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The Church of Pentecost and its role in Ghanaian society

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Introduction

The emergence of the African Initiated Churches (AICs) signalled the new form of Christianity that was to take place on the continent of Africa. These churches attempted to operate independently, without any reference to the churches in the West. Those churches emerged alongside the classical Pentecostal Churches. While activities of the early AICs attracted much research in the mid-twentieth century onwards, very little was said about the contributions that these churches were making to their societies (Baëta 1962; Beckmann 1975; Parrinder 1953; Peel 1968; Turner 1967a, 1967b; Wyllie 1980).

However, until recently, little research had been done about the Pentecostals and the contributions that they were making in society. Current research, nevertheless, shows how Pentecostalism is growing and contributing in diverse ways to the development on the continent of Africa (Anderson 2004; Kalu 2008). One such church which is growing and respected is the Church of Pentecost (CoP), with its headquarters in Ghana. While Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu, a Ghanaian theologian, argued that the CoP was a 'more respectable option in indigenous Pentecostalism' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 89) in his study about independent indigenous Pentecostalism. Gerrie Ter Haar, a Dutch professor of religion, remarked that the CoP was one of the most successful of the African-led churches in Europe in her research about the relationship between African-led churches in Europe and churches in the home countries of Africa (1998, 174). Thus, I consider the invitation to the Church of Pentecost and some of the AICs to share some best practices and the roles they are playing in their societies as very important and relevant.

Consequently, this article will throw light on the role that the Church of Pentecost plays in Ghanaian society. It does this against the background of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana and its spread throughout the world. It continues by discussing the characteristics, structure and governance of the church. Then, it ends with the church's contribution to social services, development and its public role in the Ghanaian society.

The emergence of the Church of Pentecost

The CoP traces its beginning to the activities of Pastor James and Mrs Sophia McKeown, both of Northern Ireland, who arrived in the then Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1937, on the ticket of the Apostolic Church of the UK. The Apostolic Church had its origin in the Welsh revival and later rekindled by the Pentecostal faith after the Azusa Street revival. Peter Anim, who had heard of the Pentecostal faith, and his movement, the then Faith Tabernacle Church invited McKeown to assist them in Ghana. However, McKeown and Anim parted company in 1939 due to some theological differences.

Working in partnership with the indigenous converts and personnel, McKeown worked tirelessly to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the country through his emphasis on the word of God, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and holy living. In 1953 McKeown was compelled to leave the Apostolic Church of the UK and get along with the indigenous people, under the name 'Ghana Apostolic Church', which was renamed the Church of Pentecost, in 1962. The church has become an indigenous church, with a good blend of Christianity and African cultural features. In the late 1950s, McKeown increasingly spent more time in Britain, spending only six months a year in Ghana. Thus, in 1982, when he retired, and handed over the chairmanship of the CoP to a Ghanaian, Apostle Fred Stephen Safo (1982–7), he knew that the church could run smoothly without him. The transition was very smooth. There have been four other African leaders after Safo. These are Prophet M. K. Yeboah (1988–98), Apostle Dr M. K. Ntummy (1998–2008), Apostle Prof. Opoku Onyinah (2008–18) and Apostle Eric Kwabena Nyamekye (elected in 2018); all followed smoothly without a conflict.

Giving credit to the role that James McKeown played in the CoP, E. Kinsley Larbi, a Ghanaian pioneer Pentecostal theologian observed

These principles [McKeown principles] helped to place the organisation on a sound footing morally, financially, and in terms of its strong and uncompromising evangelistic drive. These principles have since defined the ethos of the church. McKeown played the role of a facilitator par excellence.

(2004, 143)

Allan Anderson argues that, 'To all intents and purposes this was an autochthonous Ghanaian church' (2004, 117). Thus, these scholars including Anderson, Teer Haar, Larbi and Asamoah-Gyadu set the CoP in place as an example of an African Pentecostal Church with respect; an African church that is self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating and self-theologising (Anderson 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; Larbi 2004; Teer Haar 1998).

The CoP has moved beyond the shores of Ghana to become a worldwide Christian denomination, now in 99 other countries. The spread of the CoP to other parts of Africa and the rest of the world in the beginning was not organised. As CoP members migrated along the coast of West Africa, they shared

their faith with others and, before long, small groups of new converts were formed. These migrants sent information to the church's headquarters about the existence of the new churches they had established. The leadership responded quickly, by sending pastors as 'missionaries' to those foreign lands to care for them.

In a similar manner, when the Ghanaians immigrated to the West, they began to worship and contribute to the growth of western churches. Yet they could not find their identity. Consequently, some members of CoP among the migrants established churches in their places of abode. Thus, Roswith Gerloff, writing about the African-Americans rightly says that 'the religion of the slaves [Africans] and the religion of the slave master [whites] were never identical, even when both referred to the same Bible' (1995, 91). These churches established by immigrants who had not been trained as ministers show the effectiveness of oral culture. Hollenweger observes that 'all the elements of oral theology function as a logic system for passing on theological and social value information in oral society' (1985, 413–414).

At the end of 2017, the chairman of the CoP reported having 20,863 churches across the globe, with overall membership at 3,037,068. In 2017 alone, the church made inroads into eight new nations (Onyinah 2018, 28). While in most of the western countries the membership is mostly constituted of Ghanaians, in the other continents the membership is mostly indigenous. As of December 2017, the overall membership of the church in Ghana stood at 2,566,818. This is approximately 9 per cent of the total estimated Ghanaian population of 29,088,849 as of 31 December 2017. This literally means that out of every 11 Ghanaians you meet, one would be a member of the CoP (Onyinah 2018, 32).

The overall growth analysis showed that 72% of CoP membership in Ghana was made up of children and youth (up to 35yrs). This is a healthy sign and an indication that The Church of Pentecost is a thriving church with a bright future. The gender analysis of the adult membership of the church indicated that females constituted the largest proportion of 62%. It is interesting however, to note that whereas the female population in the church grew by 8% over the 2016 figure, the male population grew by an impressive 10%.

(Onyinah 2018, 34, 45–46)

This was an indication that males were being attracted to the church.

Characteristics of the Church of Pentecost

Doctrine and practices

The CoP subscribes to almost all the fundamental doctrines of faith of the Apostolic Church and other classical Pentecostals. These are written in the

constitution of the church and most of its documents such as baptismal certificates and the *Ministers' Manual*. The articles include the Bible, the one true God, human beings' depraved nature, the Saviour, repentance, justification and sanctification. Others are the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, baptism, gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit, afterlife, tithes and offering and divine healing ((Church of Pentecost 2016, 7–9) Hollenweger 1972, 291–456; Worsfold 1991, 96–102).

The Apostolic Church was a church that displayed all the spectrum of classical Pentecostalism. The Dean of Pentecostal studies Walter Hollenweger describes the Apostolic Church as a church that 'gives greater play to the gifts of the Spirit' (1972, 192). In the CoP, as with the Apostolic Church, men are called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Others are called to the offices of elders and deacons. Women are called as deaconesses and not ordained into the full-time pastoral ministry. Besides, the Apostolic Church held to an ethical rigorism, the prohibition of things such as drinking alcohol and smoking. Members who were found making a practice of going to places which were considered questionable, such as to the cinema and concert shows and falling into open sin were to be disciplined (Apostolic Church 1937, 35–44, 238–239; Hollenweger 1972). The CoP followed similar practices.

The CoP places emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in one's life and encourages all its members to experience what the Pentecostals call the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit and power in the CoP go beyond what Cyril Eastwood attempts to identify as the priesthood of all believers (1960, 260–262). The role of the Holy Spirit is associated with what Roger Stronstad explains as the prophethood of all believers (1999, 115–114), where all could become powerful and confront witchcraft and fetishism in their evangelistic activities. This sort of 'prophethood' of all believers appeals to the peasants and downtrodden who constitute a majority of the Ghanaian population. They help to propagate the gospel. The rapid growth of the CoP is evidence of this.

Structure and government

The church's headquarters is in Ghana. The church has a centralised structure that is similar to the Apostolic Church in the UK (Apostolic Church 1937; Church of Pentecost 2016).

At the top of the church's structure is the General Council which consists of all confirmed ministers of the church, area executive committee members, chairmen of boards and committees and ministries directors. Below the General Council is the 15-man Executive Council that sees to the administration of the church. The area (and national) presbyteries, chaired by apostles and prophets, come below the Executive Council. Under the area presbyteries, are the district presbyteries. The district presbyteries are headed by pastors. At the bottom of the administrative structure of the church are the local presbyteries, headed by presiding elders.

Besides the local churches, districts and areas are the ministries and boards, which are headed by directors who report to the General Council through the Executive Council. These ministries are women, evangelism, children, men and youth. Some major boards and committees in the CoP are the finance board, Pentecost social services board, ministerial committee, pension board, estate committee and the missions board. The missions board falls under the international missions' director, who is directly accountable to the chairman of the church, on the same level as the church's general secretary. The structure may have its weaknesses, as with all structures. However, on the whole, it seems to fit in with the Ghanaian culture, especially that of the Akan with its various military organs (Busia 1951, 1–22; Nukunya 1992, 67–74). Thus, it makes the members feel secure in its formality, accountability and disciplinary measures.

Worship

Worship in the church is similar to other classical Pentecostals (Hollenweger 1972, 140, 149), with some cultural diversities. These diversities are portrayed in activities such as the giving of testimonies, praises, special times of prayer called worship, and preaching. There is the opportunity to express oneself before God in diverse ways – prayer, dancing, testimonies and local theologisation. An example of such local theologisation is the example of Afua Kuma whose application of the appellations of chiefs to God has become a classical example of local theologising within African theology (Bediako 1995, 59–60; Kumah 1981). Eventually the church developed a form of worship, especially its songs that have had an impact on Ghanaian society (Larbi 2001; Leonard 1989; Hackett 1998). Often as preaching and prayer go on, a member would receive through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit a song that would be sung spontaneously, without having to write it. Professor Emmanuel Larbi observes that the CoP 'has bequeathed to Ghanaian Christianity more locally brewed Christian songs than any other Church in the country' (2004, 143).

Training

Until 1971 there was no formal training for any of the church's officers. Retreats for teaching and prayer were held from time to time by an area head for pastors, their wives, deacons and deaconesses in the area. It was Pastor David Mills, the Elim missionary who was adjoined to the CoP, who reintroduced Bible school to the CoP in 1972. The Bible school concept had been introduced to the church in 1953 when the Latter Rain visited Ghana, but it was abandoned in 1957 (McKeown 1957). The Bible school headed by Pastor Mills was also closed down in 1975 and reopened in 1981. It is clear from the closing down of the schools that, in time past, the CoP shared with other Pentecostals, as Hollenweger points out, that 'modern academic theology is a tragedy, whose fruit is empty churches' (1972, 194). As with other Pentecostals, the situation has changed significantly. Currently the CoP has established a University College

which has three faculties: theology and missions; business administration and information technology. The infrastructure of the Pentecost University College was provided by the CoP. It also has a theological seminary which trains its ministers. Full-time ministers spend at least one academic year, training at the Pentecost Theological Seminary, and one other year by extension. Some continue to bachelor's-degree level, others to master's level and still others go as far as to doctoral level.

Finance

On finance, it is the policy of the CoP to be self-supporting. The main sources of income are tithes and offerings contributed willingly by the members. The church believes that God will meet the church's financial needs in season and out of season. From this viewpoint, the church uses whatever local resources are available for its projects. Church members have been supporting the church financially by faithfully paying their tithes and giving generously in several areas, including the putting up of church buildings, mission houses, clinics, school building, and purchasing of vehicles and evangelism equipment.

In terms of structure, there is a finance board which administers the central fund of the church. Among other things the board prepares and submits annual budget and financial reports to the General Council through the Executive Council. Furthermore, it also ensures that an effective audit system is maintained at the head office and other branch offices of the church and submits its annual financial reports to external auditors before the General Council meetings. There is also an auditing, monitoring and evaluation department which conducts an annual full-scale auditing, monitoring and evaluation of church finances, projects and activities which go on within the year. The department also audits pastors who go on transfer or retirement. The focus for the exercise is to check the extent of compliance with the church's guidelines and financial policies and ascertain whether the church's funds have been judiciously applied. The department reports to the chairman of the church, who together with the Executive Council will discipline people who flout the policies. This instils discipline and order in the church, and gives church members the assurance that the money given to the church is used for the right purposes and encourages members to give more.

Social services

Right from the beginning, McKeown wanted the church to be indigenous with Ghanaian culture, ministry and finance. He realised that

it would be difficult to grow an 'English oak' in Ghana. A local 'species', at home in its culture, should grow, reproduce and spread: a church with foreign roots was more likely to struggle.

(Leonard 1989, 69)

His aim was to sow what he called the 'local species' to produce an indigenous church. To achieve this goal of indigenisation, McKeown's philosophy was 'just to evangelize' (Debrunner 1967, 325) and make the people know God. He said, 'once we have a strong church of people who really know Jesus and the Holy Spirit, then everything else will follow' (Leonard 1989, 72). The implication of this was that he was not going to concern himself and the church with the provision of social services. The people who knew God were going to provide finance, build schools, hospitals and serve their nation in diverse ways. On the face value, this was quite strange. A church is supposed not only to serve the spiritual needs of people, but also attend to their social needs. Nevertheless, the philosophy behind McKeown's policy was that he could not offer the people what he did not have. At the time, he did not have money. He would give them what he had. Once he got the right people, they would serve their own people with other needs. History was to judge him.

In 1982, during the chairmanship of Safo, the church set up a department, called Pentecost Social Services (PENTSOS). Its vision was to serve the spiritual and physical needs of people through a holistic approach to development on a sustainable basis. PENTSOS has been progressive in its vision. The chairman of the church reported in the 2018 State of Church Address that by the close of December 2017, the church had eight health institutions, one hospital and seven clinics. The total outpatients' department attendance in the church's eight health institutions in 2017 alone was 194,995. Altogether, a total of 17,682 admissions and 4,987 deliveries were recorded during 2017. The church currently runs 84 basic schools, three vocational schools, two senior high schools and a university college. The head office and the areas continue to sponsor needy student members at the tertiary level under the Pentecost Educational Scholarship Scheme. The church also operates a credit union called Pentecost Co-operative Mutual Support and Social Service Society Ltd (PENCO). The objective of these microcredit schemes is to provide financial empowerment to people to operate viable and productive businesses. A total of 40 credit unions which operated in 34 church areas were supervised by PENCO Apex in 2017.

Some of the church's social activities are done in collaboration with various institutions. One such institution is the Widows Ministry at Bolgatanga; a ministry which seeks to assist widows to get petty jobs to enhance their livelihood in the less endowed areas in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Others include a mental health authority, orphanages such as Countryside Children Welfare Home, Ghana Health Foundation and Physically Challenged Action Foundation, Royal Sparrows Ministry of Blind People and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Chaplaincy Council. The humanitarian interventions done by the church (also by the districts and areas) include donations to hospitals, prisons, provision of relief items to individuals affected by natural disasters, registering the aged and other needy people on the National Health Insurance Scheme. Furthermore, the church runs a convention centre called Pentecost Convention Centre, which is opened to the public for its usage.

In 2017, a total of 75,163 guests made up of churches, Christian organisations, private organisations, government agencies, banks, and individuals lodged at the centre during various programmes. Out of the 75,163 guests, the church's programmes comprised 50.1 per cent while the others comprised 49.9 per cent.

Fellowships/fraternities/para-church organisations

The CoP shares fellowship and support the activities of para-church organisations both within and outside the country. The church has maintained the status as the highest financial contributor to the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation, Bible Society of Ghana and the Ghana Evangelism Committee (GEC) for several years (Onyinah 2018). Many other para-church, state and some non-governmental organisations also receive appreciable financial and logistical support from the church. These include the Scripture Union (SU) and Child Evangelism Fellowship. Other organisations include Ghana Prisons Service Chaplaincy Unit, African Forum on Religion and Government, Theovision International, Gideon International, African Enterprise, and Reach the People Ministries. Others include the Lausanne Movement, Pentecostal World Fellowship and Bible League.

Public roles

The impact of the CoP in the socioeconomic development of the nation can also be felt in other areas as follows: The church, through its social services outfit provides employment for many people to complement government's efforts. The church has five ministers serving commendably well in the Ghana armed forces and the prisons service. The church has also put up a police barracks for the government. The church, on its own, and through its active involvement in the activities of institutions, such as Ghana National Peace Council, GEC, GPCC and its collaboration with the Christian Council of Ghana plays a significant role in seeking the peace and stability of the nation. This is done through advocacy, prayers and the provision of godly counsel to the members and others whenever called upon or the need arises. For example, the church in Ghana has been involved in HIV and AIDS education through its collaborative efforts with the Ghana AIDS Commission. Others include educating people on succession and drafting of wills. In many cases, widows have been robbed of or denied their inheritance in society due to lack of knowledge.

The government in Ghana as well as some civil society organisations have been tapping the potentials of some members and put them in places of important leadership positions such as Bank of Ghana, the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC) and large state publications. For example, Mrs Angela Peasah served meritoriously for two terms on the PIAC; this is the committee that regulates the use of proceeds from Ghana's petroleum revenues.

Elder Professor Kwame Boasiako Omane-Antwi, current Vice Rector of the Pentecost University College (PUC) was appointed as Board Chairman of the New Times Corporation. His two-year tenure saw the turning around of the fortunes of the newspaper. At the end of his term, he was personally invited by the President, John Dramani Mahama to be congratulated and asked to be appointed to the largest state publication the *Daily Graphic*, a position he still occupies.

The chieftaincy institution is still the custodian of Ghanaian cultures. The church occasionally organises conferences for Christian royals, chiefs and queens, with the aim to influence the traditional worldview of the chieftaincy institution to do away with archaic practices, get involved in the development of their communities and ultimately make Christ the Lord over their respective rulership. Similarly, periodic conferences are organised for Christian politicians and chief executives with the aim to help them put in place good and godly governance practices and administration.

The Youth Christian Political chamber has been established to train young people who are interested in politics to get into it with the motive to serve the Lord and the nation with integrity. They are encouraged to join any political party of their interest and impact them. Taking into consideration the best practices of the developments within the CoP, the government of Ghana has begun a dialogue with some selected churches as a pilot to begin partnership with churches under the government's 'One District One Factory' initiative. This initiative is a government programme aimed at establishing at least one medium-to-large-scale factory in each of the 216 administrative districts in the country. These medium-to-large-scale enterprises are expected to have the potential to significantly enhance the economies of the districts including creation of jobs, stable income for the residents and improved livelihoods.

Social needs in the external branches

On the international level, the church responds to the social needs of the people. Both van Dijk and Ter Haar rightly observe that members automatically become part of 'a supportive socio-religious network', which helps them to define their roles in their various respective societies (Ter Haar 1995, 17; van Dijk 1992, 1–25). The meeting places become places of providing information on some issues such as jobs and accommodation. Professionals among members, including council workers, educationists, teachers and solicitors, become consultants in their areas of speciality and render services to their clients on voluntary basis. For example, those without resident permits are advised to apply for permits or go home rather than to live in a country without legal documents. Thus, here the church provides conditions for migrants of insecure states, often with no jobs, no houses, no money and no legal documents to find their right places in society.

Concern for the social needs of the members is also apparent, in seeking the general welfare of the members, such as in marriages and funerals. Those whose

spouses are not with them are counselled. In many instances the conditions that brought such immigrants, did not permit them to bring their dependants. Most marriages have broken down because of the long separations of spouses in search of greener pastures. For those who want to get married, the church helps them through its international network. In line with the various Ghanaian cultures, the church officers in Ghana as well as those abroad make investigations into the prospective spouse. The purpose is to find out and ensure that the potential spouse is not a noted criminal, not given to quarrelling, and is hard working with good morals and reputation. After both parties are satisfied, they communicate to each other, and then those at home eventually help to perform the customary rites. Thus, here the church takes over the role of the traditional *abusua* (family). By these services, the church creates conditions which help the immigrants to get well established in their family lives, and by so doing help to arrest unforeseeable marital problems and their repercussions, including separation and divorce.

Regarding funerals, donations are collected for the bereaved. Thus, here the church helps to alleviate the possibility of incurring debt, pressure and 'guilt and shame' from its members. For Ghanaians, funerals are very important. Although the church discourages expensive funerals, immigrants may fly home for the funerals of their parents, uncles, nephews or siblings and thus incur debt. Those who fail to go usually send money for this purpose. Whether a bereaved person is able to attend a funeral at home or not, the church allows another funeral to be celebrated abroad. Donations are made to the individuals concerned towards their funeral expenses.

The church's emphasis on the concept of holiness (Ter Haar 1998, 225), which may be considered by some as fundamentalism (Hollenweger 1972, 50–52), helps to protect vulnerable immigrants from falling victim to social problems. Members are encouraged not to be addicted to smoking, alcohol or drugs. Instead their bodies should be given to the Holy Spirit as the Temple of God. Accordingly, the church prevents its members from falling victim to crimes, such as drug abuse, drug trafficking, excessive use of alcohol and other petty crimes.

The missionaries provide counselling for members especially in areas of marital problems, employment, need for legal papers, finance and dreams believed to have been influenced by demons. That some of these counselling sessions have been very beneficial and helpful to the immigrants is indicated in the ways and manners in which many people seek the attention of pastors.

Conclusion

The emergence, growth and development of the CoP in Ghana and elsewhere is a reminiscence of a new era of African Christianity, where African Initiated Churches contribute to national development through their self-supporting efforts. Although much had been said about this aspect of the AICs, this chapter has shown that some meaningful contributions are being made to enhance not

only the spiritual needs of the people but holistic aspects of both personal and societal development including empowerment, good governance, poverty alleviation and accountability. The overseas churches have been shown to help to create the necessary conditions for their members to acquire a sustainable position in the various societies where they find themselves, assisting their social responsibilities and by that, link them to families at home as well as satisfying their spiritual needs. This is part of what the power of Pentecost has done on the soil of Africa and all over the world.

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