial of Jesus for his blood to be upon them and their children (Matthew 27:24–26). According to Evangelist Vuha, if your ancestors are cursed, you inherit that curse and that is why Israel has not known peace since the crucifixion. The issue of generational sins is vigorously maintained, regardless of the rebuttal by Ezekiel (18:2) of the proverb 'The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge'. The possibility of inheriting one's ancestral curses may appear awkward and ambiguous in some Western contexts, as Csordas points out.<sup>24</sup> In Africa, however, traditional 'shrine slavery', *Trokosi* (Ghana) and *Osu* (Nigeria),

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<sup>23</sup> Advocates of the inclusive approach include Jean-Jacques Suurmond, *Word and Spirit at Play: Towards a Charismatic Theology* (London: SCM, 1994), 198–203; Amos Yong, "'Not Knowing Where the Wind Blows?': On Envisioning a Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology of Religions', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Issue 14 (April 1999), 81–112.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 43.

practices which compel young girls to be betrothed as vestal virgins to traditional shrines to atone or serve for the transgressions of family members, illustrates the strong belief in the effects of genealogical sin. In the healing and deliverance context, it is not stated how long curses are supposed to last down the generations. Cases also abound of the spirits of dead ancestors confessing to being the source of affliction of living relations. Archbishop Milingo narrates the case of a sixteen-year-old girl who was possessed by the spirit of a dead grandmother after whom she had been named. The victim had intended to be a nun but, fearing that she might thereby drop her name, the spirit of the grandmother possessed the girl in order to prevent her entering a convent.<sup>25</sup> It is often not clear to ministers whether the possessing spirits are who they claim to be or are demons assuming the identity of deceased persons.<sup>26</sup> In dealing with such situations, therefore, it may be wiser for ministers to treat each case on its own merit rather than interpret every problem in terms of demonic activity or ancestral curse.

#### *Diagnoses in Healing and Deliverance*

In the established deliverance ministries, a confidential personal profile of clients is compiled through a questionnaire, as part of the process of diagnosis. All clients at Evangelist Kanco's deliverance sessions are required to complete this questionnaire. In addition to personal details, clients are required to state whether they have been born again and baptised in the Holy Spirit. Clients are further expected to 'answer truthfully' whether they or their parents have ever associated with any churches in the Sunsum sorè category or Lodges and if so whether any objects have been obtained from these places. Clients must disclose traditional herbalists visited, what serious illnesses they have suffered in life and whether they come from a traditional royal family or have been given stool names. Under personal characteristics, clients must declare any traces of anger, phobias, sexual perversions such as masturbation, homosexuality or lesbianism.

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<sup>25</sup> Emmanuel Milingo, *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for Spiritual Survival* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1984), 39–41.

<sup>26</sup> Milingo does not discount the possibility of demons assuming the identity of deceased relatives. *Ibid.*, 41.

Experiences of suicidal thoughts, proneness to unnecessary laughter, worry, weeping, restlessness and addictions such as to alcohol, hard drugs and tobacco must all be declared. They must disclose experiences relating to abnormal phenomena like hallucinations, loss of personal rings, money or other property through inexplicable circumstances. Abortions done, sexual abuses suffered, nightmares, especially sexual intercourse during dreams, must be stated. Finally provision is made for clients briefly to outline their medical history and the current problems from which they seek healing and deliverance. In view of the detailed nature of the questions, it is unlikely, if all were to 'answer truthfully' as requested, that anyone could escape being delivered from a demon of some sort.

The 'deliverance questionnaire' sometimes requires undertaking research into one's ancestral history. Evangelist Kanco mentioned how, in many stubborn cases, he has had to despatch some of his assistants to the home towns of victims in order to trace sources of oppression in their background. The aim of such investigation is to help practitioners determine possible doorways through which people are being oppressed through the bloodline. Names are considered particularly important as sources of demonic oppression. In the African traditional context, children may be named after ancestors or even after deities through whose intervention mothers may have given birth. In deliverance teaching, this traditional practice is considered unacceptable, as it is thought that such names grant dead relatives a foothold in the lives of their living relations. Evangelist Kanco tells the story of a woman called Fraenyiwa who came to see him about what seemed like partial blindness. The name Fraenyiwa is made up of two Akan words, *fra*, meaning 'cover' as in covering oneself with a cloth but also used in relation to blindness and *enyiwa*, eyes. This according to Kanco was the source of the problem. Investigations revealed that the woman was named after her grandmother who went blind at 32 years of age. Fraenyiwa's mother, it was discovered, also went blind quite early in life. According to Kanco, when this client was taken through deliverance he decided to change her name, as normally happens in such cases. At the pronunciation of the new name, 'Fraenyiwa's eyes began to stream with some liquid', and that was the end of her impaired vision. The problem with such stories is that they fail to account for the many individuals who bear similar ancestral or 'pagan' names but who continue to function as sincere Christians. One such found in the Bible is

Epaphroditus, whose name embodied that of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite.<sup>27</sup> Yet Epaphroditus appears in the epistles as ‘co-worker’ and ‘fellow soldier of Paul the Apostle’ (Philippians 2:25; 4:18). In our own day, many such persons who may not even be Christians are successful in life without having themselves delivered.

The need for deliverance may be evident through what evil spirits are doing in a person’s life. Diagnosis may also occur through ‘word of knowledge’, prophecy or discernment granted by the Holy Spirit. In traditional spirit possession, the personalities of deities often provide the clues that determine the behaviour of the possessed person. Similarly a patient may in the process of deliverance writhe on the floor and that would be suggestive of a ‘serpentine spirit’ at work. The orifices of the body, as noted above, also serve as exit points for demons. Manifestations of demonic oppression and signs of successful deliverance include tangible signs like screaming, yawning, coughing, belching, heavy sneezes, excretion of faeces, crying, heavy sweating and vomiting. Interpretations regarding types of spirit associated with such manifestations are fairly standard. Loud cries and high pitched screams are often interpreted as spirits of witchcraft and wriggling like a fish out of water is indicative of a *Maame Wata* spirit.

#### *The Process of Healing and Deliverance*

Mature Christians, it is thought, can deliver themselves through what is expressed as ‘self-ministration’, a process that includes denouncing the demon through prayer and anointing oneself with olive oil. Most people, however, need to see an expert. The answers to the questions constitute the first major step in determining the cause of one’s afflictions. In the process of deliverance, spirits are domesticated through the ritual process of ‘binding’ them and then with loud commanding words of authority and adjuration they are cast out. An instance goes thus: ‘spirit of (anger, suicide, prostitution, envy, masturbation, etc.), we come against you in the name of Jesus—Out! Out! Out! We despatch you to “the bottom of the sea” [some may even be dispatched to the Sahara], loose him/her in the Name

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<sup>27</sup> F. Graf, ‘Aphrodite’, in Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Pieter W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 118–125.

of Jesus.’ The *authority* to dispatch the evil spirit is understood to derive from the Lord and successful deliverance depends very much on the practitioner’s anointing. Those who neglect prayerful preparation and the required moral uprightness risk the experience of the ‘sons of Sceva’ who were humiliated by evil spirits for underestimating their power (Acts 19:13–16).

After varying periods of preparing the candidates for deliverance, the actual process may take place either in the context of a deliverance service or in a selected place with the ‘ministers’ and candidates. The process itself includes the confession of sins by the candidate and the renunciation and breaking of all covenants. In relation to non-Christian associations and the occult, two minimal requirements are expected for deliverance to be successful. First candidates must verbally renounce any previous involvement with other religions and the occult. In the case of ancestral relations, all ‘bondages’ require verbal severance. Second there must be a symbolic renunciation through the burning of all emblems, books and materials associated with membership of such associations. The burning of religious paraphernalia and other apotropaic substances associated with non-Christian religions and cults is a common occurrence at Evangelist Kanco’s deliverance sessions. In all cases, such acts are seen as standing in continuity with the events of Acts 19 and considered the apotheosis of conversion. This includes renouncing all claims that Satan or demons may have on the candidates or their affairs through idol worship, involvement in traditional rites of passage and chieftaincy rituals, and curses under which one may have come albeit involuntarily as a result of belonging to particular clans and tribes. Experts like Evangelists Vuha and Kanco insist that the victim must always be led through the process of accepting Christ and confessing him as Lord before deliverance takes place. The sessions conclude with the ‘minister’ taking authority ‘in the name and blood of Jesus’ to bind and cast out all forces and cancel sources of demonic influence depending on what was stated on the questionnaire. In well-established deliverance centres like Evangelist Kanco’s, freed victims are taken through about six weeks of teaching to establish them in the Christian faith. This is to ensure that ‘the house’ is not empty, otherwise as Jesus said, demons previously cast out will bring others to worsen a person’s plight. The sessions include teachings on how to undertake self-deliverance, Holy Ghost baptism, gifts of the Spirit and family life.



*Salvation, Evil, and Healing and Deliverance Theology*

In considering the contribution of the Sunsum sorè to Ghanaian Christianity, reference was made to the importance of the 'primary intentions' of innovators as providing the clue to understanding the religious creativity underlying such movements. The extent to which healing and deliverance functionaries are willing to go in order to deal with misfortune and calamity, we have noted, betrays a struggle to come to terms with theodicy, that is, 'the difficulty of defending the justice and righteousness of God in face of the existence of evil and suffering' in the world.<sup>28</sup> In spite of the obvious questions it raises in that direction, it is not intended to debate the issue of theodicy here. Nevertheless it is pertinent to point out that one of the major difficulties with the healing and deliverance theology is its inability to come to terms with the mysterious nature of God in the search for solutions to pastoral problems. God's mysterious nature comes out in the experience of Job and such thoughts as expressed through the Prophet Isaiah: 'my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways' (Isaiah 55:8). In other words, in as much as God promises to deal with humankind's difficulties, there are still things allowed by God that may be beyond human comprehension. In the face of its popularity in Ghanaian Christianity, the issue we seek to address here is what healing and deliverance teaches about the theological and pastoral orientation of Ghana's neo-Pentecostal movement.

First, among indigenous Pentecostals there is general agreement that the phenomenon, despite its controversial aspects, stands in continuity with the mission of Jesus to deliver humankind from evil (Luke 4:18–19). The aggregate meaning of the various biblical expressions for evil, *raah* in Hebrew and *kakos* or *poneros* in Greek, is that which is bad and potentially distorts and destroys the meaning of life by alienating humankind from God.<sup>29</sup> Christian salvation thus encapsulates the biblical shalom, 'the presence in a person, or a relationship of all that needs to be there': healing from sickness, deliverance from demonic possession, freedom from servitude to sin and

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<sup>28</sup> John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in the Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 81.

<sup>29</sup> Hans Schwarz, *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 42.

redemption from the ultimate power of death.<sup>30</sup> This inclusive soteriology, we have noted, is shared by the Ghanaian traditional philosophy of health and wholeness. A turning point in the power of evil is inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus Christ who disarmed the powers and authorities and 'made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Colossians 2:15). Healing and deliverance within the Christian context thus actualises in the lives of beneficiaries the power that God exerted in the resurrection of Christ and the giving of the Spirit. St Paul could therefore point to his ministry as not lacking in spiritual power, and it was so, according to him, that the faith of the Corinthians might not rest on human wisdom, 'but on God's power' (I Corinthians 2:5). This recovery of the healing and deliverance ministry is therefore an important dimension of the renewal that neo-Pentecostals seek for Ghanaian Christianity. One way of reading such testimonies as Evangelist Kanco's, therefore, is to reach beyond that which may be considered debatable and unverifiable details and see them as conceptions of 'power encounter' between the salvific might of God and the principalities, powers and moral evils that the Bible speaks about. However, what one does not find with the ministry of Jesus is the unhealthy obsession with the demonic that seems to characterise sections of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism. The strong dualistic theology that undergirds the ministry of healing and deliverance is generally difficult to sustain from a biblical viewpoint. One must not underestimate the demonic and destructive effects of negative emotions like lust and anger on human existence and well-being. Nevertheless the uncritical references to such negative emotions, and to conditions like infertility, as always driven by evil spirits, the attempts to bind or pray against a 'spirit of sleep' in those who doze in church, often seem too far-fetched. Healing and deliverance form only an *aspect* of Jesus' ministry and not the whole of it. Such 'pandemonism' in which demonic spirits are located everywhere also tends to ignore practical solutions to practical problems. For salvation to be properly holistic, it must include deliverance not only from servitude to sin and demonic possession and oppression, but also from the fear and fascination with

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<sup>30</sup> For this meaning of shalom, see F. Martin, 'Healing, Gift of', in Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, sixth printing with corrections (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 350.

demons in which many Ghanaian Christians seem to be trapped. In our view, the healing and deliverance phenomenon itself stands in need of deliverance from 'the spirit of fear' and of mistrust of others. Christians who live their lives in perpetual fear of demons need to be reminded that God's 'rescue-mission' in Christ is to 'enable us to serve him without fear' (Luke 1:74).

Second, healing and deliverance theories reveal the extent to which Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals may be counted among the 'malcontents of modernity'. In spite of the perception of material prosperity as a sign of God's blessing, neo-Pentecostals are in the same breath not at home with some modern values and lifestyles. Modern Western society sometimes pursues religious neutrality by refusing to categorise moral deviations as 'sin'. Through the healing and deliverance hermeneutic, Ghanaian Pentecostals take a different approach by treating sin as a serious barrier between God and his creation for which there exist consequences. In other words, if people or society fail to acknowledge and deal with sin, they are held back in life with God and the results are war, pain, suffering and death. For as Paul puts it, 'the wrath of God is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness' (Romans 1:18). Participation in Christ through salvation and bringing life under the control of his Spirit in the understanding of healing and deliverance theology helps people find new strength to deal with moral failure, moral guilt and the sense of moral impotence. This reinforces the position that through salvation Christians are called to be spiritually, morally and ethically distinct.

Healing and deliverance discourse also views aspects of modern global economies and society as infiltrated by evil powers. So, as people empowered by the Spirit, Pentecostals teach their members how to stay away from contamination or to 'exorcise' modern goods, enabling their consumption without harm.<sup>31</sup> Reference has already been made above to similar attitudes displayed towards traditional food taboos. The perceived mystical danger associated with commodities is a modern translation of how the phenomenon of witchcraft is believed to be transmitted in traditional African society. So

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<sup>31</sup> For a useful discussion within a social scientific context see Birgit Meyer, 'Commodities and Power of Prayer: Pentecostalist Attitudes Towards Consumption in Contemporary Ghana', *Development and Change*, vol. 29 (1998), 751-776.

Meyer may be right in cautioning against dismissing such Pentecostalist discourse on consumption 'as a product of fantasy which blurs the boundary between people and things'.<sup>32</sup> Witchcraft, it is believed, could be lodged in and therefore passed on through gifts or commodities purchased from 'strangers'. Traditionally, African villages tended to be small communities in which people were not only acquainted with their neighbours, but were often related to one another. The market place where large crowds are encountered has always been perceived in African societies as a 'dangerous place', because crowds may be easily infiltrated by invisible evil spirits embodied in human beings. Purchases could inadvertently be made from market women who may not be human at all, but witches and ghosts whose commodities may be conduits for curses and witchcraft. This explains why clients for deliverance are expected to disclose whether they have received 'strange objects' from unknown persons or had sexual contact with someone whose identity remains a mystery to them. Most importantly, Ghanaian Christians are aware of actual stories regarding recourse by some Western multinationals to what they may regard as 'satanic' sources to enhance attraction for their goods. In 1999 the Church of England criticised a men's fragrance company for hiring a Voodoo priest 'to cast a virility spell over its latest product range'. Among these was a Lynx deodorant actually named 'Voodoo' and now on sale in many shops in Britain. The concern of the Church of England bishops remained just that.<sup>33</sup> These occurrences explain in part Evangelist Kanco's references to 'unholy pomade and deodorants' as introducing demons through skin pores. Such enchanted commodities may be considered harmless by Western consumers. For many Ghanaian Christians however, these commodities may be seen as instruments of the devil for the manipulation and perversion of society, as alienating people from God and ruining the lives of the spiritually weak.

As a response to modernity, healing and deliverance also help Ghanaian Christians to cope with issues that the modern West has either come to accept as alternative lifestyles or in some cases struggles to find answers to. The difficulty in dealing with some of these

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 767.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Gleeson, 'Church Upset by Voodoo for Lovers', *The Times* (11 February 1999).

issues through legislation in modern democratic societies renders reasonable the prayerful response that Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals adopt towards problems like the infiltration of violence into society through TV films and cartoons. In the West, there is evidence to suggest a correlation between violent video games and children who have become killers.<sup>34</sup> Other examples of difficult issues include the use of hard drugs, homosexuality and lesbianism, paedophilia, irresponsible use of guns and the legalisation of abortion. The legalisation of abortion in particular and the provision of contraceptives for teenagers are seen by Pentecostals as the tacit promotion of extra-marital sexual relations that is against Christian morality. Western governments are being forced to come out with shortcuts to problems that society would rather not address. The things considered evil and bound to sin are, therefore, considered by believers in healing and deliverance to be instigated by demonic powers for which the most effective response is God's intervention. The resurgence of new religious movements that are drawing many young people searching for meaning into their fold has also left many parents in the West perplexed.<sup>35</sup> The anti-supernaturalism attendant upon modernity seems to apply only to the extent that the supernatural has been marginalised in public space and discourse. Complaints regarding haunted homes and consultations with 'faith healers' are rife among many Westerners. Apart from a few, often under-resourced, government initiatives, Ghana has no facilities for dealing effectively with addictions to gambling and alcohol, or even adequate scientific facilities for diagnosing and treating common psychiatric disorders, phobias, obsessive compulsive behaviour and other pathological conditions as are available in the West. These are the problems that the deliverance questionnaires are aimed at diagnosing and responding to by prayer. By taking such a strong stance against such matters as masturbation, extra-marital sex and drug abuse, neo-Pentecostals recognise

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<sup>34</sup> Television programme, 'Video Nasties: Violent Video Games are Turning Children into Killers', UK Channel 4, 3 March 2000.

<sup>35</sup> This is evidenced in the setting up of INFORM (Information Network Focus on Religious Movements) in Great Britain. This organisation set up with government support and headed by Eileen Barker, an expert in new movements, 'came into being as the result of a conviction that a great deal of unnecessary suffering has resulted from ignorance of the nature and characteristics of the current wave of new religious movements in the West'. Eileen Barker, *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (London: HMSO, 1989), vii.

the need for divine intervention and therefore through deliverance endeavour to heal society of some of its major anxieties. In other words, beyond personal wills, there is a supernatural dimension to life that must not be taken for granted. Through healing and deliverance Christians are taught to look beyond their limited human capacities and depend on the Holy Spirit to overcome psychological disorders and to protect them against the witches and the evil influences present in traditional imagination and finding expression in modern ways of life.

Third, we want to consider the relationship between sin, the demonic and suffering. Whether viewed from the traditional or biblical viewpoints, the uncompromising link between sin or demons and suffering cannot be fully sustained. James 5:14–16, which was cited as one of the key passages informing the healing and deliverance worldview, suggests some correlation between sin and sickness. According to this text, in addition to the restoration of health following prayer and anointing, the sick person will receive forgiveness if required. According to John C. Thomas, the clause, ‘if he has sinned’ in verse 15 indicates that, while sin may very well be the cause of sickness, sin is not always the reason for it.<sup>36</sup> The Old Testament in several instances identifies God as the source of his people’s affliction (Leviticus 26:16; Numbers 12:9–10; II Kings 5:27; II Chronicles 21:14–15; Psalm 38). In the covenant relationship, God’s blessings of fertility, longevity, rain and increase are withheld from his people on account of sin. The offences of the individual and of the people trigger curses in the form of the withdrawal of Yahweh’s protective presence. Thus, while not disputing the connection between sin and sickness, it may be argued that not all illnesses may be attributed to sin nor, for that matter, to demons.

The evidence from the ministry of Jesus and Pauline thought supports this conclusion. Thus Paul, for instance, suggests that sickness, and possibly death, may be employed as a disciplinary or pedagogical tool by God following inappropriate approach to the Lord’s Table (I Corinthians 11:27–34). It is only in the discourse on Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ that he seems to attribute illness to the devil (II Corinthians 12:7–10). A similar passage suggestive of a correlation

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<sup>36</sup> John C. Thomas, *The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 31.

between sin and affliction is Jesus' final admonition to the cripple he healed at the pool of Bethesda. Jesus told the man that unless he stopped sinning 'something worse' than his previous condition could come upon him (John 5:14). This link between sin and suffering is also implied in the disciples' inquiry about the man who was born blind (John 9:3). Jesus does not deny the possibility of suffering being caused either by personal or parental misdemeanours, but, in this particular instance, it was neither. The victim was said to have been afflicted with blindness so that 'the work of God might be displayed in his life' (John 9:3). This and other discourses discount an uncritical cause-and-effect relationship in suffering (Luke 13:1-5).

On other occasions, such as in the cases of the Gadarene demoniac and the woman with the 18-year-old infirmity, the activities of Satan or demons are cited as the cause of affliction (Mark 5:15; Luke 13:16). So suffering could be the work of demons, but at other times suffering serves God's purposes. An instance of the latter is Paul's thorn in the flesh that was permitted as a check against pride. Paul prayed about his condition as we learn from the passage and he received an answer from the Lord. This is an answer which, as Thomas rightly points out, made an enduring impression on the apostle because he was assured of the *continuous* availability and sufficiency of God's grace, 'so that nothing, not even the thorn, will cause him to cease from his ministry'.<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere Paul can write that nothing shall separate the Christian from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:35-39). The grace of the Lord thus comes in order to help Paul and other believers cope in the face of demonic onslaughts, infirmities and weaknesses. Such a line of thought is not unknown in the Psalms. In Psalm 73, the Psalmist laments the prosperity of the wicked that had driven him to envy and clouded the meaning of God's justice. The Psalmist's own righteousness had not brought the needed returns in God's favour and blessing: 'Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence' (v. 13). After much confusion in his mind about the justice of God, the complainant comes to a sudden assurance not unlike Paul's experience: 'My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever' (v. 26).

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 71.

The discourse reveals something of the nature of God which one finds absent in the healing and deliverance hermeneutic. It is that human infirmities, weaknesses, illnesses and pain may be instruments for the manifestation of God's glory. It is a fact of human experience that unpleasant situations including ill health, poverty, business failure, finances, economies and so on do not always get better. The ultimate example of this is the event of death. In such instances the *will* of God becomes paramount for the Christian. In Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal theology, as will be noted also with prosperity theology in the next chapter, there does not seem to be much provision for 'God's will' as far as calamity is concerned. As a result the search for healing and deliverance continues relentlessly leading to what Hunt refers to as a 'deliverance fix'.<sup>38</sup> Individuals and their agents move relentlessly from one practitioner to another searching for answers to why things do not get better. Paul's experience proves that he valued suffering as part of Christian existence because it pointed to the effective power of Christ. The temptations of Jesus, his prayers in Gethsemane, his humiliation at the hands of men and above all his death on the Cross, show us something of the nature of God as revealed in Christ. Jesus dealt with the forces of evil giving rise to suffering but we do not get the impression that he was prepared to use every available arsenal to overcome their destructive influence.

The biblical thought that suffering and misfortune may not always be explained in terms of mystical causation is not alien to African traditional thought either. Most Ghanaian traditions distinguish between what the Akan call *sunsum mu yarba* (spiritual sickness) and *honam mu yarba* (literally sickness of the flesh, that is natural ailments). This distinction clearly determines the choice of therapeutic action. The changes in therapeutic choices underscore how naturalistic aetiologies and assumptions have greater immediate salience at the outset of the illness. These often give way to spiritualistic aetiologies when initial treatment proves ineffective. Most events may be 'caused', yet not all causes may be considered mystical. There is room for the belief that a person's own untoward behaviour—laziness, care-

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<sup>38</sup> Steve Hunt, 'Giving the Devil More Than His Due', in Lawrence Osborn and Andrew Walker (eds.), *Harmful Religion: An Exploration of Religious Abuse* (London: SPCK, 1997), 56.



less living, stupidity, lack of industry, etc.—may suffice as explanations for his or her misfortunes. The ‘uncompromising link’ made between misfortune and mystical agents create the danger of diminished individual and corporate responsibility that the Bible also upholds. Much is made of the proverb rebuffed in Ezekiel 18:2–4, ‘the fathers eat sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge’, without balancing this with the spirit of the ‘new covenant’ that ‘everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge’ (Jeremiah 31:29–30). In the case of the deception of Ananias and Sapphira for instance, Satan was supposed to have instigated the pecuniary advantage they sought to gain from the sale of their property. Yet they were held jointly responsible as a couple for ‘lying to the Holy Spirit’ about the transaction (Acts 5:1–11). Thus even where the temptation appears to be irresistible, it does not diminish personal responsibility.

The sense of diminished responsibility created by the extreme views of mystical causation has implications for pastoral care. In defining pastoral care, Lartey sees the role of the carer as a ‘facilitator’. He notes: ‘the function of the pastoral practitioner is to be a facilitator of growth. This is done through a process of nurture which combines caring with confrontation.’<sup>39</sup> James’s words are apposite here ‘but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown gives birth to death’ (James 1:14–15). In a situation where extremists make clients believe that every misfortune including moral deviance is caused by demonic forces, it becomes virtually impossible to ‘confront’ them with their own personal responsibility in the matter. The role of the facilitator in the context of pastoral care is to return people to ‘functioning order’ by helping them to help themselves.<sup>40</sup> The ‘healing and deliverance’ phenomenon may be emphasising biblical truths and meeting salvific needs. However, its unhealthy obsession with Satan and the demonic may be fraught with a number of dangers. One of these is that clients may easily be held responsible for situations that

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<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling* (London: Cassell, 1997), 9, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Counselling in Inter-Cultural Perspective: A Study of Some African and Anglo-American Views on Human Existence and Counselling* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987), 81, 82.

may be totally out of their control, especially in cases of psychosomatic disturbances. This 'stigmatising process' was given active expression at deliverance services in which people, including children, were branded witches. In some of these cases it was evident that witchcraft was determined by preconceived ideas of how witches were supposed to behave or react during healing and deliverance sessions rather than on revelation as was usually claimed. The same point could be made of the teaching that the activities of 'territorial spirits' account for a nation's socio-economic difficulties. In the biblical context there is no doubt that God blesses his chosen nation when they repent of sin, abandon idolatry and uphold his supremacy. However in the African context, it is widely known that some of the problems of the various countries have been caused by public corruption, political instability and inappropriate economic solutions. Demonising the IMF as Nwankpa does, or attributing socio-economic and political difficulties to 'territorial spirits' alone, serves to divert attention from the illegalities perpetrated by corrupt leaders and public officials.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the obvious deficiencies in its theological understanding, the centrality of healing and deliverance in the message of salvation and its import for Ghanaian Christianity cannot be overemphasised. It provides further evidence of the practical difference between Ghanaian indigenous Pentecostal thought and the inability of traditional Western mission Christianity to respond adequately to the theological questions raised by African Christians. Mbiti illustrated the gap between the two theologies (African and Western) in a hypothetical story involving a Western-trained African theologian. He had acquired all there was to know about Western philosophy and theology and yet returned home completely alienated from his people and unable to translate his theology into praxis. In Mbiti's illustration the young man,

returned to his home after nine and a half years of theological training with a ThD in theology and excess baggage to confront the realities of his people whose hopes he incarnated. At the peak of the celebrations marking his return, his sister fell to the ground, possessed by the spirit of her great aunt—and they looked to him to exorcise

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<sup>41</sup> Nwankpa demonises the IMF as a 'demonic doorway' through which Satan oppresses the African nations. Nwankpa, *Redeeming the Land*, 45.

the spirit. But all he could do was to demythologise her suffering according to Rudolf Bultmann.<sup>42</sup>

Mbiti concludes this story—narrated in the context of the relevance of healing to African Christian theology—by noting that the young theologian had forgotten among other things that, ‘God’s kingdom comes with power’.<sup>43</sup> The import of Mbiti’s hypothetical discourse stands out forcefully in its real life version recounted by a former Moderator (1994–1998) of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. He was responding to a query on his perceived tolerance of the Bible Study and Prayer Group in the Presbyterian Church. ‘I used to be sceptical of the BSPG myself, but an experience I had has changed that completely.’ According to the Very Rev. Anthony A. Beeko,

Whilst serving as the Chairman of the Akim Kibi Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, I was in the office one morning preparing a conference paper. Suddenly I heard loud noises from a crowd which had gathered at the office premises. When I went out to enquire what was happening, I was confronted with a traditional priestess followed by a sizeable crowd. The priestess claimed she had been told by a certain ‘voice’ to come to see me, and that I would deliver her from her fetish. She had become ecstatic and I was told by a member of the crowd that the woman was a priestess of the river deity Bootwiri of Kibi. I was confused because I had no knowledge of how to undertake deliverance, yet the woman wanted to be free from the deity to become a Christian. I dismissed the crowd, and with a few of my elders, we sang some hymns, I prayed and then read Psalm 23. At the end of these prayers, the priestess had become sober. I then invited the leaders of the BSPG who I knew were conversant with the ministry of deliverance to deal with the situation. They did exorcise the spirit of Bootwiri from the priestess. The former priestess was subsequently baptised and she enlisted as a member of the Presbyterian Church at Akim Kibi.

Beeko was unambiguous in his conclusion: ‘The experience taught me that the BSPG had more to offer than I knew; above all they taught me that I must move away from book theology.’ In the neo-Pentecostal ministry of healing and deliverance, God’s salvation is given active expression as a salvation of power meant to be experienced. Dwelling on the experience of the power of the Spirit to deal

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<sup>42</sup> John S. Mbiti, ‘Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church’, in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky CSP (eds.), *Mission Trends No. 3: Third World Theologies* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

with evil such that the full measure of God's salvation may be made possible underscores an inseparable link between the pneumatology and soteriology of African Pentecostal movements leading Anderson to refer appositely to African Pentecostal theology of salvation as a 'pneumatological soteriology'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Allan Anderson, with Samuel Otwang, *Tumelo: The Faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1993), p. 66.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SALVATION AS PROSPERITY

Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span (Exodus 23:25–26).

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the suffering of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (I Peter 4:12–13).

In the last chapter it was noted that, for Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals, when a believer's life is devoid of sin and demonic presence it is expected to be fruitful and prosperous. Thus a constitutive element of the empowerment that the Charismatic ministries (CMs) believe the Spirit grants to believers is what Mensa Otabil expresses as 'biblical prosperity'. Pastor Otabil, of the International Central Gospel Church, outlined his thoughts on biblical prosperity in his weekly Sunday morning programme, 'Believer's Voice of Hope', on Ghana's JOY FM radio station.<sup>1</sup> According to his teaching, biblical prosperity, encapsulating good health and success but especially embodying material sufficiency if not excess, is meant by God to follow the believer through this life. Pastor Otabil started the series of programmes with reference to the opening verses of Psalm 103. In reference to the traditional mission churches, he told his listeners: 'We've been trained to believe that money is evil' and that 'poverty and piety are bedfellows.' The thought that the TWMCs preach a partial

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<sup>1</sup> The name of this programme has now been changed to 'Living Word', the same as that of Otabil's television broadcast on Sunday evenings. For a useful and informative study of Otabil's programmes, see Marleen De Witte, 'Altar Media's *Living Word*: Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 33.2 (2003), pp. 172–202.

gospel because they do not emphasise prosperity is one that is widely held among Ghanaian Charismatic preachers. Contrary to this teaching, Otabil continued, the Psalmist talks about ‘benefits granted by God’. ‘Benefits are the things which make our lives better’, and such benefits according to Otabil are part of the heritage of the Christian. He outlined some of these benefits as forgiveness of sins, healing, redemption of our lives from destruction and crowning us with tender mercies.

*‘Gospel of Prosperity’: Underlying Theories*

The underlying theory of the ‘gospel of prosperity’ is that God rewards faithful Christians with good health, financial success and material wealth, ‘according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 4:19). Pastor Otabil therefore noted in his series: ‘the Psalmist says God satisfies our mouth with good things; God wants us to be happy, he wants us to be buoyant and so he blesses us with prosperity, not poverty.’ In Otabil’s understanding, since we need money to have our mouths satisfied, we need to know the principles for securing the money. He therefore encourages his listeners, ‘don’t stop making demands on God until your mouth is filled with good things’. The rest of the messages on biblical prosperity were dedicated to teaching ‘the keys and principles’ that listeners needed to follow in order to achieve it. This emphasis on biblical prosperity as the *right* of the believer in Christ is one of the distinctive elements associated with the soteriology of Ghana’s CMs.

In what follows, the theories informing the doctrine of prosperity are examined. The chapter also undertakes an overview of its historical origins in North American neo-Pentecostalism. The discussion then proceeds to show how the main features of prosperity theology are outlined in Charismatic messages delivered on radio, services attended and books written by its main Ghanaian exponents. We also undertake a theological critique of the prosperity gospel in the light of its principal sources of influence and explore the theological and pastoral problems that the teachings raise. Salvation in both Ghanaian traditional and biblical contexts, we noted in the last chapter, has a strong existential import. In that respect there may be much in these teachings that coheres with traditional notions of religion as a means to realising existential ends. However this must

be weighed against the fact that in practical terms things do not always get better, as was noted with healing and deliverance. The interpretation given by the CMs that God's will for his children *always* means prosperity, it will be argued, raises theological and pastoral difficulties which cannot be sustained in the light of the full implications of God's message of salvation as mediated in Christ. Relevant issues related to the discussion include biblical views on wealth, suffering, giving, attitude to the poor and Christian lifestyle and leadership.

*Gospel of Prosperity: North American or African?*

In North American neo-Pentecostalism, where the prosperity doctrine is most prominent, it has attracted various epithets: 'name-it-and-claim-it', 'faith gospel', 'gospel of health and wealth', 'faith-formula theology' and 'faith-equals-fortune message'. These designations are mostly aimed at questioning the theological validity of prosperity teachings. In Ghana the doctrine is popularly referred to as the 'gospel of prosperity' or 'prosperity gospel' and these are the terms preferred for our discussions. On the provenance of prosperity teachings in African Charismatic movements, Gifford's view is that the theology is incomprehensible apart from its American origins.<sup>2</sup> Ojo expresses an alternative view, insisting that the prosperity message is original to Africa's Charismatic movements.<sup>3</sup> The view pursued here is that the primary motivation of Ghanaian proponents of prosperity theology is to seek for themselves and their followers what they understand to be benefits willed to the believer by God. So the primary intent is to pursue 'a right' that they understand to be biblical, but to which, in their thinking, traditional churches remain oblivious. Nevertheless, as with their other beliefs and practices, the indigenous culture within which the message is preached has had influences on the nature of prosperity teachings in the Ghanaian context.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Gifford, 'Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity', *Religion* 20 (1990), 373-388.

<sup>3</sup> Matthews A. Ojo, 'Charismatic Movements in Africa', in Christopher Fyfe and Andrew Walls (eds.), *Christianity in Africa in the 1990s* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Centre of African Studies, 1996), 106.

The stream of North American neo-Pentecostalism that advocates the prosperity doctrine is normally referred to as the ‘Word’ or ‘Faith’ movement. In *A Different Gospel*, McConnell names Kenneth Hagin as the spiritual mentor of many leading prosperity theologians, including Kenneth Copeland. According to McConnell, it is Hagin who ‘claims to be the man who first received the “revelation” on which the faith movement is based’.<sup>4</sup> McConnell dismisses claims made by Hagin that the prosperity ideas he espouses were revealed to him by God, and traces the origins of prosperity theology to the ‘cultic teachings’ of E.W. Kenyon, and the metaphysical cults that abounded at the turn of the twentieth century. In this largely polemical study, McConnell concludes that, since Hagin plagiarised Kenyon, the ‘faith movement’ preaches ‘a different gospel’, which he considers to be cultic and heretical.<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this study McConnell’s conclusions are useful. They establish that biblical evidence does not entirely support the health and wealth gospel whose ardent exponents have included A.A. Allen and T.L. Osborn.<sup>6</sup> Other preachers of prosperity include Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Lester Sumrall, Charles Capps, Oral Roberts and Benny Hinn. The role of the media in disseminating this message in Ghana has been pivotal. The ministries of Roberts, the Osborns and other televangelists, as was noted in chapter 4, have been available to Ghanaians through personal visits, publications and the media. On Ghana TV as elsewhere, Roberts preached that ‘God is good’ and that he wills his children to prosper. Roberts also espoused the notion of ‘seed faith’ by which he meant that ‘planting a seed’, that is, making financial contributions to the evangelist’s ministry, yielded financial blessing for donors.

It was also noted in chapter 4 that during the early years of Ghanaian CMs much influence came directly from Archbishop Benson Idahosa, a protégé of many of the significant names associated with the prosperity gospel in North America. The North American sources of contact undoubtedly influenced Idahosa’s core theology of pros-

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<sup>4</sup> D.R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, updated edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, ix, xx.

<sup>6</sup> In the early 1960s, Allen claimed the power to lay hands on people who contributed to his ministry and to bestow on them the ‘power to get wealth’. Osborn is acknowledged as one of the first Pentecostal preachers to openly cite his lavish lifestyle as proof of God’s blessing. Brouwer, et al., *Exporting the American Gospel*, 24.



perity, positives and possibilities. Ghanaian students returning from Idahosa's Bible school became symbolic embodiments of Idahosa's teachings. Ghana has no equivalent of the North American Faith Movement. Excesses relating to the repudiation of medicine by some members of the American Faith movement as inconsistent with personal faith are also absent in Ghana's CMs. The difficult economic circumstances of the nation make it virtually unthinkable that such extravagances as gold taps, private jets and air-conditioned dog kennels associated with some of the North American prosperity evangelists would be emulated by their Ghanaian admirers. Nevertheless, the CMs generally share the underlying principles and theology of the prosperity gospel. It is not being suggested that all Ghanaian CMs preach the extreme materialistic theology found in the North American Faith movements. Some neo-Pentecostal leaders do indeed identify openly with the extreme materialistic interpretation of prosperity, but others preach more generally of blessings and possibilities and in various ways advocate the importance of wealth as a by-product of Christian salvation. Since the emergence of the CMs in the late 1970s, variations of the prosperity message have been part of Charismatic theology in Ghana.

*Prosperity Theology: Its Message and Praxis in Ghanaian CMs*

One of the arch-texts of the prosperity gospel is III John 2, normally cited from the Authorised King James Version: 'Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth.' According to Pastor Otabil, this passage means for the believer, 'financial prosperity, material prosperity and spiritual prosperity'. In the series of messages referred to earlier, Otabil underscored this view, noting that 'the Lord does not withhold good things from the upright, he blesses them with positives.' This message conforms to the general neo-Pentecostal belief that God wants his children to be happy, to eat the best food, at the most expensive restaurants, to appear in the best clothes, often designer made because, as Bishop Duncan-Williams claimed during a prime-time TV talk show in Accra, 'Jesus wore designer clothing'. The donkey on which Jesus rode to Jerusalem is even considered by some to have been the most expensive means of transport of his day and people gambled for his robe because it was seamless and therefore

designer made. In short God wants his children to have the best of everything.

Making extensive references to biblical passages including John 10:10 and Psalm 35:27, Otabil noted that Jesus gives ‘abundant life’ and ‘God delights in the well-being of his children’, but it is the devil who brings affliction, for ‘the one who gives abundant life and well-being is not the same person who afflicts’. In biblical prosperity, according to Otabil, God gets sad when the wicked use money to do evil. God’s will, he notes, is for the righteous to have money so they can use it for good purposes. Referring to another favourite prosperity passage, Galatians 3:7–9, Otabil interprets the ‘blessings of Abraham’ to mean the divine provision that God makes for his children in order that they may not lack anything in this life. Elsewhere Pastor Anaba advances similar thoughts, noting that believers ‘cannot be paupers in a world created by our heavenly Father’. He writes, ‘we are the seed of Abraham’, for, ‘when Abraham received the promise of possession from God we were in his loins’.<sup>7</sup>

### *Principles Needed for Prosperity*

In effect the CMs, in keeping with their understanding of the believer’s Abrahamic heritage, identify with a message in which the salvific transformation of the individual is expected to issue in physical wealth and personal well-being. The titles of publications emanating from Charismatic leaders are among the best possible illustrations of the ideas underlying the ‘gospel of prosperity’.<sup>8</sup> Charismatic preaching and writing is also dominated by the themes of ‘blessing’, ‘success’, ‘prosperity’, ‘achievements’, ‘victories’ and ‘breakthroughs’. Suffering, pain, the high cost of discipleship and the inevitability of death are conspicuously absent. The understanding is that if believers follow certain necessary keys or principles, biblical prosperity will be for

<sup>7</sup> Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1978); Gloria Copeland, *God’s Will is Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, 1974); Kenneth Hagin, *How God Taught Me about Prosperity* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1985). Titles from Ghana match the international trend. They include: Michael Essel, *Three Things to Do with the Word to Prosper* (Accra: Grace Outreach Church, 1993); Eastwood Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession: Dislodge the Enemy and Possess the Land* (Accra: Design Solutions, 1996); Duncan-Williams, *Destined to Succeed*.

them. In other words, believers could short-circuit the 'grief' and 'all kinds of trials' that the epistle of Peter says are needed to purify faith (I Peter 1:6–7). One of the key principles of prosperity, according to Pastor Otabil, is the need to engage in 'work that honours God'. But work alone does not yield prosperity. So just as Jacob did during his stay at Bethel, Christians need to covenant with God through the payment of tithes and offerings (Genesis 28:20–22). Prosperity, Otabil noted, depends as much on hard and honest work as it does on being faithful in one's covenant with God, 'who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant' (Deuteronomy 8:17–18). In Otabil's exposition, hard work alone may not yield the necessary returns unless God be in it and God can bless the work of the believers' hands if they are faithful in their financial obligations to him.

In Otabil's view, when a Christian is seeking employment, paper qualification and experience by themselves may not be sufficient for securing the job. 'God's favour must accompany you to the interview.' God must be trusted to deliver the job. He emphasises that when things are tough, that is when the Christian must give. The principle of 'sowing and reaping' is quite important in prosperity teaching. Thus, preaching from Galatians 6:8–9 on a separate occasion, Otabil told his hearers that they are receivers of what they sowed and prosperity was theirs if they sowed rightly. In line with this thinking, one of the front banners at the Christian Action Faith Ministries read 'Financial Breakthroughs are Released through the Application of the Keys of Giving'. Another important principle of prosperity emphasised by Ghana's Charismatic preachers is the 'positive confession of faith'. One of the principal lines of thought in the booklet *Three Things to Do with the Word to Prosper* written by Pastor Michael Essel of Grace Outreach Church is this: 'as a believer, you can talk yourself into prosperity.' It appears from Essel's argument that 'positive confession' is related to the principle of 'sowing and reaping' as what one speaks amounts to sowing a seed that will yield what has fallen from the lips.<sup>9</sup> Bishop Duncan-Williams puts this principle even more succinctly when he advises believers to nurture their dreams into effect by constantly 'confessing them' because through such daily confession their dreams 'will come to pass'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Essel, *Three Things to Do with the Word to Prosper*, chap. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Duncan-Williams, *Destined to Succeed*, p. 41.

*Lifestyles of Prosperity Exponents*

The lifestyles of founders, pastors and leaders of various CMs are the most cogent reflections of the philosophy that informs the message of prosperity. The leaders of CMs embody the fruits of prosperity as testament to the integrity and efficacy of the type of gospel message they advocate. In defence of his own extravagant lifestyle, Jim Bakker, the ‘converted apostle’ of prosperity theology, is quoted as saying that a pastor should be as wealthy as the wealthiest member of his congregation. This thought is also present in Ghana’s Duncan-Williams, who teaches that the days when church members drove the best cars whilst their pastors struggled on foot are over. Charismatic church leaders therefore present themselves and are so seen as the benchmark of God’s prosperity. Until his ‘fall from glory’ in 1987, Jim Bakker was arguably one of the most celebrated exponents of the prosperity message. In 1989, he was indicted for fraud by the United States government and sentenced to a 45-year jail term. This followed his inability to fulfil promises made to contributors of his PTL club. Following a successful appeal, Bakker was released in 1994. During his time in prison, he renounced his faith-equals-fortune gospel. Today he is a strong advocate of a Jesus of the poor and has become one of prosperity gospel’s fiercest critics. In a publication following his release—its title *I Was Wrong* is revealing—he notes that much of the case revolved around his flamboyant lifestyle.<sup>11</sup> Twenty-two out of a total of ninety-one witnesses called to testify, according to Bakker, did not address the original charge of fraud. They came to testify simply because Bakker had made ‘extravagant purchases’ from them.<sup>12</sup> In a subsequent book Bakker writes with hindsight that most of what he preached before his ‘conversion’ was a ‘Disneyland gospel’, which promoted ‘a spiritual fantasyland where God’s people are always blessed materially, physically, and of course, spiritually’.<sup>13</sup>

The flamboyant lifestyle of which Bakker speaks is not unfamiliar in Ghana’s CMs. Ghanaian pastors of CMs carry mobile phones,

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<sup>11</sup> Jim Bakker, with Ken Abraham, *I Was Wrong: The Untold Story of the Shocking Journey from PTL Power to Prison and Beyond* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers 1996).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Jim Bakker with Ken Abraham, *Prosperity and the Coming Apocalypse* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 5.

put on tuxedos or three-piece traditional *agbada* to preach.<sup>14</sup> They drive Mercedes-Benz cars or others in that price range, often a gift from a member, or as it is usually expressed ‘a seed sown in the life of the man/woman of God’, obviously in anticipation of the sower’s own blessing. Many pastors openly allude to their worldwide peregrinations, travelling first class. Thus, preaching on the theme ‘limitation and enlargement’, Bishop Duncan-Williams told his church members that they can break out of any limitations in life by taking decisive steps, a sort of God-given right, to overturn circumstances designed to keep them down. On this occasion he was preaching on one of the favourite passages of prosperity exponents, the story of Jabez in I Chronicles 4:9–10. The meaning of his name, ‘son of sorrow’, shaped the course of Jabez’s life. But when Jabez took a decisive step to ask God to ‘enlarge’ his life, things were supposed to have improved and he began to prosper. Among the illustrations Duncan-Williams gave of his own success was how he insisted and eventually got onto a flight with his first-class ticket although check-in staff had initially insisted the plane was full. In other words, travelling first class meant breaking out of the limitations of either being left behind or travelling economy. A number of CM pastors are also known to be owners of very luxurious accommodation situated in expensive residential areas in Ghana. For example, Duncan-Williams’s own mansion with its swimming pool was for a time the subject of much public and newspaper criticisms around the capital, Accra.<sup>15</sup>

In an uncharacteristic criticism of what is evidently becoming an issue of public concern in Ghana, Pastor Anaba writes of some his colleagues that their lifestyles outstrip their incomes. They pressurise the congregation in order to gain things for themselves and the result is that ‘they end up committing many blunders’.<sup>16</sup> I refer to this criticism as uncharacteristic because it seems to be directed more at the haste with which Charismatic church leaders seek to acquire property rather than the doctrine of prosperity itself. In response to such

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<sup>14</sup> A traditional West African flowing gown normally with extensive embroidery worn over trousers and a top made with similar fabric. They come in different fabrics but those worn by some charismatic pastors are the very expensive ones, often more expensive than Western suits.

<sup>15</sup> *The Watchman*, January 25–February 7, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Eastwood Anaba, *Elevated Beyond Human Law: Through the Fruit of the Spirit* (Accra: Design Solutions, 1995), 60.

criticisms, one Ghanaian Charismatic pastor attempted to justify the desire for top-of-the-range cars: 'I believe if you have a good car, it is economically better in the long term. . . . Let us take the pope. That special car he rides in, is it cheap? It is worth a fortune. So why isn't the pope a hypocrite? Why isn't he accused of stealing money?'

It is not being suggested that driving good cars or using mobile phones are by themselves signs of extravagance or false Christianity. The problem lies with the theological interpretations given such acquisitions. They are taken as indices of God's blessing for Christian faithfulness. This throws into question the basis on which biblical figures listed in Hebrews 11 are considered people of faith. The materialistic lifestyle of Ghana's Charismatic pastors is the source of much criticism from the public because it stands in sharp contrast to the traditional Ghanaian image of a man or woman of God. The pastors of traditional mission churches are uniformed, often very poorly remunerated, and generally expected to display a very modest lifestyle. The same goes for pastors of classical Pentecostal churches. Until the emergence of the CMs the Christian ministry in Ghana was seldom considered an avenue for economic gain. Ghanaian Christian traditions have generally stressed modesty in material things and virtually eschewed fancy clothes and jewellery, especially in the 'presence of God'. In contrast, the CMs encourage 'the faithful' to look modern and fashionable. Women wear make-up for church and are not required to cover their often well-groomed and styled hair. The relaxed dress code of the CMs may be taken as one of the strong points of the movement that endears it to young people who may want to be themselves in church. Correspondingly, members of CMs are made to view the flamboyant lifestyles of their leaders as signs of God's blessing and therefore to aspire to achieve them by following similar paths. Thus, preaching on the same passage cited above, Bishop Agyin Asare explains Jabez's request, 'enlarge my coast' (v. 10) to mean crying to God and saying to him, 'the kind of breakthrough (territory) you have given me is now not enough. I need more. . . . Maybe you have one house, a car and are married so you feel contented and think moving forward is not necessary. No! No! No! You need more territories, more coasts and more breakthroughs.'

One of the formulae required to effect such 'enlargements', as is evident in Anaba's concern mentioned earlier, requires 'the faithful' to contribute to maintaining the lifestyle of the leadership. This is

based on the shared belief that if believers must live well the ‘anointed’ of God must live even better. Giving in the CMs can therefore be very personal and reciprocal. Followers give money and gifts to pastors in proportion to material blessings they believe they have received or hope to receive from God through the ministry of such pastors and their churches.

Based on the theories and teachings outlined above, three main theological emphases may be gleaned from the ‘gospel of prosperity’ hermeneutic: (1) the positive endorsement of material wealth and consumerism as a sign of God’s blessing; (2) God’s blessing as based on the principles or laws of ‘sowing and reaping’, that is, blessing comes through giving; and (3) the belief that the ‘power of positive confession’ is important for the realisation of prosperity.

### *Wealth as a Sign of God’s Blessing*

Theologically the ‘gospel of prosperity’ reflects the belief that the ‘blessing of Abraham’ has been willed by God to believers as beneficiaries of the new covenant mediated by Christ. The ‘blessing of Abraham’ in prosperity hermeneutic refers to his wealth in cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and donkeys, and the gift of a son, as attested to by his servant (Genesis 13:2; 24:35–36). According to Pastor Essel, who is one of prosperity gospel’s Ghanaian exponents, this means God wants believers to prosper, not only spiritually, but in marital life, child upbringing, profession, business and *every* area of life. This is the interpretation advocates of prosperity like Otabil read into Paul’s thoughts in Galatians 3 where he indicates that those who believe in Christ become inheritors of the Abrahamic covenant: they ‘are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith’ (Galatians 3:7–9). Galatians 3:14 is particularly significant in the ‘gospel of prosperity’ hermeneutic: ‘He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.’

In its new covenantal form, the ‘blessing of Abraham’ is explained by the CMs to encapsulate success in life’s endeavours, health, progress and general well-being. This is believed to be the divine will for believers and so has become a core message of believers in the prosperity message worldwide. Espousing similar thoughts, Bishop Duncan-Williams writes that salvation is more than a mere mental assent to the sinner’s prayer. Salvation is only ‘an initial step in a long journey

by faith to the land of glory'. In its existential sense 'the land of glory' refers to 'authority, glory, blessings, prosperity, health and peace in this life on earth'.<sup>17</sup> Duncan-Williams thus defines the mission of the CMs over and against other traditional denominations, noting that 'our church is into the full revelation of God's success plan'.<sup>18</sup> By virtue of sharing in the blessings of Abraham, material acquisitions by the Christian, Anaba writes, are not to be seen as sinful. 'It is the will of God for us to prosper.' With obvious reference to Deuteronomy 8:18, Anaba further notes that God also 'gives us the power to get wealth'. The believer should therefore 'believe God for material possession'.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Principle of 'Seed Faith'*

Related to the belief that God intends only Christians to have wealth is the responsibility to contribute in cash and in kind to the Lord's work. In the context of the 'gospel of prosperity', the Lord's work often means supporting the ministries of particular evangelists and churches. This form of 'giving in anticipation' is often referred to as 'sowing a seed'. In the radio series mentioned above, Pastor Otabil submitted that giving is a prerequisite for keeping the 'cycle of prosperity' running. For those who preach this give-to-get message, it does work. It seems to provide theological justification and validation for the lifestyles of those who preach it. Giving may in principle be explained to include giving of time and abilities to God's work. However for the ardent exponents of prosperity, the emphasis has mostly been on cash and other luxurious gifts like cars. The importance of this theology of giving to the CMs is partly evident in the banners often decorating their meeting places, like that from Duncan-Williams's Action Faith described earlier. Other examples include: 'Sow Constantly for Constant Harvest'; 'Giving is Living'; 'Pay your tithes promptly and correctly: God will rebuke the destroyer for your days' (a reference to Malachi 3:10–11); 'Giving is not a debt you pay, but a seed you sow'. In addition to individuals giving directly to pastors, such giving has been formalised into special occasions called 'Pastors' Appreciation Sundays'. As the name suggests, these

<sup>17</sup> Duncan-Williams, *Destined to Succeed*, 1, 2, 24, 25.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>19</sup> Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession*, 45.



are days purposely set aside on which cash offerings and other gifts are collected for pastors. At the Solid Rock Chapel the set date for appreciating the founder, Christina Doe Tetteh, had been duly advertised on a front banner: 'Come and let us appreciate Mama Christy'.

In prosperity theology it is also taught that God literally takes the wealth of unbelievers in order to enrich believers. The reason, it is believed, is so that wealth may be channelled into supporting evangelistic schemes. Since unbelievers may be unwilling to do this, God intends to deprive them of their wealth and give it to believers. A theology of social concern does not seem to be part of the equation here. For the CMs, wealth is meant for evangelism. Carried to its logical conclusion, this hermeneutic suggests that God exists to serve the monetary needs of believers in order that his kingdom might expand. Morris Cerullo in particular teaches that the only ones God can use to finance the end-time harvest are his children, 'his chosen vehicles of financial blessing'.<sup>20</sup> This is a theme that was present in Otabil's prosperity series in which he consistently noted that many of the people God uses to expand his work are rich. This line of thought on prosperity in which it is considered contrary to God's purpose for unbelievers to be rich is also present in the works of Pastor Anaba. Unbelievers, according to Anaba, have 'possessed the land' illegally but this illegality must be broken, hence the title of his book *Breaking Illegal Possession: Dislodge the Enemy and Possess the Land!* He teaches that, in this era of the worldwide commitment of the church to evangelism, 'the church must have the material possessions and wealth needed to propagate the Kingdom of God'.<sup>21</sup> The understanding is that wealth in the hands of unbelievers promotes Satan's agenda, but God is putting 'the land' back into the hands of his chosen people: 'Believers must move in quickly to take possession. God is rearranging things to favour his people.'<sup>22</sup>

*Confess with your Mouth, Believe in your Heart*

The other cardinal emphasis of the prosperity message is the belief that in the appropriation of the so-called 'blessings of Abraham',

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<sup>20</sup> Morris Cerullo, *Total Provision, Continual Supply: God's Promise for his People* (San Diego, CA: Morris Cerullo World Evangelism, 1990), 18.

<sup>21</sup> Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

believers' thoughts, words and actions possess performative effects. In other words, what is thought or uttered (confessed) determines what people receive. By being specific in prayer through the power of the spoken word, the believer, it is held, can effect miracles and enjoy financial prosperity. This is the interpretation read into Paul's words in Romans 10:9–10: 'That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is LORD", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' This passage is given practical application during offering time. Worshippers are often requested to hold their offerings high and, with eyes closed, pray over the money, claiming what they require from God and trusting that, as they place the money in the collection bowls, the things 'confessed' will come to pass. In this instance a passage that deals with acknowledging the lordship of Jesus Christ as against putting one's faith in the law is interpreted to mean asking for anything and expecting God to deliver. In *God's Will is Prosperity*, Gloria Copeland gives voice to this theology when she writes that Christians are entitled to 'take authority' over poverty in the same way they would over sickness.<sup>23</sup> The moment a 'symptom of lack' shows up in the lives of believers they must command it to flee because Jesus has redeemed believers from 'the curses of poverty and lack'.<sup>24</sup>

The principle of 'positive confession' and 'refusal' or 'resistance' is especially noticeable in Ghanaian CMs during public prayer. In Pastor Otabil's series on biblical prosperity, not only did he reiterate the need to refuse the curse of poverty that is supposed to be hanging over the African continent, but he encouraged willing listeners to touch the radio as he prayed: 'Lord, cause your favour to overwhelm your people; cause them to be the head and not the tail.' The 'confession of sin', although recommended by Jesus in his model prayer for the disciples, is considered unbiblical by some prosperity preachers as believers, once forgiven, have no need to confess their sin regularly. Prayer therefore normally uses phrases like 'we take authority' or 'dominion' over a named item or even the effect of the devil on a particular situation or condition. 'Negative confessions' are required to be rescinded during prayer as they could serve as conduits for failure and various maladies in life. In order to bring

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<sup>23</sup> Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity*, 37.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

into effect such 'prosperity related' scriptural texts, CMs services in Ghana regularly disperse with the congregation repeating the closing words of the twenty-third Psalm: 'surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life'. The emphasis is on the 'goodness and mercy', for it is believed that there are countless benefits in serving God faithfully and the believer must 'confess' them into effect.

*'Proof-texting': The Problem of Prosperity Theology*

The gospel of prosperity is built on a selective hermeneutical method. Gordon Fee is therefore right in identifying 'the interpretation of Scripture' as the basic problem of prosperity teachings.<sup>25</sup> Selected 'proof-texts' from the Bible are interpreted to mean that God wills all believers to prosper in *this* life. 'Proof-texting' refers to the practice of using selected biblical verses to support arguments, regardless of the context. These selected texts are then taken as sufficient proof of God's mind and purpose on particular issues. In this way whole sermons could be built around single words or phrases within biblical passages, for example the use of 'enlarge' in the story of Jabez. Because of its subjective and arbitrary approach to biblical interpretation, 'proof-texting' leads to truncated, if not erroneous, views on theological issues.

Let us begin with the reference to the 'blessing of Abraham' in Galatians 3 as meaning material blessing. Contrary to this interpretation, the 'blessing of Abraham' hinges on the theme of the epistle that has to do with the 'inclusion of the Gentiles' in God's salvific agenda. Such inclusion, Paul endeavours to show, comes through faith in Christ and not through the law. To drive home his point, Paul builds up the argument much earlier, noting that 'we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not observing the law, because by observing the law no one is justified' (Galatians 2:5–16). In the epistle to the Galatians, therefore, Paul vigorously advocates the doctrine of 'justification by faith' and in doing so he reprimands the Galatians for overlooking the fact that God's Spirit was received by grace and not by human

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* (Beverly, MA: Frontline Publishing, 1985), 3.

effort through the observance of the law. In citing Galatians 3:14 in particular, exponents of the prosperity gospel often omit the phrase, 'so that by faith we might receive the Spirit'. But as Fee has shown, what emerges in the epistle to the Galatians is that the key element in Christian conversion is the dynamic experience of the Spirit 'as the fulfilment of the promise of Abraham'.<sup>26</sup> In effect Galatians 3:14 has nothing to do with material wealth. Paul's argument was that just as Abraham's faith in God was counted to him as righteousness, so does faith in Christ render redundant confidence in the law to effect salvation (Romans 4:1–3). For Paul, the indication of the fulfilment of the 'promise of Abraham' is the experience of the Spirit. Through the outpouring of the Spirit, even those previously considered to be outside the Abrahamic promise become included by faith in Christ Jesus. The 'blessing of Abraham' in the Galatians passage is thus not simply 'justification by faith', but also refers to the 'eschatological life now available to Jews and Gentiles alike, effected through Christ's death, but realised through the dynamic ministry of the Spirit—and all this by faith' and not by formulae.<sup>27</sup>

One of the clearest examples of the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's salvation is the event of Pentecost. For a movement based on a shared experience of the Spirit, Galatians 3:14 should be a key passage legitimising the CMs as a 'move of God' in the current generation in which 'ordinary people' become integrated into God's salvific agenda through their experiences of the Spirit. For, as Joel prophesied, a consequence of the outpouring of God's Spirit was the experience of salvation by 'all flesh' irrespective of sex, race or social status (Joel 2:28–32). In fulfilment, enquirers came from 'every nation under heaven' for the Pentecostal experience in Acts. Pentecost was, among other things, an experience of 'gentile inclusion'. And as Peter became aware through the 'Pentecost' of Cornelius and his household, God 'accepts people from every nation' (Acts 10:34–35). In the event of Pentecost, God appears as the God of the nations because the nations were reconciled to God as people heard the message of the gospel in their own languages. Abraham is the 'father of nations', so the 'blessing of Abraham' is the blessing of the nations.

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<sup>26</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 370.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 394, 395.

But as John the Baptist consistently warned, with the coming of the Lord entry into the kingdom will no longer depend on *natural* Abrahamic ancestry, but upon the purifying presence of God's Spirit (Matthew 3:7–12). In Paul's argument, Christ redeemed humankind from 'the curse of the law' in order that, through him, the 'blessing of Abraham' might be available to all by faith. This promised blessing is what Paul interprets as 'justification' and the experience of 'the Spirit', for all who are in Christ. By editing out Galatians 3:14b, and interpreting the 'blessing of Abraham' in a materialistic sense, the CMs not only misinterpret and misapply Scripture but also miss a crucial message that Paul intended to pass on regarding the role of the Spirit in salvation.

Our second difficulty is with the idea of 'sowing and reaping'. The view that God takes money from unbelievers to enrich believers in order to enable the latter to evangelise is ardently preached without regard to restrictions placed by Jesus on the material possessions his disciples needed for their mission (Matthew 10:8–10). There is no indication at all that the preaching of the gospel depended on raising cash for grandiose evangelistic schemes with flamboyant lifestyles to match. There is no indication that the early church requested people to contribute to their ministry. The ministry of the apostles was directed at simply allowing the Spirit to work through them in order to reach those who were hurting. In prosperity teachings, God's ability to put into effect his missionary agenda has come to depend on money in the believer's pocket or bank account. This is a very limited view of God that misrepresents his purposes. In thinking this way, the prosperity exponents challenge not only the principles laid down in the Bible concerning evangelism, but also the basic right of the unbeliever to own wealth. As the two texts at the head of this chapter serve to demonstrate, the Bible does not entirely discount God's ability to bless his people in concrete terms. For example, in response to Peter's blunt question regarding the rewards of discipleship, Jesus promised a 'hundred fold' return in homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, 'in this present age' (Mark 10:29). However, even if this is interpreted literally, as some proponents of prosperity theology would like to do, it need not be lost on readers that the promise of rewards for discipleship in that passage is only half the story. The positive rewards promised by Jesus were to be accompanied by 'persecutions' also to be realised in 'this life'. Elsewhere the Lord spoke to Ananias about how he

will show the newly converted Paul ‘how much he must suffer for my name’ (Acts 9:16). We will argue that this aspect of being Christian remains untouched by the ‘health and wealth’ message. Indeed, in their preaching the apostles had categorically reiterated the words of Jesus to new converts: ‘we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God’ (Acts 14:22). Much of Pauline theology is also built around knowing Christ and the fellowship of his sufferings. For it is in ‘becoming like Christ in his death’ that the resurrection may be attained (Philippians 3:10–11). The Bible has not said that material abundance is evil. But riches are denounced as a potential distraction that prevents people from putting God first in their lives (Mark 10:17–25).

This theology of giving could also be manipulative. During offering time at a service at Solid Rock Chapel, the pastor held a separate bowl in her hand and requested all those offering above 20,000 cedis (about £5 then) to drop them in her bowl. The impression created was that they stood the chance of enjoying greater blessings. One key reference for the prosperity hermeneutic is Malachi 3. Here the prophet draws attention to Israel’s responsibility on which the people seemed to have reneged. If Israel would fulfil her part by faithfully discharging her obligations of tithes and offerings, Malachi promised that God would prove himself faithful. God does prove himself faithful and he expects believers not to forget this. However, it is also true to say that God’s faithfulness issues more out of his unconditional love, grace and mercy than as a response to works. Isaiah’s cry was, ‘come, buy and eat! . . . without money and without cost’ (Isaiah 55:1–2). The problem is that Malachi 3 and related passages have been translated into formulae, as the banners indicate, in which people have a *right* to expect God to deliver once they give.<sup>28</sup>

Against the backdrop of rising unemployment, poverty and the severe economic circumstances under which people subsist, it is difficult to come to terms with the fact that not even the poor are exempted from the principle of giving to God if they wish to reap their blessing. As Duncan-Williams notes, even in impoverished conditions ‘God needs something from you in order to bless you’.<sup>29</sup> Yet Isaiah’s invitation was directed at those ‘who have no money’. The

<sup>28</sup> Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Duncan-Williams, *Destined to Succeed*, 52.

main reference for this teaching is Elijah's encounter with the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:7–16). The thinking is that just as Elijah requested the widow to 'invest' her last pot of oil irrespective of her impoverished circumstances, so does God expect the poor of today to 'invest' whatever they have as a test of his faithfulness. For according to Anaba, 'the principle of giving and receiving applies to all men and is valid under all circumstances. Whether you are poor or rich, if you practise it, you get blessed, but if you don't, you are not blessed.'<sup>30</sup>

In effect, people are thought to be poor because they do not give money to God. The teaching generally ignores the fact that some of the causes of poverty are beyond the control of both the poor and Third World governments like that of Ghana. To be fair to Pastor Otabil, who is arguably one of the most respected among Ghana's Charismatic pastors, he does recognise that some of the causes of poverty may be beyond the control of Ghanaians. Among these causes, the consequences of the implementation of World Bank and IMF structural adjustment economic policies are criticised severely. Unfortunately, the concession that some of the causes of poverty may be beyond people's control is overshadowed by the insistence that true Christianity must result in material prosperity. If the teaching does work, one wonders why the churches themselves do not cater for the poor in their midst in order to be beneficiaries of God's prosperity. Jesus gave considerable attention to lepers, to despised women and other marginalised people and even warned that those who do not give to the needy will experience eternal damnation. In effect Jesus wanted his followers to give to the poor, not take from them. From this Ronald Sider concludes that 'if centrality in Scripture is any criterion of doctrinal importance, the biblical teaching about God's concern for the poor ought to be an important doctrine for Christians'.<sup>31</sup> The teaching that people are poor because they do not give to God is an antithesis to Jesus' saying that people should forgive even their enemies since God does not discriminate between the righteous and unrighteous in providing rain and sunshine (Matthew 5:45). Another text cited in support of the principle of 'sowing cash'

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<sup>30</sup> Anaba, *Breaking Illegal Possession*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 64.

and 'reaping cash plus other material blessing' are Jesus' words that those who give will reap in abundant measure (Luke 6:38). In the context of the Sermon on the Mount this passage seems to be a logical conclusion to Jesus' admonition to the disciples to refrain from judging, condemning or holding others' offences against them. To read that it refers to putting money in someone's ministry is to read it out of context. This is better placed in Matthew where the saying 'the measure you use, it will be measured to you' is linked directly with the warning against judging others (Matthew 7:1–2). In fact Matthew (7:3) seems to suggest that everybody has a fault: 'Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?'

It is not out of Christian character to give to good causes knowing that God expects the Christian to be a blessing to others in need. The compassion shown by the Samaritan, according to Luke, was meant as an example to be emulated by all. In fact, James points out that 'pure and faultless religion' acceptable to the Father must include caring for 'orphans and widows' (James 1:27). However, no similar principle is perceived to be at work in the prosperity teachings. MacDonald has attacked this strategy as a modern form of the Gehazi-Simon syndrome in which attempts are made to put monetary value on the grace of God.<sup>32</sup> Gehazi attempted to collect gifts originally refused by his master, the prophet Elisha, following the healing of Naaman (II Kings 5:15–27). Simon, the New Testament corollary, offered money to the apostles for the ability to lay hands to impart the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:9–24). That in both cases the culprits were punished severely—Gehazi with leprosy and Simon with blindness—are indications of the seriousness with which their actions were considered. It is instructive for such a theology to note that acceptable religion, according to James, in addition to the care of orphans and widows, includes keeping one's self 'from being polluted by the world' (James 1:27). The insatiable desire for wealth does not make this possible and this forms the basis of Paul's counsel that those 'who want to get rich fall into temptation' as 'the love of money is a root to all kinds of evil' (I Timothy 6:9–10). Those who overlook such scriptures stand in danger of bringing shame on

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<sup>32</sup> W.G. MacDonald, 'The Cross Versus Personal Kingdoms', *Pneuma* vol. 3, 2 (1981), 33.



themselves and the gospel of Christ. In Ghana, Bishop Duncan-Williams and his ministry suffered not a little embarrassment when the 'sower' of some cars in his life was later found to be a drug baron.<sup>33</sup>

The teaching on positive confession, like the others, does not stand up in the face of biblical evidence. The difficulties raised by such formulaic theology of positive confession are not only theological, but also pastoral. Theologically, it presents a wrong view of God as being there merely to service the wants of humankind once the right principles or formulae are applied. There seem to be no provision either for the *will* of God or adequate explanations for why things do not always get better. The explanations offered for setbacks in terms of 'unconfessed sin', 'non-fulfilment of monetary obligations to God and the church', 'negative confessions' and 'lack of faith' are simply inappropriate and insufficient as far as the enigmas of life are concerned. The result has been the pain, suffering and disappointment caused to many believers through these principles. It is simply unrealistic, pastorally insensitive and unbiblical to preach that Christians could enjoy a pain-free, problem-free life merely by 'positive confession' and payment of tithes. In the experience of Paul, it is in carrying in one's body the death of Jesus that the life of the resurrected Christ may also be revealed in the body of the believer (II Corinthians 4:9-10).

Considered in isolation, biblical passages like John 10:10 and III John 2 seem to promise exactly what the prosperity message sees in them, that is, 'abundant life' and 'prosperity in health and soul'. In the Old Testament, as is argued from Deuteronomy 28 and the experiences of the patriarchs, material prosperity is often tied to righteousness. In Psalm 37:25, for example, the righteous are not forsaken, and their children do not beg for bread. In Proverbs 10:22, 'the blessing of the Lord brings wealth', to which there is no trouble attached. The series of blessings accompanying faithfulness to the covenant in Deuteronomy 28 includes fruitfulness in terms of human fertility, agricultural produce and financial security. There is thus a case for believing in God's ability to bless those who trust in him. But God's blessing does not always come in the form of material blessing. It also comes in the form of grace to cope with life's

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<sup>33</sup> *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, 3-9 May 1993.

afflictions. The problem with the prosperity gospel as we have noted is its 'proof-texting' method. A key principle in biblical interpretation is that theology must be based on the Bible's total teaching on a subject and not on selective hermeneutics.<sup>34</sup> For example John 10:10, cited by prosperity exponents to support the teaching, has nothing to do with material prosperity as such. The word that is translated as 'life' in this verse is *zoe*, referring to eternal life. What Jesus wished for believers, therefore, was that they would superabound in the quality of life that ensures the actualisation of the Kingdom of God in their lives. In that case believers would not die eternally.<sup>35</sup> Similarly Fee points out that the word translated 'prosper' in III John 2 is a greeting, meaning to go well with someone. It is a 'well wish' that has nothing to do with financial prosperity.<sup>36</sup> So faith in God does not exclude general well-being, as was also noted in the discussion on healing and deliverance. In prosperity teaching, the problem is with the undue emphasis placed on material wealth. In Jesus' own words, 'a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions' (Luke 12:15).

*Rethinking Prosperity Gospel in the Ghanaian Context*

In the light of the North American experience, the prosperity gospel hermeneutic has been deemed 'unacceptable', its ethics branded 'dubious' and the whole theology castigated as 'heresy'.<sup>37</sup> However in view of the inter-cultural interpretation of Pentecostal history, any critique of the prosperity gospel needs to be considered in the light of what it means in the peculiar religious and socio-cultural circumstances and theology within which Ghanaian Charismatics appropriate such a message. In the African context generally, as we have noted, religion serves practical soteriological ends. Thus the *raison d'être* of all sacrifices and supplications is the need for rain and fertility, well-

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<sup>34</sup> William W. Klein et al., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), 387–388.

<sup>35</sup> David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 196.

<sup>36</sup> Fee, *The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> For this assessment, see the following: Tom Smail et al., *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for a Theology* (London: SPCK, 1995), 133–151; Robert Jackson, 'Prosperity Theology and the Faith Movement', *Themelios*, vol. 15, 1 (1989), 16–24; MacDonald, 'The Cross Versus Personal Kingdoms', 26–37.

being and power, healing, safety in childbirth and the preservation of life. Ghanaian Old Testament theologian Ofose Adutwum has shown how Africans acknowledge that when harmonious relations are established with the transcendent realm the benevolent powers, like the view of God in the Psalms, can be counted on as a 'present help in every time of trouble'.<sup>38</sup> So in comparison with the failures of the wicked as in Psalm 1, the righteous, like the well-nourished tree, yield their fruit in season and prosper in their endeavours. Magesa demonstrates this in the rationality for prayer in African traditional religions:

When life is threatened or weakened, prayer is most abundant, both private and public prayer: prayer is a means of restoring wholeness and balance in life. In African religion, prayer is comprehensive, requesting the removal of all that is bad and anti-life in society, and demanding restoration of all that is good. Nothing less satisfies the African religious mind.<sup>39</sup>

The appropriation of spiritual power for the elimination of evil is thus a primary concern of religious activity in Ghanaian traditions. The positive endorsement of consumerist values and of wealth as proof of God's blessing needs to be challenged in the light of biblical evidence, as this chapter has attempted to do. However, there is also no reason to dismiss the Charismatic hermeneutic that the prosperity spoken of in such texts as Psalm 1 has reference to the concerns of this life. That the good news of Christ includes enjoying the practical fruits of God's grace is a view shared also by Anderson:

But is not the good news the fact that Christ has *potentially* won the victory for us over sin and all forms of human misery; and that he desires us to enjoy the fruits of that victory here and now—including forgiveness of sin, peace with God and man, and his material provision? In other words does not the New Testament promise us enjoyment of God *and* his gifts?<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ofose Adutwum, 'African Traditional "Psalms" of Confidence', *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, vol. 1, 1 (1991), 13–21.

<sup>39</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 195.

<sup>40</sup> Allan Anderson, 'The Prosperity Message in the Eschatology of Some New Charismatic Churches', *Missionalia*, vol. 15, 2 (1987), 80, 81. Italics in original.

One of the strengths of Pastor Otabil's biblical prosperity series is his emphasis that, in spite of the impoverished circumstances of Ghanaians, God still loves them and will deliver them from poverty, disease, oppression and hatred. Otabil is clear on the fact that this will not happen by prayer alone, but by hard work and resourcefulness, which in the Christian context God enables humankind to achieve by his grace. Ghanaians believe in personal effort, but supernatural realities have a determinative role in whether one's endeavours succeed or come to ruin. People respond positively to financial appeals in Ghanaian churches because of their faith in a transcendent God who takes a direct interest in their lives, and who answers prayer. This is in keeping with traditional Ghanaian spirituality that recognises a transcendent dimension to life, a dimension that is experienced in the midst of everyday activities. In the same vein, Charismatic testimonies are meant as proofs that God does indeed exist and delivers on his word to those who are faithful in their Christianity. In dwelling on the reality of the promises of God and his faithfulness to deliver, the Charismatics give practical expression to the nature of God borne out by the scriptures: God is the source of wealth, potentialities, abilities, and the believer must acknowledge that unless God approves of an endeavour it fails. If God is acknowledged as the source of what in a secular context may be attributed to human effort, it provides the believer with a sense of dependence on God and the responsibility to employ God's graces in his honour. This is what prayer and sacrifice achieve in traditional religiosity as shown by Magesa above. The community depends on the magnanimity of its deities that is sustained through right living and ritual. In Malachi, God promised that, if his people were faithful in the fulfilment of their obligations, their labours would not be wasted (3:8–12).

If this view of God as faithful, reliable, powerful, and as the source of all one is and has, is questioned as heretical, a key emphasis in the African Christian view of God is also questioned. Indeed it is a very regular practice in the traditional mission churches for people to give financial and other donations to the church in appreciation to God for child-birth, recovery from illness, passing of examinations and other endeavours for which his intervention had been sought. The success of the CMs, seen particularly in the attraction and respectability they have gained, is in our view an important index of the sort of theology that appeals to Ghanaian religious consciousness. They affirm the importance of religious experience for

the individual and power as the outflow of credible Christianity. Through the gospel of prosperity, the CMs seek to demonstrate the practicality of the Christian message of salvation and the reality and immediacy of the Spirit of God. The view being advocated here is a rethinking of the gospel of prosperity so that it is seen within the wider context of the manifestation of God's power which is so cherished in African religiosity. In principle the breakthroughs that the CMs cite as evidence of God's promises of prosperity refer not just to material wealth. Testimonies often include the acknowledgement of God as the source not only of wealth, but also of health, employment, promotion, opportunities to travel abroad, secure family life, and personal satisfaction and fulfilment. These are things that Western society can take for granted because opportunities abound and society is structured to cater for the welfare of its citizens. In the Ghanaian context, things are different. Existence can be precarious and there is lack of opportunity even when one is qualified. The Old Testament word for poor, *ani*, according to Barclay is used of those lacking any human assistance or structural support as a result of which they come to depend entirely on God.<sup>41</sup> In the precarious circumstances of many Ghanaian families, very little may be taken for granted.<sup>42</sup> As for the biblical poor, trust in God sometimes becomes the only available means of survival.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, the general relevance of their message to the context does not exonerate Ghana's CMs from the lapses in prosperity thinking. The problem lies not just with the bottom line, that is, the belief that God wills prosperity for all believers and that such prosperity may be sustained through 'positive confession' and payment of tithes and offerings. The interpretation of what it means to prosper also raises difficulties. At one service for instance, a young man who had just secured a five-year, multiple-entry visa to the USA had his open passport paraded down the aisles to show what God can do, that is, help people to secure visas. An advertisement for an

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<sup>41</sup> William Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society* (London: Fontana Books, 1971), 150.

<sup>42</sup> The level of opportunities in education is a case in point. In Ghana's tertiary educational sector, places are so limited that only about a third of those who hold the required entry qualification gain admission. It is therefore not uncommon to hear people testify to how God has helped them, their children, or perhaps a relation, gain university admission.

<sup>43</sup> Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society*, 150, 151.

impending Charismatic programme included the following line: ‘Is it a visa you want? Come, God will give you a miracle.’ Considering the difficulties with which such visas may be obtained, it is understandable that in Ghana such endeavours are the subject of much prayer and fasting. That is different from the impression often created in testimonies and messages that travelling abroad by itself constitutes a sign of prosperity from the Lord. In Ghana, where people are predisposed to search for solutions to problems in theological terms, the formulae advocated by the gospel of prosperity could lead to the exploitation of the poor, as people may genuinely want to believe that if they pay tithes God automatically responds.

It is also not possible to preach and live out the theology of prosperity in such conditions of deprivation as are found in rural Ghana. One effect is that the CMs become alienated from the poor—the very people who were the prime target of Jesus’ ministry. Evidence of this alienation is in the fact that the CMs have mostly become urban phenomena in Ghana. If God blesses people according to their financial contribution, then the poor may perpetually remain at the bottom of the pile. At the Christian Action Faith Ministries, an envelope given out for donations had the instruction ‘minimum one million cedis’.<sup>44</sup> The message of prosperity is thus effectively directed at those who have. It is our view that any gospel that cannot be universally applied across all sections of the community falls short of the gospel of Christ.

Prosperity doctrine thus presents a wrong rationale for giving. Biblical giving must be seen as integral to worship. Worship, in the Christian context, is humankind’s response to God’s initiative in Christ. Sacrifice or ‘voluntary offering’ has been cited in the work of Underhill as one of the main ingredients in worship.<sup>45</sup> In the African traditional context too, McKenzie explains that sacrifice ‘is the total offering of oneself to the deity as the only proper response to all that has been received’.<sup>46</sup> As a form of sacrifice, Christian giving is a token of sensible embodiment, which though inadequate

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<sup>44</sup> Envelopes given out at a service in August 1998. One million cedis was approximately £300 at the time. At the time this figure amounted to three months’ salary of a university lecturer.

<sup>45</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (London: James Nisbett, 1936), 16.

<sup>46</sup> Peter McKenzie, *Hail Orisha! A Phenomenology of West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 4.

helps the Christian to acknowledge and respond to the initiative of God in Christ.<sup>47</sup> Giving in tithes and offerings is undoubtedly one of the strongest points of Ghana's CMs. The CMs, as indigenous Christian movements, are enabled to be essentially African and truly independent. They fund their activities and projects from local resources. This financial initiative and independence is something that leading older mission churches still struggle to emulate. Charismatic churches invest heavily in evangelistic programmes. Many run radio programmes requiring them to pay very expensive airtime fees. Generally Charismatic pastors are also better paid and resourced than the agents of traditional western mission denominations. In recent times many CMs have set up social programmes in aid of their communities. Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church, for instance, gives scholarships to capable but needy students in Ghanaian secondary schools. In addition to these, a number of CMs have within short spans of time been able to fund their own church building projects.

However, selfless or sacrificial giving seems missing from the principle of 'sowing and reaping' preached through the gospel of prosperity. The preoccupation with one's own mundane needs as the rationale for giving has generated a number of unorthodox if not un-Christian means of collecting funds in CMs. In one instance, a pastor claimed to have received a directive from God to collect donations of fifty thousand cedis (approximately £20 then) from worshippers. God's purpose in asking for this donation was that he was going to give the donors special 'breakthroughs' in life within a month. Conscious of the fact that this collection might raise eyebrows, the pastor added: 'I don't care what you think, God asked me to collect this money, and I am doing this in obedience.' What was striking for me was the large number of worshippers, many of them obviously students, who could not respond to this mandatory invitation to give to God. The underlying implication was that those who could not contribute, the poor, students and unemployed, were effectively placed outside God's intended blessing.

Prosperity teaching simply falls short of the message of the Cross. In relation to the Cross, it is worth returning to the theme of power referred to in the last chapter as informing Charismatic Christianity

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<sup>47</sup> Underhill, *Worship*, 9.

in general. Charismatics seek to demonstrate through a praxis-oriented, results-oriented theology that God is powerful. He is powerful to save, to heal, to deliver from evil, and, in relation to the prosperity gospel, powerful to transform physical circumstances. In response to the neglect of the Cross in such teaching, MacDonald rightly observes that 'the cross can never be removed from the Gospel without changing the good news into other news'.<sup>48</sup> There is no doubting the fact that the gospel of Christ is indeed a gospel of power as seen in the healing of the sick, raising of the dead, stilling of the storms, and the power of the resurrection. But it is also a gospel of weakness. For in the incarnation, the Creator became part of his creation and in the crucifixion he became 'a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering' (Isaiah 53:1–12). That is why, as Dickson argues, Paul is reluctant to place the Cross in the shadow of the resurrection of Christ.<sup>49</sup> The prosperity hermeneutic is an indication that the CMs have not come to terms with this paradox of a powerful God acquainted with grief and suffering and whose power is made perfect in weakness. A gospel that does not engage constructively with pain, poverty and suffering by offering practical solutions to it will almost certainly not be of much relevance on African soil because the African experience often embodies such conditions. Size and what one has to show in terms of modern commodities have become too important to those who preach prosperity. The thinking is that if God is in something, it has to turn out grandiose. When something is big, very successful or grand in the lives of believers, it is taken as a reflection of God's blessing. Ghanaian CMs have, for instance, aimed at 'mega'-size church buildings and congregations. Personal appearance, cars used, accommodation, and numerical strength of churches and the number of times a person travels out of Ghana, are all expected to reflect the fact that 'God is big' and he goes for the spectacular. This lifestyle needs money to sustain it, but the experience of most Ghanaians is one in which finding a decent meal a day can be a struggle.

Related to the issue of the Cross is the inability of the prosperity gospel to come to terms with humility and service as the means to Christian leadership. To further illustrate the power motif, consider

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<sup>48</sup> MacDonald, 'The Cross Versus Personal Kingdoms', 33.

<sup>49</sup> Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 189, 190.



the reason for the insistence that the Charismatic leader must embody the fruits of prosperity. The view taken in this matter is that there is a deep-seated desire among leaders of nascent Charismatic churches to be counted with the religious, social and politically powerful of modern society. In Ghana some Charismatic leaders appear to relish the prospect of being seen in the company of powerful members of the ruling government. Our concern here is that patronising the government weakens the ability of Charismatic leaders to challenge those in power on their record of economic mismanagement and human rights abuses. The standard and model of leadership is not that of the humble Christ, identified with the poor and marginalised, but that of the powerful of modern society. This is the only way to explain the recent rush for honorary doctorates, the desire to be seen in expensive automobiles, the public endorsement of government and the enthronement as bishops in grand and ostentatious ceremonies to which leading government functionaries are invited. In justifying the expensive gifts received from members, Duncan-Williams refers to society's standards and expectations of its leaders and executives:

Society is fully aware that the man of God would be stronger and better composed riding in a good car rather than waiting endless hours at the bus-stop. Society takes care of its chief executives to ensure that they are up-to-date and healthy to take crucial decisions with accuracy. Society provides the best for its leaders to show them forth as examples.<sup>50</sup>

Duncan-Williams is not alone in this belief that a pastor's lifestyle should be comparable to that of any chief executive of a modern business concern. Otobil was also the beneficiary of a Mercedes-car given by his congregation as a birthday present. In response to the question of why a more modest car was not chosen, Otobil noted:

The Benz . . . serves as the amplification of the personality of the pastor because the pastor does not just occupy a spiritual position. He is a source of inspiration to the people he meets who do not relate to him as a pastor but relate to him on a certain level. So if the church grows to a certain social standing and wants the pastor to be able to meet people that he comes across with that kind of dignity then I think buying a Mercedes-Benz car is nothing of a big deal.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Duncan-Williams, *You are Destined to Succeed*, 144.

<sup>51</sup> Interview in *The Mirror*, May 6, 1989.

A similar rationale lay behind the enthronement of Pastor Reginald Ofori-Twumasi as bishop. According to Pastor Newman, who used to be the direct assistant to Ofori-Twumasi, the reasons for coveting the title 'bishop' were not just religious. There were sociological reasons as well. He explained that the enthronement as bishop was to enhance the religious and social image of their leader. On what difference the enthronement had made, he explained: 'We now see him as a proper spiritual overseer. His status as bishop is also respected by the government because his office now has authority. His personal relationship with the government has improved tremendously and the government now consults him on spiritual matters.' One of the clearest indications of the social respectability aim of enthroning bishops is Pastor Newman's claim that when Bishop Ofori-Twumasi has an appointment with government officials, his episcopal accoutrements give him added poise and recognition. The relevance of the acquisition of academic and ecclesiastical titles for our discussion lies in the vehemence with which, in their formative years, the Charismatic churches denounced their traditional mission church counterparts for those tendencies. Academic degrees, the use of clerical robes and collars were all denounced as un-scriptural, un-spiritual and effectively indicative of the staid nature of these older churches.

It is revealing that the use of expensive cars, flamboyant appearance and lavish lifestyles are justified not only on the basis of Scripture but as indices of religious and social status. Admittedly, many of Ghana's Charismatic leaders need not have been in the ministry to have access to some of the commodities they covet today. However, one would contend that there is such a thing as 'a Christian lifestyle'. By this is meant the pattern of life that arises from the choices a Christian makes about how time, money and related resources are used. If a person's status in life remained the same after the call to ministry, Christianity might never have become a life of self-denial and self-surrender. In other words, to follow Jesus is to accept a measure of uncertainty and that is the message Jesus sent to would-be disciples in statements like, 'foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head' (Luke 9:57-62). To be a Christian necessarily involves making sacrifices and this includes refraining from a lifestyle or public disposition that does not reflect God's pattern in Christ. Neither Jesus nor any of his followers coveted societal or religious recognition by assuming a 'Christian equivalent' of what were considered symbols of political

and social importance. Those who tried to seek privileged status in God's kingdom were shown the way of humility and service. The prelude to the request made to Jesus by James and John is familiar to much of Charismatic prayer: 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask' (Mark 10:35). The comment of John Stott on the implication of the request is worth citing in full:

[The request] was the exact opposite of true prayer, whose purpose is never to bend God's will to ours, but always to bend our will to his. Yet the world . . . is full of Jameses and Johns, go-getters and status-seekers, hungry for honour and prestige, measuring life by achievement, and everlastingly dreaming of success.<sup>52</sup>

In seeking social importance through the imitation of a materialistic lifestyle, prosperity pastors, according to Sider, have fallen into a version of 'theological liberalism' that allows its 'thinking and living to be shaped by society's views and values rather than by biblical revelation'.<sup>53</sup> Indeed it was the noticeable difference in lifestyle that led to the disciples' first designation as 'Christians' in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

In the Ghanaian context it needs to be acknowledged that the Charismatic churches have been able to articulate a message that addresses people's situations and circumstances in a relevant manner. This is the position taken throughout this work. The CMs are keen to stress that becoming a Christian is a transforming experience. There are powerful and moving testimonies in the CMs of people who as a result of encounters with Christ have had marriages restored, alcoholism overcome and bribery and corruption abandoned. Through the message of prosperity, the CMs emphasise the acquisition of a new self-image for the Christian. In addition to his message of self-denial Jesus also affirmed the value of human beings in God's sight by the space he created in his ministry for those marginalised by the social, religious and political institutions of his day: sinners, lepers, prostitutes, tax-collectors, women, children, and the weak. On the whole the gospel of prosperity assures people that God values them, wills the best for them and that with the proper use of their abilities

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<sup>52</sup> John Stott, *The Essential John Stott: The Cross of Christ; The Contemporary Christian*, combined edition (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 266.

<sup>53</sup> Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 20th anniversary edition (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), 64, 65.

and potentialities they could maximise their talents and enhance their own value as human beings.

However, encountering the Cross of Christ also transforms the very centre of our being, giving the Christian a new courage to face the perplexities of suffering. With this understanding of suffering, Jesus endured temptations and the apostles rejoiced at the thought of 'being counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name' (Acts 5:41). In other words, suffering does not always go away as the prosperity gospel seems to suggest. On the contrary, through the Cross Christ gives the Christian the capacity to endure. For it is 'to him who overcomes' that the right to sit with Christ in God's eschatological kingdom is offered (Revelation 3:21). In a country like Ghana where the barren are objects of public derision, and conditions like poverty and unemployment are rife, prosperity teaching leaves large sections of the community in limbo. God may be doing other things in the lives of people that cannot be quantified in material terms. However, because such 'goodness and mercies' of God may not be considered paradigmatic, it leaves many people 'without a testimony'. For large sections of the Christian population, their experience of God may not be the presence of tangible blessing at all. It may lie in the grace received to be able to endure in a certain time of crisis, or to do without something that they needed. It might lie in the grace received to be able to cope during grief or even to care for a terminally ill patient. There are many who continue to endure marriages where the other partner is an alcoholic or has been unfaithful in the marriage and that is their testimony. There is thus a clear imbalance at the heart of the prosperity hermeneutic.

The obvious difficulties raised by the message of prosperity should not be allowed to obliterate the fact that within Ghanaian Christian history the story of these churches is indicative of a great rediscovery of which the church stands in need. They demonstrate that Christianity has much to do with experience, and a God who is as much concerned with providing their needs in this life as he is with the Christian's eschatological end. The error of Simon Magus who attempted to pay money for the ability to impart the Spirit sadly continues to be made by some in the Pentecostalist movement today. The Charismatic churches are no exception to this, but there are signs that many of their leaders are learning with the years.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### AFRICAN CHARISMATIC SPIRITUALITY

Then Moses said to [the LORD], If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? (Exodus 33:15–16).

This book began with a reference to the observation made initially by David Barrett that Christianity's demographic centre of gravity has tilted in favour of the Southern continents. Placing this observation in context, we argued that, as far as the African situation was concerned, Pentecostalism offered the most palpable evidence of the current exponential growth occurring within Third World Christianity. Elsewhere in *Schism and Renewal*, Barrett called for a critical but sympathetic examination of what these movements of 'immense power and creativity' emerging in Africa have 'to teach concerning a genuinely African theology'. For, as he points out, 'Christian theology, if it is to be truly Christian, must not rest merely on past formulations but must be a reflection on what God is doing in the present'.<sup>1</sup> Considering that Pentecostalism is a global phenomenon, the study adopted an intercultural approach. The author shares Taylor's view:

In Africa today it seems that the incalculable Spirit has chosen to use the Independent Church Movement for another spectacular advance. This does not prove that their teaching is necessarily true but it shows they have the raw materials out of which a missionary church is made—spontaneity, total commitment, and the primitive responses that arise from the depths of life.<sup>2</sup>

On current developments within Ghanaian independent Pentecostalism, it has been noted that, while some waves of the movement have

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<sup>1</sup> David Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968), xix.

<sup>2</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God* (London: SCM 1972), 54.

withered and perished, in other areas there have been life, vitality and renewal within Ghanaian Christianity. The impact of renewal is evident through the enormous effect that indigenous Pentecostal spirituality is having on Ghanaian Christianity as a whole. Inspired by the Sunsum sorè, who are now in decline, and heightened by the forceful impact of CMs, we have seen how the singing of choruses during worship, hand-clapping, drumming and dancing, mass spontaneous prayer and 'praise and worship' sessions are now part of non-Pentecostal services in Ghana. Thus one of our major findings has been that in the midst of weaknesses, deviations, abuses and controversial theological pursuits within indigenous Pentecostal movements, there has also been renewing and re-energising.

In the process of renewal, neither the impact of indigenous Charismatic figures whose personal visions and psychology shape their movements, nor the effects of the contextual cluster of economic, social and cultural factors that give the movements their unique character, are to be denied. However, in the midst of the precarious existence in which the Western church finds itself, the cause of the gospel, I believe, has been advanced and preserved through the ebullience, dynamism and ingenuity of independent Pentecostal movements in Third World countries like Ghana. Responses offered by Ghanaian Pentecostals regarding what they considered to be the main attraction for them about their 'new churches' may be expressed in the word 'relevance', by which they meant Christianity that was practical. In the Ghanaian context, as is evident from our discussions, to speak of 'practical Christianity' or what is considered 'theologically relevant' is to speak of a God whose power is unsurpassed and who practically manifests his presence in the experiences of his people. These manifestations, meant to serve as proofs of God's viability and 'distinguish his people from all other people on the face of the earth', are evident in personal transformations, healings, deliverance from evil which opens the door to the realisation of life, longevity and prosperity. We have pointed out that there is undoubtedly a deficient appreciation of the role of suffering in such theology. Job called his wife 'foolish' for her inclination to curse God in suffering. His response to calamity was: 'Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' (Job 2:10). However, it is also true that, from a biblical perspective, suffering is viewed as a great evil and God promises to intervene in the sufferings and misfortunes of his people: 'A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord

delivers him from them all' (Psalm 34:19). For Ghanaian indigenous Pentecostals, if God is on your side, you must have something to tender in evidence for it. Such practical Christianity, adherents of Pentecostalism claimed, was absent from the spirituality of mission churches to which many originally belonged. The focus of the renewal initiated by Ghanaian independent Pentecostals has been to respond to what they consider the external formalism, 'power failure' and spiritual emptiness associated with traditional mission Christianity. What follows is an attempt, in line with the intercultural approach, to string together the distinctive spirituality that defines Ghanaian Pentecostalism as one member of a global family.

First, the spirituality of Ghanaian Pentecostal renewal affirms God's existence and presence. This research has provided opportunities to observe and listen to Ghanaian Pentecostals speak about their faith, express it through prayer, song and dance, and live it out in daily life. A striking thing about this encounter has been the *intense conviction* with which such spirituality has been expressed. Whatever its failures may be, Ghanaian independent Pentecostalism cannot be faulted on the attention it draws to the importance of *experience* to Christian faith and life. Speaking within the context of faith, the writer of Hebrews notes that 'anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him' (Hebrews 11:6). Here, a bare assent to God's existence is considered insufficient unless it is joined by active faith. In their spirituality, indigenous Pentecostals consistently affirm that the God in whom they have come to believe is not a figment of someone's imagination, that he indeed exists, and that he is real because he fulfils his promise of re-birth for those who believe in the saving power of Christ, to give them a new tongue, heal the sick and deliver the demonically possessed and oppressed. It is only a 'living God' interested in the everyday concerns of his children who can also make his mind known to them through prophecy, visions and dreams. It was also striking to see how such belief in the reality of God had influenced and been incorporated into popular Ghanaian imagination. Thus in Ghana, car bumper stickers carry biblical and religious slogans like 'Angels on guard, keep off' and 'Satan is a loser'. A number of small businesses also advertise their ventures in religious language: 'Anointed Hands Hairdressing Saloon', 'Jesus is a Winner Restaurant' and 'Blessed Hands Tyre Repair Services'. What makes such spirituality distinctive is that the African traditional heritage

within which such spirituality is expressed is itself intensely and pervasively religious. In the words of Sanneh, 'from casual, daily, and spontaneous contexts to sombre, highly structured public occasions, [religion] is the focus of elaborate and detailed interest' in African communities.<sup>3</sup>

A useful illustration of Ghanaian religiosity is found in the recognition that there is a transcendent dimension to life. There is very little in Ghanaian traditional life that lies outside the jurisdiction of *Onyame*, God, and spirit powers such as the ancestors. Thus one of the most cherished symbols of Ghanaian traditions is the *Gye Nyame* (literally, 'God alone') symbol meant to communicate God as the 'be all and end all of life and existence'. The Psalmist echoes Ghanaian perceptions of God when he asks: 'Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?' (Psalm 139:7). Pentecostal spirituality thus speaks to the African experience in a very relevant manner because it affirms the immediacy of God's presence, a presence that, as the quotation at the head of the chapter shows, Moses expected to be proven in God's dealings with his people through sustenance, provision of needs and deliverance from the hands of their enemies as they travelled through the precarious wilderness. Similarly for Ghanaian Pentecostals, there is no area in life that God cannot touch through prayer whether it concerns personal, family or national life. One observer puts it as follows: 'Ghana is one of the few countries left in the Christian world where no meeting (whether official government business or private gathering) starts without an opening prayer and finishes without a closing prayer.'<sup>4</sup>

Second, in Ghanaian Pentecostal spirituality, the living God also authenticates his power or presence in 'signs and wonders', especially healing. In Ghanaian traditional thought, healing in its wider connotation as a response to physical, social and spiritual disorder is a very crucial function of religion, and, not surprisingly, it is a central activity in indigenous Pentecostal renewal. To quote from Hebrews again, God's salvation is verified by 'signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according

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<sup>3</sup> Lamin O. Sanneh, 'New and Old in Africa's Religious Heritage: Islam, Christianity and the African Encounter', in A.F. Walls and Wilbert R. Shenk (eds.), *Exploring New Religious Movements* (Elkhart, IN: Mission Focus, 1990), 64.

<sup>4</sup> Mike Afrani, 'God is Serious Business in Ghana', *New African Magazine* (July/August 1997), 37.



to his will' (Hebrews 2:3–4). Such all-embracing salvation speaks to the African experience in which, as has been noted, salvation is holistic, encapsulating 'a sense of well-being evidenced in freedom from sickness, poverty and misfortune as well as in deliverance from sin and evil.'<sup>5</sup> In African contexts like the Ghanaian one, allegiance is maintained towards deities who consistently prove their power through the gifts of children, health, good harvest, rain or some form of tangible evidence that they are more than mere pieces of wood or stone. The renewal that twentieth-century Pentecostal movements have brought to bear on Ghanaian Christianity, therefore, seeks to affirm that God is real and he is able to save through Christ, to empower through the Holy Spirit, and show his mighty power in miracles. Evidence is provided by the testimonies through which people point to dramatic personality transformations, recovery from ill-health and failing life's endeavours and restoration of human dignity as a result of cessation from alcoholism, womanising, drug abuse, prostitution, neglect of family and general aimlessness in life. For many former victims, it has taken God's miraculous intervention to redeem them from ways of life that previously alienated them from the source of their being and conditions of affliction. In biblical thought and experience, as we have argued, the renewal of the church is linked with visitations of the Spirit. The message that the various testimonies seek to put across is that it makes a difference to have God in one's life and that renewal theology is based on experiencing a God who is real.

Third, renewal in Ghanaian Pentecostalism also affirms the restoration of spiritual gifts not just in an ontological sense, but also as a functional reality. This is the area in which traditional mission church Christianity has been considered most deficient by Ghanaian indigenous Pentecostals. To return to the principle of our opening quotation, indigenous Pentecostals expect that God, according to his promise in Joel, will prove the reality of his presence through the activity of his Spirit. Thus, in chapter 2, the 'normalisation of charismatic gifts in Christian expression' was cited as one of the main contributions made by the Sunsum sorè to Christianity in Ghana. In this conclusion, we refer to the 'rediscovery' of spiritual gifts in order to stress

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<sup>5</sup> Allan Anderson, 'Global Pentecostalism in the New Millennium', in Anderson and Hollenweger, *Pentecostals After a Century*, 215.

the continuing relevance of the *charismata pneumatika*, listed in various parts of the New Testament, in the spirituality of Ghanaian indigenous Pentecostals (I Corinthians 12:8–10; Romans 12:6–8; I Peter 4:10–11).

In order not to rehearse points already made, two areas will be isolated concerning the rediscovery of spiritual gifts as a defining feature of renewal in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. On the subject of renewal, Parker has noted that ‘clericalism’ as a leadership style is Spirit-quenching.<sup>6</sup> One of the most important theological statements made by the eruptions of Pentecostal activity in Ghana is an affirmation of the ability of the Holy Spirit to make ‘ministers’ out of ordinary people by filling them with power and therefore spiritual gifts. Most of the tensions arising between church authority and those who eventually find their way out of established Christianity emanate from the inability of the latter to create the requisite context for people to use their ministry gifts of the Spirit. Those who champion the cause of clericalism often feel scandalised that lay people, previously counting for nothing in the mission church establishment, become spiritual dynamos after being given a ministry by the Holy Spirit. The only way the Sanhedrin could come to terms with the courage of Peter and John, ‘unschooled ordinary men’, was the sudden realisation that, ‘they had been with Jesus’ (Acts 4:13). In other words, the apostles had been with the source of spiritual power and authority. In the Ghanaian religious tradition, religious functionaries are expected to be spiritual persons par excellence. Traditional priests, irrespective of gender, are quintessentially wives of the deities who possess them. As a result, they are expected to demonstrate signs of being closer to the divine sources of power than ordinary devotees. In the context of Ghana where people seek solutions to their problems in spiritual terms, lay people who are seen as men and women of the Spirit soon gain the confidence of church membership as pastoral carers, a move that is often seen as a challenge to the powerlessness of an ordained minister. Such spiritual experiences of ordinary lay people, possessing no theological sophistication yet successfully initiating the formation of independent churches, account in large measure for the success of these Ghanaian movements. In the words of Anderson:

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<sup>6</sup> J.I. Parker, *Serving the People of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 83.

The mass involvement of the 'laity' in the pentecostal movement was undoubtedly one of the main reasons for its success. There was no need for theologically articulate clergy, because cerebral and clerical Christianity had, in the minds of many people, already failed them. What was needed was a demonstration of power by indigenous people to whom ordinary people could easily relate.<sup>7</sup>

The second point about spiritual gifts relates to the fact that in the CMs, as was noted in chapter 5, the democratisation of charisma or 'gifts of grace' means that all words or acts mediating grace to the 'body of Christ', whether listed in the Bible or not, may be considered charisms or ministry gifts (I Corinthians 12:7). It is as well that in Pauline thought charisma is synonymous with *diakonia*, ministry (see chapter 4). What has happened within the CMs is that, as a result of the diversified ministries, 'natural abilities' or talents of renewed individuals have been 'Christianised' in order that in their new form as spiritual gifts they may be employed in ministry to serve the body of Christ. This is particularly evident in the area of music, where former Ghanaian pop stars like Christian Action Faith Ministries pastor, Leslie 'Tex', keyboard players and vocalists like Elvis J. Brown, are now in charge of music and worship in CMs.<sup>8</sup> What comes to mind in seeing such people who are easily recognised from their pop star days in the 1970s are Paul's words to Timothy: if anyone cleanses himself or herself from ignoble uses, 'he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work' (II Timothy 2:21). The literal point of this passage, according to Marshall, appears to be that a vessel previously used for so-called dishonourable purposes can be thoroughly cleaned and will then be fit for honourable uses.<sup>9</sup> In 'human life', according to *The Interpreter's Bible*, 'this miracle' of transformation from an ignoble vessel to a purposeful one 'actually takes place through the power of Christ's Spirit'.<sup>10</sup> The example of Leslie 'Tex' is replicated in the cases of Ghanaian gospel singers like Helena Rhabbles and Amy

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, 'Global Pentecostalism in the New Millennium', 222.

<sup>8</sup> The real name of Leslie 'Tex' is Leslie Buabasa. Leslie and his wife Emily are the pastors in charge of the Christian Action Faith Ministries branch at the Sakumono Estates, Accra.

<sup>9</sup> Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 761.

<sup>10</sup> George Arthur Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 11 (New York: Abingdon, 1955), 494.

Newman, both former Methodists, whose singing gifts are now recognised as special ‘ministries’ within the Charismatic family and beyond. In Matthew’s account, Jesus begins the parable of the talents by referring to ‘a man’, a master, ‘who called his servants and entrusted his property to them’ (Matthew 25:14–30). Whatever the talents in this parable signify, one of its underlying messages is that just as the master required the servants to account for their stewardship, so does God entrust his children with abilities which must be usefully employed. In the context of our discussion, natural abilities are the ‘properties’, gifts of grace that God puts at our disposal, which in the fellowship of believers could be used to minister to the common good of the body of Christ. Here the intervention of God enables recipients to make such gifts available for the Master’s use, for, ‘it is only the coming of God’s Spirit that truly reveals the full potential of humankind’.<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, an important hallmark of the spirituality of the renewal initiated by Ghanaian Pentecostals is the affirmation of worship as an authentic encounter with God. During one service I observed, the choir seemed unable to bring to an end a song originally meant as preparation for the message (sermon). The last line, ‘when I consider your ways, I feel like praising you till the end of my days’, continued repeatedly in what appeared to be an involuntary manner until suddenly some singers started shaking and screaming. Some blessed the name of the Lord in words, whilst others just started jumping around uncontrollably. The impact reverberated through the congregation with some falling to the ground, having been ‘slain in the Spirit’ as the experience is called. The message for the day was not delivered at all. After about an hour of what would have appeared to outsiders as a church service descending into chaos, what had occurred was explained as being sufficient blessing for the day. In spite of the incorporation of mission church elements into their liturgical styles, the emotive, expressive and spontaneous nature of worship in Ghanaian independent Pentecostalism remains one of the main areas in which their spirituality differs from other Christian traditions. Parker avers that to be ‘serious about the Holy Spirit’ Christians must rediscover the naturalness of three things that modern believers in the West rarely see as natural: worship, evangelism and

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<sup>11</sup> Hocken, ‘The Significance and Potential of Pentecostalism’, 23.

suffering. With regard to worship, Parker quotes A.W. Tozer as follows:

To great sections of the Church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the 'program'. This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us.<sup>12</sup>

Ian Cotton is understood to be making a similar observation when, in contrast to Charismatic worship, he notes of choral evensong in a typical Church of England cathedral: 'while it was undeniable that it was a profound celebration of *something*, exactly what was not so clear'.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to these observations by Tozer and Cotton, worship in Ghana's indigenous Pentecostal movements comes across as a lively celebration of the presence of a living God. Such worship is the fruit of spiritual experience, described as the greatest cornerstone of religion, following belief and ritual.<sup>14</sup> During corporate worship, especially within the period designated 'praise and worship' in the CMs, the 'orderliness' associated with the liturgical programming of services in traditional mission churches is generally absent. Worship is characterised by vibrancy and vitality because it is meant to be a celebration of what has been experienced. The expressive nature of Pentecostal worship ties in with African traditional forms of celebration in which drumming, dancing, spirit possession and the expression of emotion are considered normal. The type of worship associated with Ghanaian Pentecostalism is important for another reason. Ghanaian Pentecostal spirituality, as mentioned in chapter 2, ends the 'body, mind and spirit', 'sacred and secular' and 'theological and non-religious' fragmentation by employing all human faculties in worship. Speaking in tongues, tears, healing, shaking, screaming, prophecy, revelations and visions: these features ensure the use of all integrative faculties in worship and help worshippers to take God's inexpressibility seriously.

The features of the spirituality or renewal summarised above underscore the innovative nature of African Pentecostals generally and the

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in J.I. Parker, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God: Collected Shorter Writings of J.I. Parker*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), 207.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Cotton, *The Hallelujah Revolution: The Rise of the New Christians* (London: Warner Books, 1995), 19. Italic in original.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 1.

enduring contribution that the Sunsum sorè have made to Ghanaian Christianity. This contribution must be recognised, for it is the openness to the spontaneous movements of the Spirit of God that has saved Christianity from being pushed to the periphery in Ghana, as has happened in Western Europe. The endurance of the features characterising Sunsum sorè spirituality among Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals challenges the argument that these fresh and modern religious stirrings are the result of American neo-Pentecostal expansionism. Ghanaian indigenous Pentecostalism, as with Pentecostal movements everywhere, is experiential in nature. This, as has been suggested, makes it imperative that an emic perspective be adopted in which voices from the inside are taken seriously in attempts at understanding the spirituality of the movement. However the insider's view of experience alone (see chapter 1) is not considered sufficient. For, as Cox points out, although the insider's perspective is an important part of the picture, it may have deficiencies.<sup>15</sup> Charisma or experience that does not have the benefit of critical 'independent' interpretation and knowledge could be chaotic. This has been evident in some of the problems associated with the decline of the Sunsum sorè and the 'lack of knowledge' characterising the activities of some of the emerging Charismatic prophets discussed in chapter 5.

The theme of spiritual renewal that occurs through experience, as my investigations have shown, is one of the main defining characteristics of indigenous Pentecostal thought and praxis in Ghana. Pentecostals believe in the doctrine of the Spirit, except that for them doctrine is given active expression through experience. So, when Pentecostals confess 'We believe in the Holy Spirit', it is often because they have experienced the Spirit in some way during their Christian pilgrimage, and they identify with the experiences of the Charismatic community to which they may belong. The emphasis on experience has often been at the expense of critical exegesis and carefully considered hermeneutics. But human experience, Peter L. Berger has shown, could also contain theologically relevant data.<sup>16</sup> Considering the general rationalistic approaches to religion in the modern West, Berger goes as far as to suggest that 'inductive faith' holds the great-

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<sup>15</sup> Harvey Cox, 'Foreword', in Anderson and Hollenweger (eds.), *Pentecostals After a Century*, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Peter L. Berger, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 100.

est promise of new approaches to religious truth.<sup>17</sup> 'Inductive faith' refers to 'a religious process of thought that begins with facts of human experience'. Unlike 'deductive faith' that begins with ideas, 'inductive faith', according to Berger, proceeds from human experience to statements about God.<sup>18</sup> So, for many of the followers of Jesus, their faith was born out of their experiential encounter with Jesus: 'what we proclaim concerning the Word of life' is what 'we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched' (I John 1:1). In other words, faith and proclamation emanated from personal encounter. Similarly, the theological root of much of the religious innovation in Ghana lies in the religious experiences of the founders and their followers. The emphasis on experience is what makes oral theologising one of the distinctive hallmarks of Ghanaian Pentecostalism. In the experience of many of its participants, God has rescued them from destruction and placed their feet on 'higher ground', which is something they want to pray, sing, talk, clap and dance about. For such people, their own experiences provide sufficient evidence that God exists and that he rewards those who diligently place their faith in him.

However, we have also witnessed clear dangers in making the religious experience of the leader or of a few members paradigmatic or normative for everybody. God's Spirit, to reiterate a point, is unpredictable and religious experiences attributed to the Spirit may not occur among people in any systematic way. Care should be taken in sitting in judgement over those whose experiences do not follow known patterns, for they could be as genuine as those stipulated as the norm. The problems identified with Ghanaian Pentecostal spirituality and the criticisms offered underscore the need for the movement to integrate its 'primitive spirituality', that is, the experiential emphasis on the Holy Spirit in accordance with biblical patterns, with a biblical theology of depth. The establishment of the Good News Training Institute in Ghana and the proliferation of Bible Schools within the CMs are evidence that the independent indigenous Pentecostal movements are not oblivious to this need for theological integration.<sup>19</sup> Authentic renewal must also place as much

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 76.

<sup>19</sup> The Good News Training Institute was established by Ghanaian Independent

importance on practical action against injustice, poverty, oppression, unemployment and economic deprivation as it does on the personal experience leading to new life in Christ and spiritual empowerment. So far a meaningful engagement with social matters has been minimal in Ghanaian independent Pentecostal thought and praxis. Personal piety seems to have overshadowed this important aspect of ministry, for which the ministry of Jesus offers a decisive example.

Although there are signs of efforts being made in this direction too, the problem remains that the human and material resources to achieve these ends are either inadequate or beyond the capacities of these indigenous movements. There are no theologians comparable to Baëta, Dickson, Pobeë, Bediako, Sarpong, Lartey and Oduyoye within independent Pentecostalism in Ghana. This is where one would recommend that some of the people who have studied such movements make efforts to contribute to the endeavours of their objects of study. Theologians, missiologists and church historians, many belonging to Western institutions of considerable repute, have acquired higher degrees and enhanced their academic and professional careers by studying and writing about Ghanaian initiatives in Christianity. Yet there is little if any evidence of investments made into such movements. This raises the question of who may be called 'an authority' or 'expert' on such movements. I would suggest that scholars might profitably refer to themselves as authorities on particular movements if it could be proven that their ideas were translatable on the ground. One way to do this is to give the movements an opportunity to read and respond to what has been written about them. A recent initiative by researchers at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of Leeds University, bringing together academics and practitioners in the area of African initiatives in religion for constructive dialogue, may be considered a step in the right direction. This ongoing programme of consultations aims 'to equip people from oral cultures to tell their stories, which can serve as reliable material for analysis and understanding'.<sup>20</sup> In keeping with such initiatives, scholars who are

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churches of the Sunsum sorè category in 1971. Its aim was 'to help students improve their understanding and knowledge of the Word of God, and their effectiveness as the followers of Jesus Christ'.

<sup>20</sup> The first consultation, at which this author was present, took place at Leeds University in September 1997 under the theme 'The Significance of the African Religious Diaspora in Europe'. The organising team included Roswith Gerloff and



competent to do so could collaborate with their subjects of study to help them to address areas where they need help, particularly in the development of human and theological capacities.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of developing capacities, much could also be achieved by working together. Dickson has noted that, as long as the church remains in the world, 'mission will be its *raison d'être*, for the church has its origin in God's mission in Christ'.<sup>22</sup> The church in this context refers not to denominations and traditions, but to the church as the body of Christ. There is much that churches in Ghana could do together if they began to view their mission as continuous with that of other Christian traditions. As the body of Christ, the Church shares the privilege of working in the vineyard of a common Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. What comes to mind in reflecting on this is the parable Jesus told of the labourers in the vineyard in Matthew 20:1–16. In considering developments within Ghanaian Christianity in the light of this parable, two main issues emerge. First is the fact that the workers recruited at the 'eleventh hour' were paid the same wage as those engaged earlier. Second, the fact that those who were engaged earlier grumbled, feeling cheated by the generosity of the landowner towards the latecomers. Based on these two points, I offer the following observations regarding what God is perceived to be saying and doing within Pentecostalism and Ghanaian Christianity in general.

First, like the vineyard workers employed earlier, established churches in Ghana appear to be anxious, scandalised, even envious of the growing strength, success and impact of the CMs in particular. Although in the Bible God's salvation is firmly linked with faith, the parable of the vineyard shows that grace is basic to God's dealings

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Kevin Ward of Leeds University and Rev. Jeridan Jehu-Appiah of the Musama Disco Christo Church, London. See Roswith Gerloff, 'The Significance of the African Christian Diaspora in Europe: A Report on Four Meetings in 1997/8', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 29, 1 (1999), 115–120.

<sup>21</sup> More often than not, the movements have no idea what has been written about them. For example, Gifford relies extensively on the work of Ghanaian healing and deliverance exponent Aaron Vuha in his analysis of the phenomenon. But the first time Vuha heard of Gifford and the fact that his work is of scholarly interest was when this author told him about it during our interview. Vuha wrote to me, 'I shall like to read what has been written because although I have been doing this work for sometime now, I have not had the privilege to discuss my successes and failures with any academic. I hope that you will also not treat us the same way.'

<sup>22</sup> Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, 1.

with his people. Paying the latecomers the same as those recruited earlier establishes the principle that the owner of the vineyard reserved the right to do what he wanted with his resources. God's grace goes to the undeserving, in this context the latecomers; it is humankind's inclination to compare on merit that creates displeasure. The expression 'mushroom churches', initially used of the Sunsum sorè, and now widely used of the CMs by those outside these groups, is meant to castigate independent Pentecostals as churches 'recruited at the eleventh hour' and not having much to offer. As in the case of the elder brother of the prodigal son, there is much grumbling about the prominence of the CMs in modern Ghanaian Christianity. In our judgement, if God has indeed chosen these movements to renew the flagging spirit of his church, there is no need to be envious of God's generosity. Rather they should be assessed on the basis of what their presence is saying to the church as a whole: that renewal does not occur through the revision of inherited traditions. It comes by being open to the Spirit of renewal, God himself.

Second, seeing God's Spirit and grace as being at work outside one's own Christian tradition raises the prospects for co-operation. The responsibility for ecumenical co-operation that must be shared is only possible if the contribution made by others is recognised and appreciated. In Ghana, the Sunsum sorè pioneered renewal by bringing a new lease of life into Christianity. Without the efforts of conservative evangelicalism, the CMs may perhaps not have had much to build on. They therefore need to recognise that their own mission has been made 'easier' by those employed earlier who bore 'the burden of the work and the heat of the day' (Matthew 20:12). Much ground had already been prepared by the established Christian churches before the emergence of indigenous Pentecostals. So if those 'early comers' need a heart of love to appreciate what God is doing through the latecomers, the latecomers must also appreciate that whatever success they are reaping comes by grace not by merit. Historic churches need to be appreciated for their groundbreaking efforts in mission and the Sunsum sorè need to be appreciated as the unsung heroes of renewal within Ghanaian Christianity. I contend that if churches in Ghana were able to see themselves as co-workers in the Lord's vineyard, bridges could be built for purposeful co-operation.

Finally I would add a word on the implications of the intercultural approach to Pentecostal history. As far as Christian mission is

concerned, God must be understood to be the God of the nations. The experience of Pentecost in which all nations received the gospel in their 'own languages' perhaps renders irrelevant any claims to where the movement actually began. Indeed Sanneh has referred to the event of Pentecost as 'a piece of cultural innovation which enabled [Christianity] to adopt the multiplicity of geographical centres as its home'.<sup>23</sup> The modern simultaneous Pentecostal outburst in diverse contexts invites participants to bring each other into a global relationship so that all mission history can be viewed as occurring under the direction of the one God of history. An 'us' and 'them' syndrome is alien to renewal initiated by God's Spirit. In spite of their differing contexts, Pentecostals can always recognise signs of God's presence in one another. The intercultural approach to Christian history, we have noted, values diversity, because God's Spirit gives churches the right to be different. What is being advocated as far as the global Pentecostal communion is concerned is a holistic understanding of Pentecost that aims at building up the body of Christ across all barriers.<sup>24</sup> Cameroonian theologian Jean-Marc Éla has noted:

The tissue of human cultures, swept up in the dynamism of Pentecost, gives birth to local churches. . . . Each church is shaped by a milieu and an ambient culture, by its history, by the theological reflection it develops under pressure circumstances, by the internal conflicts it takes up and develops.<sup>25</sup>

The Ghanaian Pentecostal spirituality outlined in the foregoing discussions results from the encounter between experiencing God's Spirit and the traditional religious cultures in which the churches concerned are located. God's Spirit is dynamic and so is culture. Changes occurring within Ghanaian Pentecostalism are therefore set to continue as long as internal weaknesses, changes in the religious landscape

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<sup>23</sup> Lamin Sanneh, 'Gospel and Culture: Ramifying Effects of Scriptural Translation', in Philip C. Stine, *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church: The Last 200 Years* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Such an understanding of Pentecost from a holistic perspective is said to have been at the heart of the Azusa Street revival of William J. Seymour. According to Hollenweger the ecumenical understanding was responsible for the missionary growth of the movement. Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Priorities in Pentecostal Research', in Jan A.B. Jongeneel (ed.), *Experiences of the Spirit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1991), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 111.

and the impact of modernity persist. Under the influence of modernity, everything in society is undergoing change as established structures break up under the impact of new methods and inventions. In this process, mutation, change, even decay and collapse, become the hallmarks of many religious movements. The forces of modernity cannot be discounted in changes occurring within religious movements. However the enduring lesson of Ghanaian independent Pentecostalism is that renewal does not occur through human planning and strategising, but through yielding to the Spirit of God. But charisma and experience alone do not guarantee constructive renewal, for they have potential for abuses in the body of Christ. In my view, for renewal to be constructive, tradition must be cherished in tandem with a radical overhaul of the established system. This overhaul comes through a willingness to allow the Spirit to lead the church in unpredictable directions for the restoration of the relevance that people are looking for as African Christians.

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## INDEX

- Ababio, Isaac, 110–111  
academic success, 41, 70  
accountability, 71, 78, 93  
Acheampong, General I.K., 121  
Adubofour, Samuel, 101, 101 n. 10  
African Faith Tabernacle, 30, 65,  
77–78  
Agbozo, Enoch, 108–109, 113,  
117 n. 27  
Agona Nsaba, 66, 70–71, 86  
AICs, 3, 20–22, 31  
Akan people and culture, 47, 67, 164,  
166, 173, 176, 186, 196  
Aladura, 21, 24 nn. 30–31, 40,  
40 n. 7, 73  
alcohol, 152, 179, 184  
Altar Call, 136–137, 141, 157, 159,  
176  
Amoro, A.W., 93  
Ampene, Esther, 168, 179  
Anaba, Joseph Eastwood, 120,  
123–124, 124 n. 39, 125–126,  
126 n. 42, 127, 127 n. 46, 128,  
128 n. 48, 155, 155 n. 32, 156,  
206, 206 nn. 7–8, 209, 209 n. 16,  
210, 212, 212 n. 19, 213, 213  
n. 21, 219, 219 n. 30  
angels, 17, 69, 70, 84, 118, 177, 235,  
242 n. 16  
Anim, Peter N., 23–26  
anointing, 112–113, 115, 128,  
152, 154, 154 n. 30, 155, 156,  
156 n. 35, 157–159, 166, 171,  
182, 187–188, 194  
Apostolic Faith, 24  
Appiah, William Egyanka, 45  
Asare, Charles Agyin, 111, 135–138,  
144, 157, 159, 210  
Assemblies of God, 15, 23, 88, 91,  
165, 176  
audiotapes, 4, 5  
Azusa Street movement, 10–11, 52,  
52 n. 29, 247 n. 24  
  
Baëta, C.G., 23, 23 n. 27, 30,  
30 n. 35, 32, 32 n. 39  
Bakker, Jim, 208, 208 nn. 11, 13  
baptism, 7, 14–15, 19, 28, 41, 50,  
103–104, 109, 113, 116, 118, 154,  
159, 188  
Barrett, David, 9, 9 n. 2, 14, 14 n. 15,  
15, 15 n. 17, 233, 233 n. 1  
Bediako, Kwame, 17, 17 n. 19, 244  
Bennett, Dennis, 28  
Bible, 13, 17–18, 22, 29, 40, 49, 53,  
57, 57 nn. 40–41, 61, 64, 79, 82,  
88, 90, 98, 100, 102–104, 111–112,  
114–115, 119, 126, 126 n. 45, 134,  
149, 153, 155, 158–159, 170 n. 8,  
177, 183, 186, 187 n. 27, 190, 197,  
199, 205, 215, 217–218, 222, 239,  
239 n. 10, 243, 245, 247 n. 23  
black emancipation theology, 153  
born-again Christians, 13, 102, 104,  
124, 142, 144, 150, 170  
Broken Yoke Foundation Ministries, 120  
Buddhism, 4, 10, 136, 145  
  
Calvary Road Incorporated, 107, 118,  
118 n. 28  
camp meetings, 5, 32, 46  
Cerullo, Morris, 109–111, 156,  
156 n. 35, 157–158, 213, 213 n. 20  
Charismatic churches, 1, 5–6, 31,  
77, 97, 97 n. 3, 108, 114, 116,  
117 n. 27, 124, 139–141, 145–146,  
154, 159–160, 162, 171, 223 n. 40,  
227, 229–230, 232  
Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry, 120,  
147, 149–150, 154  
Charismatic Ministries, 2, 27, 31,  
96–97, 101, 120, 127, 164, 201  
Christ for All Nations Bible School,  
111  
Christian Action Faith Ministries, 96,  
112, 117, 123, 126 n. 45, 133, 150,  
168–169, 207, 226, 239, 239 n. 8  
Church of Pentecost (CoP), xi, 23,  
23 n. 29, 26, 86, 88–92, 112  
conversion, 15, 19–20, 22, 27–28, 37,  
50, 68, 92, 92 n. 38, 104, 109, 112,  
121, 133, 137–142, 142 n. 13, 144,  
148, 152, 159, 165, 168, 172, 177,  
188, 208, 216

- Copeland, Gloria, 110, 204, 206 n. 8, 214
- Copeland, Kenneth, 204, 206 n. 8
- cosmology, 40, 42, 176
- covenant, 17, 48, 144, 169 n. 7, 172, 175, 175 n. 12, 176, 182 n. 19, 188, 194, 197, 207, 211, 221
- Cox, Harvey, 17, 17 n. 20, 31, 31 nn. 37–38, 108, 108 n. 19, 117, 117 n. 26, 119 n. 29, 242, 242 n. 15
- cults, traditional, 41–42, 48, 184, 188, 204
- deliverance, 3, 19, 22, 49, 91–92, 98, 106, 110, 112, 116, 127, 130, 133, 140, 142, 155, 164, 164 n. 1, 165, 165 n. 2, 166–172, 175, 176–194, 194 n. 36, 196–199, 203, 222, 234, 236–237, 245 n. 21
- demons, 17, 143, 151–152, 155, 167–168, 173, 175–185, 185 n. 26, 187, 187 n. 27, 188, 191–192, 194–195
- devil, 50 n. 27, 128, 134, 142, 142 n. 14, 143, 150–152, 166, 169, 177, 179, 183, 183 n. 20, 192, 194, 194 n. 36, 196 n. 38, 206, 214
- diakonia, 52, 98, 239
- Dickson, Kwesi, 53, 53 nn. 32, 34, 54, 145, 145 n. 21, 228, 228 n. 49, 244, 245, 245 n. 22
- disease, 24, 41, 83–84, 143, 151, 175–178, 194, 215 n. 25, 218 n. 28, 222 n. 36, 224
- divination, 40, 49, 74, 83, 94, 174 n. 11
- dreams, 22, 45, 47–48, 54, 57, 70, 76, 179, 186, 207, 235
- dress, 31, 64, 89, 119, 210
- drumming, 146, 234, 241
- Dua-Agyeman, Kwaku, 169, 169 n. 7, 175 n. 12, 179, 179 n. 14, 182 n. 19
- Duncan-Williams, Nicholas, 96, 98, 112–113, 133, 205, 206 n. 8, 207, 207, n. 10, 208–209, 211–212, 212 n. 17, 218 n. 29, 221, 229, 229 n. 50
- ecclesiology, 22, 28, 97, 128–129, 129 n. 50, 130–131, 151 n. 26, 159–160
- education, 1, 115 n. 24, 117, 126, 225 n. 42
- empowerment, 3, 129, 132–133, 135, 141, 149–150, 152, 154–155, 157, 159–160, 163, 201, 244
- Episcopalian Church, 29
- Essamuah, Samuel B., 63
- Ethiopianist churches, 22
- fasting, 67, 72, 114, 155, 166 n. 2, 181, 226
- Ferguson-Laing, George, 111–112
- FM stations. *See* radio
- Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, 28, 171
- gender ideology, 36, 55, 57, 61
- Ghana Evangelical Society, 108–109
- Ghana Evangelism Committee, 23 n. 28, 29, 66
- Ghana Fellowship of Evangelical Students, 103
- Gifford, Paul, x, 31, 31 n. 38, 97, 97 n. 3, 98, 98 n. 4, 99 n. 5, 139, 139 n. 8, 140, 203, 203 n. 2, 245 n. 21
- gifts, 7, 27, 31 n. 37, 34, 37, 46, 59, 63, 67, 67 n. 5, 68, 71–72, 75, 77, 91, 94–95, 97–98, 104, 108–110, 113, 119, 126, 128–131, 135, 148–149, 152, 156, 159–160, 162, 188, 192, 211–213, 220, 223, 229, 236–240
- globalism, ix, 1, 2, 11–12, 15, 22, 35–36, 59, 98–101, 103, 191, 233, 235, 237 n. 5, 239 n. 7, 247
- glossolalia, 11, 53
- God's End-Time Militia, 120, 120 n. 30, 123, 125–126
- gospel music, 102, 107, 115
- Graham, Billy, 104, 104 n. 13, 110
- Great Awakenings, 120
- Hagin, Kenneth, 204, 206 n. 8
- hand-clapping, 2, 54, 94, 234
- Harris, William Wadé, 19–20, 41, 43, 50, 57, 156
- Hastings, Adrian, 10, 10 n. 6, 30, 30 n. 35, 38, 38 n. 4, 44 n. 15, 56, 56 n. 37
- Hayford, Casely, 19
- healing, 2–4, 7–6, 11 n. 10, 12–13, 19, 22, 24–27, 32, 38 n. 3, 42, 42 n. 11, 43–44, 46–47, 50, 55, 63,



- 66–68, 68 n. 6, 69, 72, 74, 78,  
84, 86, 88, 91–94, 96, 98, 103,  
106–107, 110, 112, 116, 118,  
127–128, 130, 133, 140, 143,  
149–150, 155–156, 158, 163–164,  
164 n. 1, 165, 165 n. 2, 166–172,  
175–177, 178 n. 13, 179–181,  
181 n. 17, 182–184, 184 n. 24,  
185, 185 n. 25, 186, 189–190,  
190 n. 30, 191–194, 196–199, 203,  
220, 222–223, 228, 234, 236, 241,  
245 n. 21  
herbs, 43, 84  
Hinduism, 4, 10, 145, 145 n. 22  
Hinn, Benny, 110, 156, 156 n. 35,  
157, 204  
Hollenweger, Walter, 8, 11, 11 n. 11,  
15, 15 n. 16, 52, 52 n. 29, 107,  
107 n. 18, 237 n. 5, 242 n. 15,  
247 n. 24  
Holy Ghost. *See* Holy Spirit  
Holy Spirit, ix, 1, 7, 11–13, 15–17,  
22, 27–28, 32–33, 33 n. 40, 35,  
35 n. 45, 37, 41–44, 46, 54, 56,  
58–59, 62, 67, 67 n. 5, 68, 74,  
74 n. 12, 76 n. 16, 79, 96–97,  
103–104, 104 n. 13, 105, 107,  
109, 112–113, 116, 117 n. 27,  
118, 128, 132–133, 135, 139–141,  
143 n. 18, 149–150, 153, 155–157,  
159, 162–163, 165, 184–185, 187,  
194, 197, 216 n. 26, 220, 236–238,  
240, 242–243  
Hour of Visitation Choir and  
Evangelistic Association, 110  
Idahosa, Benson, 96, 98, 111,  
111 n. 21, 112–114, 148, 171, 204  
inculturation, 36, 39, 41, 61, 61 n. 52,  
165 n. 2  
independent indigenous Pentecostal  
churches, 16–17, 23, 31, 33, 52, 73  
infertility, 66, 68–169, 190  
interculturalism, 8, 10, 11, 11 n. 11,  
12, 15 n. 17, 147 n. 23, 197 n. 39,  
233, 235, 246  
International Central Gospel Church,  
99, 101, 108, 114, 124, 134, 201,  
227  
International Fellowship of Evangelical  
Students, 103  
Jehu-Appiah, Miritaiiah Jonah, 6, 245  
n. 20  
Jesus Divine Healing Church, 6, 66,  
68–69, 72–74, 78, 85–86  
Jesus is Alive Ministries International,  
100, 139  
Joyful Way Incorporated, 107  
June Fourth Revolution, 121  
Kanco, Vagalas, 172–177, 179,  
182–183, 185–186, 188, 190, 192  
Larbi, Kingsley, 101  
Lartey, Emmanuel, x, 197, 197  
nn. 39–40, 244  
leadership, religious, 27, 55  
Life and Salvation Church, 77  
Living Praise Ministries International,  
101–111  
Living Streams Ministries, 108, 117,  
118 n. 28, 119  
*Maame Wata*, 171–173, 187  
Markwei, Ebenezer, 108, 117, 119  
Martey, Emmanuel, 61 n. 52, 165,  
165 n. 2  
Mbiti, John, 198–199, 199 n. 42  
McKeown, James, 23, 25–26, 90  
McKeown, Sophia, 23  
media technologies, ix, 6, 31, 99 n. 7  
mediation, 27, 36, 39, 76, 96–97, 118,  
128, 147  
medicine, 24–25, 41–42, 42 n. 12,  
43–44, 48, 68, 72, 171, 173–175,  
181–183, 205  
membership drift, 62  
Mensah, Stanley, 147  
Mensah, Steve, 147–152, 154  
Mercedes-Benz cars, 209, 229  
messages, 6, 13, 50, 53, 55, 91–92, 95,  
102, 119–120, 124, 132, 134, 150,  
153, 156, 160, 165, 202, 205, 215,  
226, 240  
Methodist Church, xi, 45, 62, 62  
n. 56, 66, 68, 88 n. 30, 116, 145  
Meyer, Birgit, 50 n. 27, 142, 142  
n. 14, 191 n. 31, 192  
Milingo, Emmanuel, 42, 42 n. 11, 185,  
185 nn. 25–26  
millennialism, 21, 24  
miracles, 12, 81, 88, 103, 111–113,  
117 n. 27, 139, 156, 214, 236–237  
missions, xi, 14–16, 18, 23, 38, 45, 116  
modernity, 9, 50, 64, 91 n. 37,  
99–100, 100 n. 9, 142 n. 14,  
152 n. 27, 178, 191–193, 248

- Mozano, 6, 69  
 Musama Disco Christo Church, 6, 29,  
 45, 65, 245 n. 20
- Nackabah, John, 20  
 negative instances, theory of, 37,  
 65–66  
 neo-Pentecostalism, 27, 147, 165, 190,  
 202–204  
 new paradigm churches, 27, 113  
 new religious movements, ix, 4, 14, 30  
 n. 36, 37 n. 2, 38 n. 3, 60, 64–65,  
 106 n. 17, 115–116, 121, 145 n. 22,  
 166, 193, 193 n. 35, 236
- New Testament Church, 15  
 Newbiggin, Lesslie, 33, 33 n. 41, 34  
 Nigeria, x, 21, 24 n. 30, 25, 57,  
 73, 90, 99 n. 7, 102 n. 11, 112,  
 114, 123, 123 n. 38, 171, 181,  
 181 n. 17, 184
- North America, 27, 99, 113, 120, 170,  
 170 n. 8, 171, 204
- Nyamekye, Akua, 66–68, 70–72, 74,  
 76–77, 79, 81–83, 86
- occultism, 136
- Oduyoye, Mercy, 57 n. 41, 59 n. 49,  
 244
- oil, 4, 63, 72, 83, 122, 155, 157–159,  
 166, 169, 187, 219
- Okure, Teresa, 57, 57 n. 41, 58
- oppression, 167, 169, 177, 179–180,  
 186–187, 190, 224, 244
- oral theology, 36, 52, 54–55
- ordained ministry, 2, 55–56
- Osborn, Daisy, 110, 117 n. 27, 123  
 n. 38
- Osborn, T.L., 110, 117 n. 27, 204
- Otabil, Mensa, 108, 114, 124,  
 124 n. 40, 125, 134, 153, 153  
 n. 28, 161, 201, 201 n. 1, 202,  
 205–207, 212, 214, 219, 224, 227,  
 229
- Otto, Rudolf, 9, 10 n. 4, 68, 68 n. 8,  
 69, 95, 95 n. 44, 143, 143 n. 16
- Oyedepo, David, 154, 154 n. 30
- Parachurch associations, 28, 101, 110
- Paul, 42, 48, 56, 58, 67, 76, 79, 84,  
 89, 95, 128, 130, 136, 138, 144,  
 146, 156, 160–162, 169, 179, 184,  
 187, 190–191, 194–196, 211,  
 214–218, 220–221, 228, 239
- Pentecostalism, 1–4, 7, 8 n. 4, 9–11,  
 11 n. 10, 12–15, 17, 19, 23, 27,  
 31, 33–36, 44, 46, 46 n. 20, 52, 55,  
 61, 64, 73, 79 n. 18, 87–88, 101,  
 108–109, 126, 135 n. 5, 140–141,  
 147, 152 n. 27, 156, 163, 165, 170,  
 184, 233, 235, 237, 237 n. 5, 239  
 n. 7, 240, 240 n. 11, 241, 242–245,  
 247
- Peoples' Militia, 124
- plural belonging, 39, 62, 87
- pluralism, religious, 144–145, 184
- pneumatology, 21, 49, 49 n. 25, 60,  
 87, 115, 152, 200
- Pobee, John, 16 n. 18, 31 n. 37, 74  
 n. 11, 115 n. 24, 122 n. 36, 244
- prayer, 6, 23–26, 29–30, 40, 42–43,  
 46–47, 50, 52–53, 53 n. 33, 54, 62,  
 62 n. 53, 67, 71–72, 82, 84, 86–88,  
 98, 102–103, 114–115, 118, 122,  
 125, 136, 147–149, 155, 157, 166,  
 168, 170, 177, 181, 183, 187, 191  
 n. 31, 193–194, 196, 199, 211, 214,  
 223–224, 226, 231, 234–236
- prayer meetings, 5, 24, 28, 62, 114,  
 122
- prayer vigils, 45
- Prayer Warriors, 105–106, 170
- preaching. *See* messages
- Presbyterian Church, 29, 41 n. 9, 62,  
 62 n. 53, 145, 199
- Prince, Derek, 110, 169, 169 n. 6, 170
- proof-texts, 215
- prophecy, 19, 22, 25, 27, 32, 46–47,  
 57, 68, 82, 88, 94, 120, 128, 137,  
 140, 159–161, 187, 235, 241
- prophetism. *See* prophecy
- prosperity, 3–4, 41, 49, 70, 82, 111,  
 119, 133, 140, 152 n. 27, 164, 169,  
 173–4, 177, 191, 195–196, 201–209,  
 211–228, 231–232
- Protestantism, 28 n. 33, 33, 51 n. 28,  
 113, 13 n. 22, 140 n. 11
- publications, ix, xi, 31, 38, 38 n. 3,  
 58, 98, 134, 153, 158, 170–171,  
 204, 206
- radio, 6, 110, 153, 168, 170 n. 8, 202,  
 212, 214, 227
- Rawlings, Jerry John, 121, 122–125
- renewal, 1–3, 8–9, 11, 11 n. 11,  
 13–15, 17, 17 n. 19, 18–19, 26,  
 28–30, 32–33, 33 n. 40, 34–37, 39,

- 41, 48, 48 n. 22, 49, 61–62, 64, 74, 87, 95, 107, 112, 115–116, 116 n. 25, 119, 121 n. 34, 129, 129 n. 50, 132, 134, 138, 146–147, 147 n. 23, 149, 163, 171, 190, 222 n. 37, 233, 233 n. 1, 234–238, 240, 242–243, 246–248
- renewal prayer groups, 29, 86–87
- revival. *See* renewal
- Rhema World Outreach Ministries, 169
- Roberts, Oral, 96, 96 n. 1, 98, 110, 113, 204
- Roman Catholicism, 33, 87, 146–147
- salvation, 1, 3, 7, 11–12, 36, 43, 48–52, 56, 62, 64, 76–77, 80, 112, 116, 122, 132–135, 137–138, 140–143, 143 n. 17, 144, 149, 153, 163–164, 166, 168, 176, 184, 189–191, 198–199, 202–203, 205, 211, 216–217, 225, 236, 245
- Sanneh, Lamin, 13, 13 n. 14, 36, 36 n. 1, 59, 59 n. 50, 90, 90 n. 34, 236, 236 n. 3, 247, 247 n. 23
- Satan, 42, 127, 136, 142–144, 150–151, 167–168, 171, 175, 177, 180, 184, 195, 197, 198 n. 41, 213, 235
- schism, 6, 18, 34, 65, 78, 233, 233 n. 1
- Scripture Union, 102, 170, 171 n. 9
- seed faith, 204, 212
- sermons. *See* messages
- sexual morality, 89, 180, 193
- Seymour, William J., 10, 11, 247 n. 24
- Solid Rock Chapel, 111, 114, 125, 213, 218
- soteriology, 3, 49–50, 60, 135, 137, 141, 166, 190, 200, 202
- South Africa, 1, 21, 38 n. 5, 76 n. 16, 100 n. 9, 200 n. 44
- spirit possession, 11, 55, 57 n. 38, 172 n. 10, 187, 241
- spirits, territorial, 180, 198
- spirituality, 3, 7–8, 13, 17, 17 n. 20, 20, 32, 35–36, 38–40, 42, 44–47, 47 n. 21, 50–51, 54, 60, 62–63, 87, 91, 102–103, 105, 105 n. 14, 106–107, 116, 129, 133, 139–140, 153, 155, 164, 224, 233–236, 240–241, 243, 247
- Sundkler, Bengt, 38, 38 n. 5, 106, 106 n. 16
- Sunsum sorè*, 2, 6, 19, 21–23, 29–32, 36–51, 53–57, 59–82, 84–89, 91–96, 100, 106, 116–119, 128, 130, 132, 144, 158–159, 162–163, 165, 175, 189, 237, 242, 244 n. 19, 246
- Tabernacle of Witness Church International, 98
- Tani, Grace, 20, 57
- televangelism, 1, 74, 111, 204
- testimony, 35, 38, 53, 112, 125, 135–136, 138, 144, 158–159, 172, 174, 176, 232
- Tetteh, Christina Doe, 111, 114, 148, 213
- The Lord's Vineyard Ministry, 171–172
- Town Fellowships, 103, 114
- Traditional Western Mission Churches (TWMCs), 14–15, 17, 20, 38, 45, 56, 59, 61, 73, 104, 130, 165, 198, 227
- transformation, 3, 9, 45, 50–51, 114, 129, 132–133, 135, 137–138, 141, 143, 152, 163–164, 171, 206, 234, 237, 239
- translation, vernacular, 17, 22, 61
- Turner, Harold, 3, 3 n. 1, 24 n. 30, 37, 37 n. 2, 38 n. 3, 69, 69 n. 10
- Twelve Apostles Church, 20, 29, 57, 65, 69, 82
- Van Dusen, Henry Pitt, 33
- videocassette tapes, 6, 157
- visas, 70, 225
- visions, 12, 22, 45, 47–48, 54, 57, 70, 74, 78–79, 94, 104, 115, 120, 128, 134, 234–235, 241
- Vuha, Aaron, 168, 177, 182, 184, 188, 245 n. 21
- Walls, Andrew, 16, 16 n. 18, 90 n. 35, 203 n. 3
- wealth. *See* prosperity
- Winneba, 6, 30, 30 n. 36, 66, 77
- Winners' Chapel, 154
- witchcraft, 41–42, 44, 70, 79–80, 83, 93 n. 42, 134, 170, 177, 187, 191–192, 198
- Women Aglow, 28, 123, 123 n. 38, 171
- Word Miracle Church International, 101, 111, 135, 157

- Wyllie, Robert, 6, 30 n. 36, 66, 77,  
84, 84 n. 25
- youth, 31, 88, 98, 107, 109–110, 112,  
116, 118–119, 133, 139
- Zionist churches, 21, 80

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