

# Charismatisation of the Salvation Army, Ghana: Challenges and Way Forward

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## Abstract

Until recently, the Salvation Army of Ghana was widely considered the only historic mission Christian denomination that has managed to ward off the onslaught of the main features of the charismatic movement in Ghana. Through information derived from the historical and phenomenological methods, particularly interview schemes and observation, this paper discusses the main reasons for a gradual introduction into the mainstream of the Salvation Army Ghana's unique prayer groups, which are bringing hitherto "restricted" spiritual gifts to the forefront. The paper further argues that despite the popularity of the prayer groups and their activities among the grassroots membership of the Salvation Army, the groups are facing internal and external challenges that could jeopardise their spiritual and material benefits. The paper attempts to examine some of the immediate measures that could be undertaken, not only to incorporate the prayer groups and retain their membership in the Salvation Army, but also to ensure the continuous survival of the Salvation Army in Ghana and the rest of Africa.

**Keywords:** Salvation Army; Christianity; Charismatics; Pentecostals; Africa

## Introduction

The Salvation Army of Ghana is one of the historic mission churches that moved into Ghana from the United Kingdom. Until recently, the Salvation Army succeeded in warding off the charismatic movement that is making inroads into other historic mission churches such as the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Methodist Church of Ghana (Agbeti 1986, 57). At its foundation in 1865 in the United Kingdom, the Salvation Army manifested the main features of a charismatic movement (Taylor 1988, 23). It exhibited shouting "hallelujah" and "amen" at church services, clapping hands during singing, and dancing. It engaged in open-air evangelism,



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processions on the streets, and the wearing of uniforms to church. Speaking and praying in tongues, prophesying, and performing faith-healing, as well as rites of water baptism and Holy Communion, were among the essential gifts of the Holy Spirit at display during most of their gatherings (Booth 2010, 45).

Over time, the emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Salvation Army declined worldwide (Burns 2012, 34). Dr Andrzej Diniejko, in his post “The Salvation Army: Origins and Early Days 1865–1900: The Origin and Early Development of the Salvation Army in Victorian England,” identified three reasons for the decline.<sup>1</sup> First, the Salvation Army turned all its attention and resources toward the provision of social services and health centres for the sick. It engaged in dealing with societal issues, such as drug addiction, illiteracy, and unemployment among the population. Second, the Salvation Army succumbed to the humiliation they received from the mainline churches because of the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including falling on the ground, which at the time was considered odd or not normal by non-salvationists. Third, the decline of the use of some charismatic gifts was a result of the differences in theological positions on faith-healing among the leadership. William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, believed in the gift of healing by faith (Booth 2010, 24). He, however, was of the view that faith-healing was the product of the discretion of God himself and not by pressure from believers’ prayers. His point of view was opposed by some of his pastors, who eventually had to leave the Salvation Army (Booth 2010, 24–26).

Since its planting in Ghana in 1922, the Salvation Army has officially “restricted” the use of certain charismatic gifts till today. By these restrictions, the Salvation Army prohibited essential distinctive aspects of Charismaticism<sup>2</sup> (Oduro and Baah 2000, 128). In relation to the restriction, in 2019, the Territorial Commander (national leader) of the Salvation Army of Ghana announced at an annual spiritual rally of female pastors at Nkawkaw (Eastern Region) that the “bond of avoidance of doctrinal deviation” was still operational. This is the bond whose interpretation disallows the use of these spiritual gifts. The Salvation Army disallows the use of these essential gifts of the Holy Spirit on the grounds that they are subject to abuse. Any sign of these gifts is discouraged across the board in the Salvation Army worldwide. As a result, until recently, the Salvation Army in Ghana operated without the essential elements or features of a charismatic movement, such as gifts of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and anointing for healing (Ocheltree 1990, 45). Even though the Salvation Army is endowed with charismatic features of exuberance in praises and worship (the use of brass trumpets, clapping hands, marching on the streets with loud Christian songs for open-air evangelism, and allowing open sharing of testimonies), it still does not consider itself as charismatic and does not

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1 <https://victorianweb.org/religion/sa1.html>. Accessed October 12, 2020.

2 Charismaticism is a movement or a type of Christianity that places special emphasis on personal religious experience and divinely inspired powers, as of healing, prophecy, and the gift of tongues.

accept being referred to as a “charismatic church.” Thus, the ranks of the Salvation Army would prefer to be described as an “evangelical movement” (Ocheltree 1990, 45).

Although charismatic practices such as vision, faith-healing, prophecies during services, speaking or praying in tongues, and glossolalia are not officially allowed in the Salvation Army in Ghana, these gifts regularly manifest in many branches of the Salvation Army in Ghana. The chief secretary (the second in command at the national level) has noted in an interview that restrictions on the use of these spiritual gifts remain in place (Interviewed on May 6, 2021). Often, the restrictions come from the national leaders, district leaders, corps officers and local members. All efforts by the leadership to enforce rules about the “restricted” gifts are met with “deaf ears.”

In this paper, we will discuss in detail the gifts that are prohibited and examine their manifestations in most of the Salvation Army branches across the country. We will also examine the formation of prayer groups at the various branches (corps) of the Salvation Army, which are at the centre of the introduction of the “restricted” gifts into the mainstream. We will explore various ways by which the charismatic movement may be officially incorporated into the Salvation Army, Ghana, for its potential benefits.

## Methodology

This paper is based on research conducted between June 2020 to September 2022 by the authors in two regions of Ghana: the Eastern and the Greater Accra Regions. Although these regions have many branches of the Salvation Army, we selected five branches with strong prayer groups in each of the regions. The branches from the Greater Accra Region were: Madina Corps, Kotobabi Corps, Kodiabe Corps, Darkuman Corps, and Mamprobi Corps. The branches studied in the Eastern Region were: Begoro Corps, Suhum Corps, Koforidua Asokore, Koforidua Anglo Town, and Nkurakan. These branches were chosen because they have a strong presence in the emerging charismatic phenomena. This was qualitative research, which used the historical method comprising data collection tools of participant observation, interviews, and focus group discussions in the selected corps. The historical methods offered us the opportunity to trace the history of the Salvation Army in London and in Ghana. Altogether 20 participants took part in the interview schemes, all of whom were members of the Salvation Army, the leadership, and the prayer groups. We assembled 10 comrades from each of the corps for the focus group discussions. The participants answered questions ranging from: How did the prayer groups come to be formed in the corps? Which charismatic practices of gifts of the Holy Spirit prevailed at the branches? What has been the response of the leadership and the faithful to the prayer groups in the branches? Other questions included: In what ways have the traditional beliefs and practices of the Salvation Army been impacted by the emerging charismatic phenomena in the Salvation Army, Ghana? All the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded, later transcribed and analysed.

## The Charismatic Context of Ghana

The charismatic wave of Christianity has taken Ghana by storm for some time now. Its acceptance by Christians is so ubiquitous that gradually, it has almost become the face of Christianity in Ghana. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census (Ghana Statistical Service Records 2021), most Ghanaian Christians are Pentecostal and charismatics. Charismaticism in Ghana is characterised largely by emphasis on prayers, reliance on gifts of prophecy, revelation, and anointing for healing (Gifford 2004, 46–47). These identifiable features are not only found in the charismatic churches but also in some historic mission churches such as the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

The “charismaticisation” of Christianity in Ghana started with the African Independent Churches (AICs), such as the Twelve Apostles Church founded by Grace Tani and John Nankaba in 1918, and Musama Disco Christo Church founded by Joseph Egyanka Appiah (Jemismiham Jehu Appiah) in 1923. In 1924, Samuel Brako formed the Saviour Church of Ghana. In 1945, Charles Komla Nutonuti Wovenu formed the Apostles Revelation Society, and Apostle John Taylor founded the Christian Divine Church (Asamoah-Gyadu 2018, 116–117). The AICs introduced singing Christian songs in African rhythm, drumming, dancing, clapping hands, singing praises and worship at church services (Albrecht 1999, 30). They also introduced into Ghana a form of Christianity which, to many, is in tune with the religious worldview of the Ghanaian (Omenyo 2006, 55–68). Depending on the different perspectives, different names are used to refer to the AICs. Baëta calls them “spiritual churches” in line with the role of the Holy Spirit in their activities (Baëta 1962, 1). Parrinder, however, prefers to call them “separatist churches” to emphasise the apparent discontent that got them out of the main historic mission churches (Parrinder 1963, 107). Bediako calls them African Independent Churches to reflect their “more self-consciously seeking to be African than the churches of historic missionary origin” (Bediako 1995, 63). Assimeng would rather call them “sect” in line with their usual unpreparedness to engage in any meaningful relations with the wider community (Assimeng 1989, 135).

Although the African Indigenous Churches differ among themselves in many ways, certain features distinguish them from the historic mission churches. Unlike the mission churches, they are usually formed and led by native Ghanaians who often refer to themselves as prophets (Sarbah 2014, 7–9). Of the various features of the African Independent Churches (AICs), the most important for our paper is their emphasis on an African worldview, their affection for a freer form of worship, and their reliance on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These churches are considered more African than the historic mission churches because they aim at Africanising Christianity in a manner that Ayegboyin and Ishola (1997) find more “pragmatic in contextualising Christianity” in Africa. Other characteristics include an emphasis on spontaneous prayer, the spiritual aspect and interest in divine healing, as well as praying and speaking in tongues (Asamoah-Gyadu 2021, 44–45; Ayegboyin and Ishola 1997, 31).

Gradually, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, the AICs became so popular that they attracted many members from the historic mission churches into their fold (Omenyo 2005, 41). This probably explains why at their beginnings, the AICs were given derogatory descriptions such as “*abɔ nsam asɔre*” (churches that clap their hands during church services), “pray-for-me churches,” and *Enwera besa asɔre*” (churches that are causing a shortage of white clothes). Another derogatory description was “*kyiri bentoafo*” (the church that does not permit the use of a bulb syringe because of their emphasis on faith-healing). They were also accused of sheep stealing, cheating and deceiving members (Ayegboyin and Ishola 1997, 116–117). With these persistent attacks and stiff opposition to the AICs, some converts returned to their historic mission churches, such as the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church (Adubofour 2020, 374–376).

Upon their return, some of the returnees from the AICs introduced prayer groups and worship styles that involved clapping, singing praises, and “all-night” prayers in the historic mission churches (Omenyo 2005, 45). They, in particular, focused on speaking in tongues, reliance on revelations, and anointing with oil for healing and deliverance. In the Catholic Church, the prayer groups eventually formed the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement. In other historic mission churches, such as the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church, the influence of the charismatic phenomena of scripture union and other para-church organisations is undoubted (Omenyo 2005, 46). Most of the influences of the charismatic movement have been traced to the Azusa Street Revival, from which many Pentecostal churches emerged (Sarbah 2014, 7–26). The first Pentecostal Church in Ghana, led by Apostle Anim, had direct contact with the Apostolic Church in the United Kingdom and the United States of America (Kodua 2018, 136–140). The Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement in the Roman Catholic Church in Ghana had different sources of origin, including the efforts of foreign nuns from the USA to minister in the country. Some Catholic Charismatics were also influenced by other Christian denominations or parachurch organisations in Ghana (Omenyo 2006, 104–106). One of the earliest charismatic church denominations in Ghana, led by Archbishop Nicholas Duncan Williams, had a direct influence from the ministry of Archbishop Idahosa of Nigeria (Orogun and Pillay 2021). Both Omenyo (2006) and Asamoah-Gyadu have noted that one of the major influences of the charismatic movement in historic mission churches is the activities of para-church organisations like the Scripture Union and Women Aglow (Asamoah-Gyadu 2018, 188–189).

## Charismatic Phenomena in the Salvation Army of Ghana

In the Salvation Army, the traditional prayer meeting (the congregational prayer) is organised by each officer in the corps (local branch), which must be attended by all members (The General of the Salvation Army, *Orders and Regulations for Officers* 1997, 80–83). Samples of prayers for certain ceremonies or rites, such as the dedication of children, marriages, funerals and thanksgiving services, have been written down and

can be read at such programmes by the officiating pastor (The General of the Salvation Army, *Ceremonies by Authority of the General* 2018, 60–61). Though this prayer is in the book of official ceremonies, pastors are not strictly obliged to recite or read it. The officiating pastor can offer spontaneous prayers of their own. The corps officer (ordained pastor in charge of a corps) is expected to ensure that there is a set time for congregational prayers. The General of the Salvation Army, *Orders and Regulations for Officers* (1974), describes the four main sections of the congregational prayer meeting. First, an officer or an appointed comrade (a member of the local branch) could be asked to give an exhortation and also lead the prayers. The leader issues a prayer topic, and the congregation prays on the given topic. The prayers of both the leader and the congregation could be said aloud or silently. What is most important is that all the people present are informed on the issue at hand for prayers. Second, at the prayer meeting, individuals could be called to pray on given topics extempore. Comrades or visitors can ask the congregation to help them pray for their needs. Third, there could be testimony time for anybody in the congregation to testify what God has done for them. Fourth, the Salvation Army mandates at least once a week for congregational prayer. The day and time are left for the local congregation to decide. The essence is to ensure that most of the comrades in the local branch can have time to attend (The General of The Salvation Army, *Ceremonies by Authority of the General*, 2018, 60–65). Though the ethos of the church includes prayer meetings for the congregation and also encourages individual members to have time to pray, it is noted that in some corps and societies, some members have formed non-traditional prayer groups or prayer warrior groups to pray in line with the practices of the charismatic movement and churches.

As already noted, some elements of charismatic movements are already at play in the Salvation Army. Since its arrival in Ghana in 1922, charismatic elements of shouting “Hallelujah,” loud prayers, clapping hands, and giving testimonies during church services were integral parts of the ethos of the Salvation Army in Ghana. As compared to the other historic mission churches in the 1920s and 1940s, the Salvation Army had time for longer praises and worship sessions. The Salvation Army, in its early days in the 1930s to the 1970s, engaged in open-air evangelism in attempts to win souls for Christ (Oduro and Baah 2000, 12–15). As part of this open-air evangelism, the Salvation Army branch would march in church uniform in procession with the brass band and songs through the principal streets of the locality. The use of local songs was and has been predominant in the Salvation Army Ghana since 1922, alongside the songs in the Salvation Army “Book of Songs.” One would, therefore, consider the Salvation Army as a vibrant and exuberant church and, for that matter, equate it to charismatic or any of the Pentecostal churches.

However, there are other major elements widely considered the main features of the charismatic movements, which are not officially permitted in the Salvation Army, Ghana. These essential features of the charismatic churches and the charismatic movements in Ghana are largely an emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, faith-healing services, praying and speaking in tongues, prophetic and deliverance

ministration, exorcism, and the use of anointing oil during prayers (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 46). In his groundbreaking book, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*, Professor Omenyo of the University of Ghana discusses in detail the gifts of speaking in tongues, faith-healing, anointing with oil, and prophetic ministration, which he considers as the most profound gifts that define the charismatic phenomenon and the charismatic churches (Omenyo 2006, 105). His conclusion that the charismatic renewal is taking centre stage in the historic mission churches in Ghana is based on the prevalence of such essential features in these churches, as already mentioned. Over time, these essential elements of the charismatic ministration, such as speaking in tongues, faith-healing, anointing with oil, and prophetic ministration, which, even though they officially remain restricted, have been taking place in the various branches of the Salvation Army, Ghana. The “restricted” charismatic elements were introduced into the Salvation Army, Ghana, through the formation and activities of prayer groups (Atiemo 1993, 48).

### **Formation of Prayer Groups in the Salvation Army**

When the missionaries landed in Ghana, they established churches that exhibited every feature of the Salvation Army in the United Kingdom. The Salvation Army did not have prayer groups as they have in the charismatic churches (Omenyo 2006, 106). The first prayer group in the Salvation Army was formed at Kodiabe in June 1985, when two farmers, Joseph Donkor and Moses Donkor, were converted to Christianity and joined the Salvation Army. Donkor noted in an interview that “the long distance we had to endure to come and fellowship at the Salvation Army branch at Asuboi was so daunting that we decided to hold prayer meetings on our farm at Kodiabe,” which eventually became a branch of the Salvation Army (interviewed on May 5, 2022). The prayer meeting evolved to become the prayer group. Mensah, a current member of the group, acknowledged: “A story claims that these founding fathers of the Salvation Army at Kodiabe, the Donkors, were very prayerful” (interviewed on June 19, 2021). Various testimonies of healing, speaking in tongues, prophecies, and other successes accompanied their devotion to prayer (Munn and Courts 2014, 18).

Some seven years after the formation of the Kodiabe group, another prayer group was formed in 1992 at the Mamprobi Corps, the first branch of the Salvation Army in Accra. The branch followed the ethos of the Salvation Army faithfully, and a day was set aside for congregational prayer. However, at a point in time, Capt. Joseph Larbi, the Corps Officer, bemoaned the fact that there was no fixed time for prayers outside the congregational prayer, which would adequately cater for their spiritual needs (interviewed on May 23, 2021). As a result, Larbi continues, “We started fellowshiping with other charismatic churches and prayer centres.” To stop the tide of movement to other churches, some comrades at the Mamprobi Corps and members of Child Evangelism Fellowship in Accra, led by Agbozo and Larbi, started some prayer sessions in the Salvation Army at Mamprobi, which later resulted in the formation of a prayer group. Among the initial active members of the prayer team was John Agbenetor, whose

father was the chief secretary (the national executive secretary) of the Salvation Army at the time.

The prayer group of the Madina Corps is the most vibrant of all prayer groups in Ghana's Salvation Army. The group was started in 1999 when two students from the University of Ghana (Legon), Isaac Mensah and Philip Adzomadi, joined the Madina Corps. Since Madina was not far from Legon Campus, the two could easily commute from Legon to Madina. Brother Isaac was a leader of a prayer group in the Salvation Army at Asiakwa and was gifted with a number of spiritual gifts, including healing, prophecy, and the ability to exorcise. According to Silvia Debrah, a member of the group, "Brother Isaac managed to convince the comrades of the inadequacy of the weekly congregational prayer for spiritual growth" (interviewed on September 13, 2021). Thus, Brother Isaac was instrumental in the formation of the prayer group within the Madina Corps with the assistance of Maxwell Anane Adjei, Sylvia Debrah, Samuel Akwei and Brother Ben. The group continues to meet every Friday night in the Madina No.1 School. The prayer group organises regular "all-night" prayer sessions. Some of the prayer team members went through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and received various gifts, including praying in tongues and prophecy.

Some members of the Kotobabi prayer group trace its history to 2001 when four members led by Abraham Yeboah, popularly known as "Father Abraham," began to spend extra time in prayer in addition to the corps' congregational prayer. The four pioneers were Abraham Yeboah, John Appiah, Kate Sam and Portia Obiri Yeboah. In time, Lydia Botwe and Danquah joined the group. John Appiah, a prayer group member, noted that the "group was not initially easily accepted by the whole corps" (interviewed on October 2, 2021), even though there were manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in some comrades. It came out of the group discussion that two main reasons account for the formation of the prayer group at Kotobabi. First, the group was to revive the Salvation Army with dedication to prayer. There were many who felt the congregational prayer led by the corps officer was not helping them enough in spiritual growth. Second, they hoped to improve attendance at congregational prayers, which was declining, often attended by members who did not seem to be interested in prayers. According to Christian Tsekpoe, the comrades at Kotobabi wanted spiritual activities that were more relevant to their African worldview and spirituality (Tsekpoe 2019, 46). As of 2021, the group was made up of 25 members who were all regular members of the Kotobabi Corps.

Like the other prayer groups mentioned above, the Koforidua Anglo Town Prayer Group was formed to revive the spiritual fortunes of the Salvation Army there. Comrade Samuel Adubofour noted that prayer programmes had taken centre stage of Christian activities in Ghana, and so they did not want the Salvation Army to be left out (Adubofour 2020, 374–376). In 1994, Adubofour and the local officers of the Koforidua Anglo Town Corps started meeting at specific times for prayers outside of the congregational prayer, which evolved into a prayer group at the corps. The group



instituted a week of prayer, of which the first five days of every month (from Monday to Friday) were dedicated to fasting and prayers. The Friday of the week of prayers was set aside for “all-night” prayer. The prayer group became so vibrant that the local officers permitted non-local officers to attend their meetings. Brother Isaac, a tutor at Koforidua Senior High Technical School, was appointed the leader of the prayer group. Later on, the prayer group chose the name “Warriors of Koforidua Salvation Army (WAKOSA).”

The existing prayer group at Koforidua Asokore traces its roots to July 2001 when A. A. Nyantakyi (popularly called “Officer”) formed the prayer group to pray for the corps. He was supported by a few committed members, including Samuel Abaidoo, Brother George Arko and Comfort Omane. In a focus group discussion at Koforidua Asokore, the participants’ responses indicated that the prayer group was formed to pray for the spiritual development of the corps. It was also to enable them to confront some form of spiritual laxity, which, they believed, was creeping into the corps at congregational prayer sessions. The prayer group was also formed to seek spiritual solutions to the existential problems of members. The group engaged in faith-healing and deliverance from the oppression meted out to humanity by the hand of the devil.

Although the Salvation Army branch at Nkurakan near Koforidua started in 2012, it was not until 2018 that its prayer group was formed. John Tayi, the founder of the Nkurakan Society, his wife and children were once leading members of the Warriors of Koforidua Salvation Army. Tayi attempted to introduce rites of their prayer meeting into the general congregational prayer on Friday evenings. He gave two main reasons for the introduction of the rites of prayer group into the Salvation Army’s traditional prayer: 1) to help attract new members into the corps; and 2) to stem the tide of movement into the Pentecostal and charismatic churches (Opare-Kwakye 2018, 36). This attempt to “charismaticise” the whole branch at Nkurakan with long prayer sessions was fiercely rejected by the local comrades. Not everyone was interested in intense prayers, praying in tongues, prophecies, and faith-healing. More so, congregational prayers of the Salvation Army had stipulated a time of two hours. A prayer group was formed at the branch eventually.

### **Activities of the Various Prayer Groups**

In his book, *Contemporary Pentecostal and Christianity Interpretations from an African Context*, Asamoah-Gyadu (2013), like Omenyo, also identifies Bible study, prayer meetings, healing, deliverance, “all-night” prayers sessions, and prophetic ministration as the main activities of charismatic movements and groups (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013, 67). The prayer groups of the various corps we visited during our study were involved in similar activities. Their programmes took place at different times of prayer meetings, depending on the activities of each corps, and usually lasted longer than the usual congregational prayers. At their prayer meetings, the groups engaged in five main activities. First, the prayer groups spent long hours in Bible study and prayer (Omenyo and Arthur 2013, 58). They studied the Bible on their own to develop a deeper

understanding of it and to grow in grace for overall Christian growth. Often, members are put into different groups for Bible teaching and sharing. In relation to long hours of prayers, a member said in an interview: “We pray for hours. We want to emulate the prayer life of Jesus, the Saviour” (interviewed on March 4, 2021). The meetings of the groups never coincided with any programme of the corps. This was to avoid getting into trouble with the leadership of their corps. A member at Madina noted: “Many people don’t like us, so we want to keep the group from undue influence” (interviewed on April 12, 2021). At their usual meeting, the word of God is shared after a passage is read from the Bible to their healing. They would be silent for a while reflecting on the word. Then, each member would be at liberty to share their understanding of the passage as the Holy Spirit gives them insight.

Second, the prayer sessions of the prayer groups often lead to healing services. Agbozo, a staunch member of the Mamprobi prayer group, believes that the healing services take place in accordance with Matthew 10:1, where Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every kind of disease. Ofori-Atta et al. (2018) have observed that the main activities of charismatic groups include managing prayer camps where the sick, including the mentally ill, pray for healing (Ofori-Atta et al. 2018, 34–41). We observed that healing was one of the most important activities of the prayer groups we visited. Many are those who cited healing as the main reason they joined the group and took part in its activities. In our research, we came across many who said they were healed by prayer in the group after unsuccessful visits to medical doctors and other prophets. Those who dabbled in the occult or witchcraft and showed signs of spiritual disturbance, who were afraid of rejection and abandonment, and who had feelings of insecurity and worthlessness in relationships were also delivered.

Third, some of the prayer groups have members who are gifted with skills for deliverance and exorcism, which is a ministry undertaken by Pentecostal/charismatic churches and fellowships (Ampong and Benyah 2017, 84–108). This activity also takes place at their regular meetings and also at monthly “all-night” services. The reason why the deliverance service is gaining grounds among the Salvationists is summed up in the words of a member: “Life on earth is a struggle between forces of light and forces of darkness (Rev. 12:1–11)” (interviewed on October 27, 2021). We observed that they took some of their clients through a ritual of cleansing or delivering them from one form of bondage or the other (Atiemo 1995, 48; Pondani 2019, 56). A man who claimed he had been delivered from the grip of Satan two years ago noted deliverance service in an interview: “This has come at the right time in the Salvation Army ... Salvationists now stay in the Salvation Army because they have access to deliverance service. That is why the Salvation Army should allow its use” (interviewed on June 19, 2021). Many Ghanaians rush to churches for deliverance due to the widespread belief that the spiritual world has a great influence on the lives of the living (Anderson 2014, 132; Benyah 2018, 56).

Fourth, the groups also performed prophetic ministration (Aboagye Aryeh 2015, 198). This ministration was strong in three of the groups we observed. Brother Thomas of the Mamprobi prayer group claimed he had received his prophetic ministry after 40 days of prayer at the Achimota Forest. “Uncle Sammy” of the Koforidua Asokore group also claimed he had been a prophet since he was 18 years old. He disclosed in an interview: “Because the Salvation Army does not allow me to practise my gift, I have been giving prophetic direction (*akwankyere*) to clients on the blind side of the Salvation Army” (interviewed on February 9, 2021). These self-proclaimed prophets and their involvement in the Salvation Army are pointers to what Quayesi-Amakye indicates that, in recent times, the neo-charismatic prophets are fond of giving prophetic directions (*akwankyere*) as counsel to clients on how to deal with problems (Kaunda 2021, 113–115; Quayesi-Amakye, “Prosperity and Prophecy in African Pentecostalism,” (2011, 291–305). Appiah of the Kotobabi Corps believes the prophetic gift was transferred to him by his father before he joined the prayer group. With reference to giving prophetic direction, Benya agrees with Ogbu (2008, 233) that the Pentecostal teachings, before they take their clients through deliverance, stress an African worldview of spiritual causality (Benyah 2018, 56; McDonnell and Montague 1994, iii–iv).

Fifth, we determined that the prayer groups engage in vigil or emergency prayer sessions, which are often referred to as “all-night” prayers. Although “all-night” prayer sessions are not foreign to the traditional ethos of the Salvation Army, the “all-night” prayers of the prayer groups occur on a regular basis (Adubofour 2020, 374–385; Okyere 2018, 151, 220, 224). The group members meet at the church premises for prayers from the evening till dawn the next day. Often, prior to the meeting, the members would have been engaged in two or three days of fasting as preparation. We observed that the “all-night” services did not follow the same liturgy of the congregational prayer of the Salvation Army. Their liturgy had a lot in common with the liturgy of the charismatic churches in Ghana. They usually began with an hour or two of songs of praise and worship led by the various worship teams. After the song ministration, they would engage in long, spontaneous prayer aimed at various prayer points. They prayed for each other and the church as a whole. Many of them would be praying and speaking in tongues. A woman told us in the focus group discussion at Koforidua that “the spiritual tongue is the reason we are able to pray for that long. You don’t get tired.” A spiritual talk follows the prayers delivered by either one of the members or someone particularly invited for it. The topic for the talk is usually meant to help the group grow in their understanding of the Bible and particularly prepare them for healing and deliverance ministry that will follow till dawn. It is worthy of note that the activities of the “all-night” services take place outside the control of the branch officials. The benefits of the “all-night” services are evident also in the high attendance level of the group members and even the rest of the church (Hamon 1990, 78).

### **Charismatisation, Traditional Ethos and Challenges**

Although the prayer groups and their activities (mainly speaking in tongues, prophetic revelations, and the use of anointing oil for healing) are well received by the majority

of the comrades across the board, they are facing mounting challenges in the Salvation Army. These challenges are both internal and external. Some members keep creating internal problems for the group, which had originally set out to spiritually revive the Salvation Army. In the group discussions at Kotobabi, Mamprobi and Medina, five main internal problems were identified. First, some gifted members have been constantly abusing the gifts they have received. Second, Peter Johnson of the Mamprobi group observed that “some clients have reported instances of abuse perpetrated by the prayer leaders, prophets and spiritual healers to the Salvation Army leadership” (interviewed on March 26, 2022). Third, some monetary support solicited from members was seen to be going to the prophets’ private needs and not even to the group or the Salvation Army. Fourth, some prophets were also accused of selling, at exorbitant prices, various forms of oil as anointing oil for healing and spiritual protection. In the same vein, others accused faith-healers of selling some herbs or tree roots, sand, salt and stones as contact links for divine power for successful personal endeavours (Aboagye Aryeh 2020, 67–78). Fifth, there are also reports of fake prophecies and arranged healings taking place at some prayer meetings (Wariboko 2014, 24). Kweku Appiah observed that “the prayer group at Mamprobi, upon long hours of prayer, received revelations through their self-proclaimed prophets, which saw them introduce the Sacrament of Holy Communion at the meeting,” which is still not a practice of the Salvation Army. The introduction of non-traditional doctrines such as the Holy Communion into the Salvation Army by the prayer group is a cause of concern to officials across the board.<sup>3</sup> It was mentioned in focus group discussions that these non-traditional features were often introduced by prophets invited from other charismatic churches and also group members and leaders with insufficient training. These activities are seen to be not only damaging the integrity of the groups, but also charismaticising the Salvation Army in general.

The prayer groups of the Salvation Army are facing the same external challenges that the prayer groups of historic mission churches faced at their beginning in Ghana (Hocken 2009, 45). These challenges have a lot in common with the stiff opposition that Asamoah-Gyadu observed at the early stages of prayer groups and charismatic movements in the historic mission churches of Ghana (Asamoah-Gyadu 2018, 189). We observed that the “stiff opposition” comes mainly from the leadership of the Salvation Army. It is also in line with what Oyebowale Oyetade noted that, often, junior pastors who were endowed with a gift of speaking in tongues, prophetic revelations, and faith-healing by anointing with oil were opposed by leaders of the charismatic and Pentecostal churches who are the main champions of such gifts (Oyebowale Oyetade 2020, 49). In the Salvation Army, it is not every leader who is against the use of restricted gifts. Unofficially, some of the leaders (both divisional/district and national leaders, including some lieutenant colonels and majors, who are divisional commanders and district officers) acknowledge the full charismatic phenomena. Not only are gifted prayer group members often given platforms to lead prayers, but some famous charismatic prophets

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3 <https://ojs.reformedjournals.co.za/stj/article/view/2064/2872>

and evangelists are even invited by some district/divisional pastors to minister at revivals and rallies organised by their corps. At national programmes, such as the National Women's Congress, National Youth Congress, and the Salvation Army Students and Associates Fellowship Congress, evidence of open manifestations of the restricted charismatic gifts, including speaking and praying in tongues, prophecy, and anointing with oils, could be witnessed (Ojo 2006, xvii).

However, the open display of restricted gifts at national and district programmes appears not to be enough to warrant their acceptance by the national leadership of the Salvation Army. Various warnings—verbal and written—from the national leadership have been issued to pastors and comrades known to have been spearheading or championing the gifts under restriction. In addition, disciplinary transfers have been issued to pastors who are either involved in the prayer groups themselves or seem to be promoting the activities of the prayer groups in their corps. At the height of the restriction was the signing of the bond of avoidance of doctrinal deviation, which literally sought to stop the open display of the gifts of speaking in tongues, prophetic revelations, the use of anointing oil, and other practices and beliefs deemed to be associated with the charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Non-compliance with the bond by prayer group members often leads to tension and confrontation with the local leadership. The commanding officer of the Mamprobi Corps, for instance, at a point reported the prayer group members to the national headquarters for turning the Salvation Army into a Pentecostal or charismatic church because of their public display of what he describes as “alien” gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues and the use of anointing oil. As a result, in 1984, the territorial headquarters summoned some members of the group at Mamprobi and cautioned them in a meeting that lasted for two hours against an unauthorised display of the “forbidden” gifts. The leadership eventually decided that the activities of the prayer group had to come to an end at Mamprobi. In addition, some leading members of the prayer group were suspended from the corps in order to put an end to the tension. In 1988, some members were also even given disciplinary transfers from the Salvation Army School at Mamprobi for engaging the school children in afternoon break prayers. This problem of the prayer group at Mamprobi is akin to Asamoah-Gyadu's observation that the early stages of prayer groups and charismatic movements in the historic mission churches were met with stiff opposition from the leadership (Asamoah-Gyadu 2018, 185–190). Eventually, the prayer group was virtually dissolved, and 25 of the members left the Mamprobi Corps to join various Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

It is significant to note that the leadership does not restrict the use of praying and speaking in tongues, prophecy and anointing oil in a vacuum. While the emerging charismatic phenomenon resonates with the Ghanaian indigenous worldview (Wariboko 2014, 26) and not only attracts more membership but also offers them some assurance of spiritual protection and security, it is also easy to understand the scepticism of the leadership about the phenomenon in the Salvation Army. Various reasons are given by the authorities of the Salvation Army to justify the restriction of the use of

spiritual gifts. First, the leadership often receive reports of abuse of these spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues by the prophets and some members of the prayer groups, as Oyebowale Oyetade has noted in his study of Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria (Oyebowale Oyetade 2020, 54).

Second, our interviews with some national leaders revealed evidence of reports of false prophecies and financial exploitation of clients among the members of the group. The leadership is of the view that prophecy and the gifts of speaking in tongues, in particular, are already causing confusion in the church and families, and so they should not be given further public exposure. Third, the Salvation Army officials are concerned that the full acceptance of the gifts, as expressed in Ghana and perpetrated by prophets/pastors of charismatic churches, will eventually spell doom for the Salvation Army (Aboagye Aryeh 2020, 69). Some prophets are already engaged in certain un-Christian practices, which tarnish the image of Christianity in Ghana and may creep into the Salvation Army (Anto 2011, 72). These un-Christian practices include the use of abusive exchanges, commanding wedding rings and passports to appear in churches, giving out lottery numbers, and issuing punishments for atonement of sins (Anto 2011, 74). Fourth, the leadership of the Salvation Army also fears that the emphasis of neo-prophetic Pentecostal/Christianity on prosperity and success could produce Christians who will be spiritually shallow and will lack a proper understanding of the Bible and Christianity as a whole (Anderson 2019, 16–27). The interest of such Christians will be in prosperity, miracles, spiritual protection, and spiritual direction (*akwankyere*), and will depend solely on their prophets instead of Jesus Christ (Gifford 2004, 35)

### Forward for the Salvation Army, Ghana

While the leadership of the Salvation Army has officially been restricting the emergence of charismatic phenomena, the masses are also pushing for an official acceptance of the full elements (Robbins 2004, 119). There should, therefore, be a consensus between the official leadership and the prayer groups on how best to handle the emerging charismatic phenomena (Coleman 2000, 89). The Salvation Army is in a situation that the other historical mission churches in Ghana faced in the mid-1990s. Some members do not feel spiritually satisfied in the church (Meyer 2015, 46). Because of the ban, some of their members are fraternising with other charismatic churches. The position of the Salvation Army on speaking in tongues has created an impression in most Salvationists that speaking in tongues is just ridiculous and not accepted (Coleman 2006, 8). At a focus group discussion, one of the members shared his experience that while he was at Dwenase near Osino in the Eastern Region of Ghana, there was a comrade who had the gift of praying in tongues. Any time she prayed in tongues, some church members made a mockery of her. Another participant also expressed concern about the restrictions such that people are not allowed to speak in tongues at church services. Yet, another participant intimated that the gift of tongues, prophecies and faith-healing are susceptible to abuse.

Obviously, Asamoah-Gyadu's advice to the historic mission churches (when they found themselves in a similar situation) is equally applicable to the Salvation Army. He asserts that "God remains sovereign." He remains the God of renewal, who determines and chooses how to carry on His mission with whatever instruments are available to him at any particular time (Asamoah-Gyadu 2010, 42). In this statement, Asamoah-Gyadu calls for a mission response that will open up the church to the work of the Holy Spirit in our contemporary times. In the same vein, the Salvation Army must also take a cue from the period of the Reformation in 1517 AD, when the prolonged misunderstanding and show of authority in the Western church eventually led to the division of the church into the Roman Catholic Church and the then mainline Protestant Churches across Europe (Hillerbrand 2009, 89). Consequently, Asamoah notes further that God is bidding, "He is mighty enough to raise even stones to carry out the mission of renewal in Jesus Christ our Lord and empowered by his Holy Spirit" (Asamoah-Gyadu 2010, 42–3). In this statement, Asamoah-Gyadu drums home in relation to the gifts of the Spirit that the church must open up and accept what God chooses to do in different ways.

The possibility of abuse ought not to be the reason for an outright ban on the gifts; why throw away the baby with the bath water (Oyebowale Oyetade 2020, 68)? The outright prohibition of the emerging charismatic phenomena has not yielded any positive results. The Salvation Army of Ghana should reconsider its decision and allow those with the gifts to continue availing them for the service of the Salvation Army communities (Haynes 2017, 91). According to Adubofuor and Osei, in the Methodist Church of Ghana, the operations of the Prayer Fellowship Movement led to the recognition of the deliverance ministry. In Kumasi Wesley Methodist Church, such recognition led to the introduction of a monthly "Deliverance Service" on 4 February 1990 in an attempt to meet the "special" spiritual needs of members who could not be attended to in the regular Sunday divine service (Adubofuor and Osei 2020, 374–385). In this way, Omenyo argues, the Methodist Church managed to "integrate the renewal programmes of the prayer groups into its traditional structures" (Omenyo 2006, 159).

It would be helpful for the leadership of the Salvation Army not only to study the charismatic movement and dialogue with the prayer groups, but also to train the officers inclined to the emerging charismatic phenomena in order to guide them appropriately (Asamoah-Gyadu 2004, 371; Atiemo 1993, 46; Larbi 2001, 35–36). Certainly, these spiritual gifts constitute part of the spiritual capital for the edification of the church. The signs and wonders in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the early apostles attracted many people to listen to the Gospel and to be converted (Kwiyani 2020, 13–16; Yalley 2018, 126–128). To deal with the incidence of false prophecies and exploitation of clients, the Salvation Army could set up a committee of experienced comrades to train the prayer group members about the gifts.

It was realised in this research that the various prayer groups operate independently without a district/regional or national association (Dulin 2021, 108–119; Goodman

1995, 41–52; Mugambi 2020, 59). One cannot underrate the significance of unity in any human endeavour. When the Catholic Church faced similar difficulties with prayer groups, the church accepted the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) in 1970 as one of the spiritual movements or societies in the Catholic Church in Ghana. The movement is currently found at the Parish and Diocesan levels, with the national headquarters in Kumasi. The national office helps to coordinate the affairs of the groups and helps to train members across the dioceses and the parishes. It has helped not only to weed out unscrupulous members but also to nurture many Catholics to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Adoboli 2018, 198). The Salvation Army can adopt a similar model to bring all prayer groups under one national umbrella for the spiritual growth of members.<sup>4</sup> It will also address the situations where isolated prayer groups are confronted individually by the national leadership and asked to stop operations. The national office of the group would be charged with the responsibility of not only ensuring that the bond of avoidance of doctrinal deviation is adhered to, but also giving a hearing to allegations levelled against some of their members (Adoboli 2018, 199). A national association of prayer groups can, among other things, regulate the activities of the group members and eliminate the unscrupulous ones among them (Methodist Church Ghana 2005, 68–79).

As an international church, the leadership of the Salvation Army in Ghana takes direct instructions from the international headquarters in London. The General of the Salvation Army, *Orders and Regulations for Officers* (1997) stipulates that the headquarters in London endorses the beliefs and programmes of Ghana and the worldwide church. It is, therefore, recommended that the international headquarters examines critically the group and its activities in order to come to a clear understanding of the charismatic phenomenon in Africa (Maribei and Mugambi 2021, 128; Oborji 2003, 335). It will be in a good position to advise the African church, including Ghana. This attempt by the international office would, perhaps, move the Salvation Army towards its origins and be able to understand the reasons for its change of name from the Christian Mission to the Salvation Army. As a spiritual army, fighting against Satan, evil spirits and sin, the Salvation Army must be inspired by the emerging charismatics (Mugambi 2020, 62; Warner 1995, 23). It is prayer that can overcome the activities of Satan and liberate people from afflictions by evil powers (Mugambi 2020, 62; Osei 2016, 52). It would be of interest to investigate whether the ranks of the Salvation Army—lieutenants, captains, majors and colonels—have any link to fighting and having victory over the powers of darkness and to find out how militant the emerging charismatic groups are.

## Conclusion

Since its planting in Ghana in 1922, the Salvation Army has exhibited all features of the Salvation Army in London. The prayer groups, despite their internal problems, have

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4 <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Catholic-Charismatic-Renewal-Ghana-CCR-Hits-40-years-187286>. Accessed May 20, 2023.



become popular with the grassroots membership. Attempts made by Salvation Army officials to enforce the “bond of doctrinal deviation” issued to restrict the various gifts, have not been successful.

We have discussed the gifts that are prohibited in the Salvation Army in Ghana, including the gift of speaking in tongues, faith-healing, prophetic ministration, and anointing with oil. We have also examined the reasons for the formation as well as the activities of prayer groups at the various branches of the Salvation Army. The prayer groups are meant to spiritually revive the Salvation Army and improve congregational prayer attendance. They were formed to deepen the faith of their members in God and their understanding of the Bible. Looking forward, we have examined, using suggestions of scholars and church historians such as Omenyo and Asamoah-Gyadu, various ways for adopting these essential charismatic elements for the good of the Salvation Army, Ghana.

It is concluded that the officials of the Salvation Army should also consider the spiritual benefits of Charismaticism in Ghana and reconsider their decision against the gifts of praying in tongues, prophecy, and anointing with oils for healing for the good of the church (Anderson 2019, 16–17).

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