

# Pentecostal mission spirituality

## A study of the classical pentecostal churches in Ghana

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### Abstract

Mission is not just about proclaiming the gospel - it encompasses spiritual preparation of those involved in both mission activity and in converted souls. This approach is what is termed as mission spirituality in this article. Mission spirituality is the means by which churches and individual believers participate in the mission of God, through the way they live in and by the Holy Spirit, in order to know the will of God regarding what He is doing in their context and to follow His example. In view of the importance of mission spirituality in missionary activities of the church, this article explores the mission spirituality of the classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana (The Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church International, The Apostolic Church Ghana and the Assemblies of God).

**Keywords:** Mission spirituality, Pentecostal spirituality, Spirituality prayer, Discernment

### 1. Introduction

Church growth does not happen by chance. It involves various missiological strategies of which mission spirituality is one. The term 'spirituality' is used in this context to indicate the way Ghanaian Pentecostal churches prepare themselves spiritually before, during and after their mission, church planting and evangelistic activities. Mission is not just about proclaiming the gospel - it encompasses spiritual preparation of those involved in both mission activity and converted souls. This approach is called 'mission spirituality' by the World Council of Churches and other scholars such as Bosch, Kim, Helland and Hjalmarson. Kim defines mission spirituality as 'a kind of spirituality which is oriented to the world. It is not individualistic, but an engaged spirituality that is lived out in mission' (2009:256). It is the means by which churches and individual believers participate in the mission of God, through the way they live in and by the Holy Spirit, in order to know the will of God with regard to what He is doing in their context and to do the same (Helland & Hjalmarson 2011:23-27). Kourie submits that there are diverse spiritualities, each one culture-specific, expressing its own historical, sociological, theological, linguistic

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and philosophical orientation (2006:19). In view contextual manifestation of spirituality, this article is an attempt to describe Ghanaian Pentecostal mission spirituality. This article is necessary because there is no such research on Ghanaian Pentecostalism. It will also help readers to appreciate why Pentecostals form the majority of the Christian population in the Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service 2012:1, 6, 40).

The article has three main divisions; the first part gives a brief history of Pentecostalism in Ghana, the second section defines mission spirituality, and the final part describes the various forms Ghanaian Pentecostals express their mission spirituality.

## **2. Classical pentecostal churches in Ghana**

Classical Pentecostal churches began in the West in 1906 as a result of the Azusa Street experience and appeared on the Ghanaian religious scene in the 1920's. Apostle Peter Newman Anim and his Tabernacle Church, which started in 1917, are credited with the origins of classical Pentecostalism in Ghana (Larbi 2001:32-33).

Although Seymour never stepped on Ghanaian soil, and none of his missionaries to Africa set foot in Ghana, one can trace the impact of Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival on Ghanaian Christianity through various connections. They are: Apostle Peter Anim's connection with the Apostolic Faith Church of Florence Louise Crawford - an associate of Seymour's Azusa Street movement (Larbi 2001:32-33), the Assemblies of God connection through Rev. Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, the first Pentecostal missionaries to enter Ghana in 1931, the Four Square Gospel Church connection which took place in the 1980's (Omenyo 2006a:244-258) and in 1937, when James McKeon arrived from the Apostolic Church in the UK and started missionary activity in the country under the leadership of Anim's Asamankese-based group.

Five years prior to the arrival of the first Pentecostal missionary from Europe in September 1931 (Debrunner 1967:324), Peter Newman Anim and his Tabernacle Church were believed to have experienced Baptism in the Holy Spirit. This experience is now referred to as the "Dispensation of the Holy Spirit in Ghana" (Atiemo 1993:20-21). In 1937, The Apostolic Church of the United Kingdom sent Pastor James Mckeown with his wife to Ghana to support Apostle Anim and his group. Mckeown and his wife arrived at the then Gold Coast (currently known as Ghana) on August 4, 1937, and became direct associates of Apostle Anim (Debrunner 1967:324, Omenyo 2006b:94-95). The labour of Peter Anim and his Tabernacle Church gave birth to The Christ Apostolic Church (Currently known as The Christ Apostolic Church International), The Apostolic Church - Ghana, and The Church of Pentecost (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:23). Two of the three churches named here came into being as a result of a continuous reformation and the personal constant acquisi-

tion of knowledge sought by Anim through his affiliation with foreign churches and their teaching about the Holy Spirit and his work in believers (Larbi 2001:32-33). The Church of Pentecost surfaced through a split in 1939 in the group due to doctrinal differences in the Christ Apostolic Church and the Apostolic Church, Gold Coast. The latter grew rapidly under Pastor James McKeown. A constitutional crisis in the church in 1953 led to the founding of the Gold Coast Apostolic Church with Pastor James McKeown as leader. On the country's attainment of independence in 1957 and its adoption of the name Ghana, the Gold Coast Apostolic Church was renamed the Ghana Apostolic Church. The Church later adopted the name of The Church of Pentecost on August 1, 1962 (The Church of Pentecost 2015).

The Assemblies of God, Ghana, the fourth mainline Classical Pentecostal church in Ghana, was founded by Rev. Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, the first Pentecostal missionaries sent by the American Assemblies of God Church to Ghana in 1931 after serving as missionaries in Burkina Faso. They settled in Yendi in the Northern region of Ghana at the invitation of the king of Dagbon (Bansah 2012:14). Their ministry flourished and they later opened branches at Kumasi in 1944 and Takoradi in 1945 (Larbi 2001:72-75).

The 2010 *Population and Housing Census of Ghana reports that* out of the 71.2 percent Christian population, Pentecostals have the highest membership (28.3 percent) of the entire Christian population (Ghana Statistical Service 2012:40). In fact, Pentecostals in Ghana are growing in membership and are exerting significant influence over other Christian denominations in Ghana. Furthermore, the growing edges of Christianity in its most vital and dynamic forms are found in the Pentecostal churches (Larbi 2001:99, Foli 2001:11).

### **3. Classical Ghanaian pentecostal mission spirituality**

Spirituality is the core of the Christian experience and encounter with God in real life and action.

It is the same thing as continuous or experimental prayer – prayer as a living communion with God who is experienced as being personally present in relationships with humanity (Shorter 1978:4). Although there is no consensus on what “experience” means or how it can best be studied, most modern approaches to Christian spirituality have noted that it is an ongoing existential phenomenon (Holder 2007:2, Schneiders 2007:16, Schneiders 1998:1, 3-12). It should be emphasised at this point that all Christian spirituality is inherently Trinitarian spirituality: The relationship with God was initiated by the Father through the work of Jesus Christ and it becomes effective in the Spirit (Venter 2015:3, Cornick 2008:7).

Mission spirituality gives the deepest meaning to our lives and motivates our actions. It is a sacred gift from the Creator, the energy for affirming and caring for

life, and has a dynamic of transformation through which the spiritual commitment of people is capable of transforming the world through God's grace. In doing this churches are called to discern the work of the life-giving Spirit sent into the world and to join with the Holy Spirit in bringing about God's reign (World Council of Churches 2013:52, 56-57). It is made up of spiritual resources from which mission springs: the experience of God that initiates, the reading of scripture that guides and the prayer life that sustains the missionary or the movement in mission (Kim 2009:256). In Helland and Hjalmarson's view, it often carries an intercessory missional focus (2011:114). Pentecostal spirituality emphasises the importance of the Holy Spirit as a starting point for a distinctive Pentecostal approach to theology (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013a:17). Mission spirituality takes human history and cultures seriously, correlates itself with time without losing its touch with God's dynamic participation in mission. Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal mission spirituality involves but is not limited to the following:

#### **4. Prayer**

The Synoptic Gospels made us aware of the fact that, before Jesus Christ assumed his fulltime ministry on earth, He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for spiritual preparation for forty days and nights. Historically, the early church did nothing without prayer - they gave prayer a prominent place in their approach to mission. Helland and Hjalmarson define prayer as a 'channel of missional spirituality'. It often carries an intercessory missional focus for the spiritual benefit of individuals and churches for the advancement of the gospel (2011:114). In the book, 'Perspectives on the world Christianity movement', prayer was considered as a missional approach one could use (eds. Winter & Hawthorne 1999:145-155, 733-741). On the issue of prayer, Krintzinger, Meiring and Saayman argue that prayer is one of the points of departure for mission (1994:115).

The New Testament presents prayer as a saturating medium for the mission of Jesus Christ, for the church as described in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's instructions to the churches in relation to mission (Wright 2010:257-259). Ott, Strauss and Tennent posit that, 'if the cornerstone of mission is the power of the Holy Spirit, and spiritual warfare in an age of conflict is the context of mission, then prayer is the way we express our dependence on the Holy Spirit for enablement in the middle of this vicious struggle' (2010:248-246). This implies that prayer is the human conduit of divine energy for mission (McQuilkin 1997:31). With regard to the necessity of prayer in mission, from the beginning of each year, the leadership of many Pentecostal churches - especially the Classic Pentecostal Churches in Ghana - set a prayer agenda for mission projects and these prayer topics become part of the prayers of local churches. Should it be that there is an emergency mission issue,

for example a missionary who has unfortunately found himself in a war zone, the church intercedes for such a person for God's protection and deliverance. They say that this approach is based on 2 Thessalonians 3:2 which says 'pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith'. In addition to this, the Assemblies of God in Ghana, as part of their mission prayer topics, says, 'we are all vulnerable to the enemy's attack. Missionaries on the front line of ministry frequently face the brunt of those attacks. With this in mind, we need to pray for those involved in mission (missionaries) and for ourselves that we would remain true to our God-given mission' (Assemblies of God, Ghana 2015).

Another common practice of many Ghanaian Pentecostal churches is that, during crusades and conventions, their prayer teams are encouraged to pray that God will work miracles through healing, signs and wonders in the lives of people present at the crusade and the convention. Intercession is also made for the unsaved so that their eyes would be opened to the gospel and that they will come to the knowledge of the saving power of Jesus Christ. On other occasions, when the church is about to plant a new church at a new location or in a community, the prayer ministry is sent ahead of time to spend time praying in the community and on the site/place where the new church would be located. Sometimes, the prayer ministry would walk around the community, praying against demonic forces that would challenge the mission work in the community.

In fact, mission without prayer is just a human activity and would never yield the needed results. Van Rheenen talks about the importance of prayer in mission when he says, 'before, during and after a missionary campaign, prayer serves as the support base for both long term and short term mission endeavours' (1996:51). In conformity with Van Rheenen's concern, the following are some of the mission prayer topics of many Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches.

## **5. Prayer for opportunities to share the gospel**

Ghanaian Pentecostals many times base this idea on Paul's letter to the Colossian church, which says: 'Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Don't forget to pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to preach about his secret plan — that Christ is also for you, Gentiles. That is why I am here in chains. Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should' (Col 4:2 – 4). A similar request was also made to the Corinthian church in the statement: 'When I came to the city of Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord gave me tremendous opportunities' (2 Cor 2: 12).

Though the Scripture above presents Paul's exhortation to believers to pray and his appeal for the church to pray for him so that God would grant him opportunities to preach the gospel. In Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding, one could relate

Paul's appeal to the contemporary church; for, according to them, as the church prays for opportunities to share the gospel, God would surely bring opportunities for the gospel to be preached at various places according to the will of the Holy Spirit. White shares this view when he states:

I believe we must pray in confidence for the salvation of each person God brings across our path. If this is God's heart, it must be ours as well. Our role is simply to help another say 'yes' to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God offered in Christ. We need to petition the Lord for opportunities to share the Word with those for whom we pray (1990:123).

In a personal interview dated August 20, 2015, in Accra, Ghana, with Apostle Mankralo the current president of the Apostolic Church-Ghana, he stated that, Jesus Christ made us aware in scripture that we should pray to the Lord of the harvest (mission) to bring in labourers (Matt 9:38). This tells us that mission starts and ends with God. He owns every single missionary activity. Since the harvest field is owned by God, He knows where, every labourer in the harvest field should work. As the church and missionaries pray for opportunities to share the gospel, the Lord of the harvest will lead them to where the field is ripe for the harvest of souls.

## **6. Prayer for a conducive environment to preach the gospel**

Many of the classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana have specifically made it a point to use this prayer point at the beginning of their prayer meetings. Their understanding is that the church needs a peaceful environment to propagate the gospel. The focus of their prayer is that God would influence the decisions of kings, political parties and government policies. They also pray against any government decisions which would hinder the growth of the church. They approach this by making reference to Paul's appeal to the church to pray for "all men, kings and all others who are in authority, so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity" (1 Tm 2:1-4). Robb refers to this kind of prayer as "holistic prayer", by making reference to a similar approach that was adopted in Cambodia (Robb 1999:148-150).

## **7. Prayer for those involved in missionary work**

According to Pentecostals, mission work is sometimes frustrating - especially when things get tough. They usually refer to Acts 4: 21-23, Acts 12: 1 -14 and the Apostle Paul's request, "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should" (Eph

6: 18 – 20). A similar request can also be found in 1 Thessalonians 3: 1 – 2. In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul testified that through the prayers of the saints for him, he and his team were rescued from mortal danger in the Province of Asia (2 Cor 1: 8 – 11). Based on the above scriptures, Ghanaian Pentecostal churches spend a lot of time praying for their missionaries. A typical example of this is when Apostle Michael Ntumi, the past Chairman of the Church of Pentecost, and his family were taken hostage for 163 days in the heart of the Nimba Forest in Liberia by Charles Taylor's NPFL rebels (Ntumi 1994); and on another occasion faced the same challenge on the Ivory Coast. On both occasions, the Church of Pentecost kept praying for him and his family for divine security and release, until the church heard the news of was their release (Ntumi 1994 & 2012).

## **8. Prayer for new converts**

As part of the daily prayer practice of Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches, Ephesians 1: 15 – 23 and Ephesians 3:14 - 19 are prayed for new converts daily, mentioning their names, until they have gone through the membership class and have been confirmed as members of the church. The purpose of this intercessory prayer is to help the new converts to become established in faith. This is mostly done by the prayer team, or what are often called "*the watchmen or prayer warriors*".

In conclusion, prayer and mission are inseparable. Prayer plays a very important role in every area of mission. This was the reason why the disciples could not start their mission until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit after days of prayer in the upper room. In like manner, Ghanaian Pentecostal churches have also given prayer a very important place in their approach to mission. This is seen during their preparation for any major mission programme - such as crusades, conventions and church planting. Furthermore, they take their time to pray for a conducive environment for mission. They also pray for those involved in mission and their new converts so that they would become established in faith.

## **9. Mission spirituality through discernment**

Discernment is one way we connect with God. It is a part of spirituality that opens us to God's movement in our lives. It flows out of a larger commitment to yield our attention, agenda and action towards God. Discernment is an ongoing attitude and practice of Christian spirituality and that matters to mission spirituality. Writing about mission spirituality, the Apostle Paul, exhorts believers to be devoted to prayer with an alert mind (Col 4:2). Discernment in mission involves one's ability to join in with the Holy Spirit and discern what the father is doing in their context (Lonsdale 2005:240). The Holy Spirit is central to Christian spirituality and to any understanding of it. In fact, the word spirituality reflects the realisation that Chris-

tian life is led in the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; it does not primarily designate this life as dealing with the 'spiritual,' in the sense of 'immaterial' (Farrelly 1993:492).

Jesus Christ manifested the character of mission discernment when he said, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel" (John 5:19-20). This attitude of Jesus Christ demonstrates the importance of discernment in mission spirituality. It is generally accepted that Christian mission has its beginning in the *missio Dei* (Balia & Kim 2010:4), there is no way the church can succeed in mission without engaging in missional discernment to know God's will for any mission venture they intend to embark upon (Ma & Roos 2010:223, 241).

In a personal interview dated July 20, 2015, in Accra, Ghana, with Apostle Joseph Sakyi, the Director of Christian Education, of the Christ Apostolic Church International, he noted that, discernment is nothing more than the ability to decide between truth and error, right and wrong. Discernment is the process of making careful distinctions in our thinking about truth. The key to living an uncompromising life lies in one's ability to exercise discernment in every area of his or her life. Furthermore, mission can be very challenging and therefore calls for a discerning mind and spirit. Missional discernment encompasses every aspect of mission, and it is a continuous process in every mission venture. As far as Pentecostals are concerned, missional discernment can manifest in any form (ie. trance, visions and dreams, inward feeling towards a thing, place or a person, the Holy Spirit can drop a message into your heart or mind on a particular issue).

## 10. Missional spirituality through prophesy

Prophecy is one of the gifts of the Spirit and those who have and exercise this gift persistently are called Prophets. Being a Prophet goes beyond the simple display of the gift of prophecy. It is accompanied by supernatural signs (visions, dreams and trances), an inward voice and the unusual visitation of the presence and power of God (Freeman 1981:14, Kaiser & Silva 2007:139). In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that Peter went to the house of Cornelius as the result of a vision he had. The end result was that Cornelius and his household were saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 13, we read that Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to pursue their missionary journey based on prophetic utterance.

Prophecy forms a very important part of Pentecostal spirituality. In this regard, many of the mission and major decisions of their churches are directed through prophetic utterances (Larbi 2001:286). As a matter of policy, the Church of Pentecost's Constitution says that:

Whereas those endowed with the gift of prophecy amongst the clergy and laity are allowed to exercise their gift in any church meetings, it is only those ordained into the office of prophet among the clergy who have the authority to give directive prophecies for the church. (Church of Pentecost's Constitution 2010:14)

In view of this, before they embark on any missionary activity, those believed to have prophetic gifts gather with the prayer team to seek prophetic guidance. According to the Christ Apostolic Church International's Constitution (2000:54,67), the prophetic ministry helps the church to seek God's direction for the church as well as to ensure that the prophetic covenant of the church is being adhered to by the National Executive Council.

### **11. Mission spirituality through discipleship**

Disciple-making is one of the missional assignments of the church (Bosch 1991:56). It forms an important aspect of mission spirituality. In the Great Commission, the church is assigned to make disciples of all nation, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all things. This process is particularly essential for spiritual maturity and for that matter missional spirituality. According to Lombaard, spirituality can never be only inward looking. It involves a strong ethical implications characterise the life style and practice of the faithful (2012:35).

Mission begins with a personal encounter with God. Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches are growing at a fast rate due to their emphasis on a personal experience with the Holy Spirit during the process of incorporation into membership. This approach has enabled Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches to maintain their missionary focus and discipleship agenda (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013b:15-16). This approach to mission spirituality has enabled them to produce disciples who will also disciple others. During their discipleship process much emphasis is placed on the role of the Holy Spirit as the power behind every mission agenda. This empowerment is manifested through the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to believers – for both their personal edification and the perfection of the church. As believers operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, God works through them in the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfil the *missio Dei*. Essentially, they stress on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit directed towards the proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ to the glory of God (Vinson 1986:32)

In order to ensure an effective discipleship programme, the classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana, have at their Headquarters the Christian Education Department, headed by the Apostle in charge of Christian Education. The person, who assumes the office of the National Director/Apostle of Christian Education is usually the one

who, in conjunction with the leadership of the church, prepares teaching material (such as Sunday school manuals and devotional books) for discipleship. He/she sometimes organises training programmes for those who are in charge of Christian education at regional, district and local levels to acquaint them with the teachings and doctrines of the church (White 2015:5).

According to the Church of Pentecost, the theme for 2012, 'Discipled to make others disciples' demanded a revamping of their discipleship structure to make room for the achievement of the vision. The Executive Council thus empowered the Bible Study and Cell Committee to pursue and strengthen discipleship through small groups; Bible Study and Cell Groups (Baidoo<sup>2</sup> 2015). The ultimate purposes for this approach are as follows:

- To love God and put him first
- To love one another as members of his family
- To serve others with our gifts
- To grow in godly character
- To help others become disciples of Jesus

The church has also gone further to make available the study materials in eight languages online.

## 12. Conclusion

Mission is not just about proclaiming the gospel - it encompasses spiritual preparation of those involved in both mission activity and converted souls. This article describes the mission spirituality of Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches. It started with the history of Classical Pentecostalism in Ghana. This was followed with a conceptual definition of mission spirituality. The article argues that missional spirituality forms an important part in every mission venture. It is an ongoing existential phenomenon and takes seriously human history and cultures, correlates itself to times without losing its touch with God's dynamic participation in mission. It was noted that Pentecostal spirituality emphasises the importance of the Holy Spirit as a starting point for a distinctive Pentecostal approach to theology. The article then discussed the various forms and manifestations of Classical Ghanaian Pentecostal mission spirituality.

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