



CHRISTIANITY'S ENCOUNTER WITH GHANAIAN INDIGENOUS RELIGIOUS COSMOLOGIES

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Abstract

The relationship between Christianity and indigenous religious cosmologies in Ghana during the pre-colonial missionary days was said to "divergent." However, this essay argues that there were many points of convergence between the two religious worldviews. The relationship between Christianity and the indigenous religious cosmologies was a major determining factor on the success or failure of the early mission's efforts, and it is still a significant factor for Christian churches today. Consequently, the success of contemporary neo-Pentecostals depends upon the ability of the groups to contextualise their beliefs and praxis within indigenous society.

Keywords: traditional religions, neo-Pentecostals, African Pentecostalism, mission.

Early Missions to Ghana and Contributions to National Development

Roman Catholic Franciscan Friars who came with the Portuguese traders as chaplains were the first missionaries to arrive on the coast of West Africa. Initially, the focus of their mission was to provide pastoral care to the traders and not to Africans. As such, there was no notable presence of Christian missionaries on the coasts of West Africa until about 1828. The first missionaries to arrive in Ghana

(formerly the Gold Coast) came from the Basel Mission in 1828 and they were based at the Akwapim ridge of the Eastern Region. Physical traces of their presence in the area are characterised by the stone buildings, stone wells, and tombs of those who died on the mission field due to tropical diseases. In 1835, Wesleyan missionaries arrived and established their base at Cape Coast. They were soon followed by the German Bremen Society in 1847 who settled in the Trans-Volta area. In 1881, 1898, and 1906 the Catholic missionaries, the African Methodist-Episcopal Zion missionaries and the Anglican missionaries arrived respectively.¹

One important factor that helped the growth and expansion of the missions' activities was the contribution they made to national development. Socio-economic development formed a significant part of their mission strategy.² The early missionaries to Ghana made several contributions to national development. Among these were the setting up of colleges and schools, some of which remain the best schools in the country. These include teacher training colleges such as the Presbyterian Training College established in 1848 in Akropong (the oldest college in West Africa apart from the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone); the Wesley Training College in Kumasi; Adisadel College; and a number of secondary schools such as Mfanstipim Senior High School, Presbyterian Boys Senior High School, Holy Child Senior High School, and Aburi Girls Senior High School.³ Similarly, hospitals were built, such as the Agogo Hospital by the Presbyterians and St Joseph's Hospital by the Catholics in Koforidua. The missionaries also developed the reading and writing of the indigenous vernacular languages.⁴ Those missionaries set a precedent with their national development agenda that most of the older churches have continued to follow; and, lately, the neo-Pentecostal churches are following suit with the building of schools, universities, hospitals and student hostels.⁵ Despite the successes highlighted as the missionaries' major contributions and legacy to the nation's development, there were also some failures.

¹ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*. Studies in African Pentecostal Christianity 1. Accra, Ghana: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001, 16.

² Pascal Fossouo, "Missionary Challenges Faced by the First African Church Leaders in Cameroon and in Ghana," *Exchange* 37 (2008): 265-266.

³ Florence Mable Bourret, *Ghana: The Road to Independence, 1919-1957* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), 133.

⁴ Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960: Younger Church in a Changing Society* (Accra: Ghana University Press 1966), 271.

⁵ Examples of churches with such initiatives include: The Royalhouse Chapel International; International Central Gospel Church; Lighthouse Chapel International; Action Chapel International; Perez Chapel International.

Attitude towards Akan Cosmology

The main area of perceived failure of the missionaries' activities among the Akans was their reluctance and inability to contextualise the message of Christianity. In an argument explaining why Akans perceived Christianity as a foreign religion, Kofi Busia noted that:

Those who have been responsible for the propagation of the Christian gospel in other lands and cultures have not shown sufficient awareness of the need for an encounter between the Christian religion and the cosmology of the people alongside European cultures and traditions.⁶

In this sense, they built Christian congregations that were in opposition to the indigenous way of life. In a much stronger critique, Kofi Asare Opoku states that, 'the church in Africa [...] was part of the cultural invasion of Europe which did not have much regard for the dignity of African culture and which therefore adopted a disdainful and condemnatory attitude to things African [...].'⁷

Contrary to Opoku's critique, there seems to be no evidence to suggest this was a *deliberate* attempt to erase the cultures of the people. It appears to me that what happened was a clash of civilisations – over and against a clash of cosmologies – where the missionaries had the upper hand because of political and imperial authority. Christian groups, even today, are often suspected of trying to erase indigenous cultures. Some strands of Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana are often accused of this.⁸ However, it was the processes by which the missionaries tried to propagate the gospel and build Christian communities in Ghana that gave rise to these allegations. For instance, they built *salems* (exclusive Christian communities) with the intention of separating converts to Christianity from the rest of the communities. This caused some locals to refer to Christianity as the 'white man's (*sic*) religion' and associated it with what they thought was a superior culture. Of course, Europe's history of slavery and imperialism did not help. In many cases, the social development work of the missionaries made Christianity unattractive even after the missionaries were long gone because it was thought to replace of slavery and because of this,

some have considered the Western missionary enterprise an offence to African society.⁹ To many, Christianity became synonymous with civilisation, and was therefore not accepted for its religious value but rather as a religion that offered material blessings.

Smith observes that the three factors of (1) literacy, (2) the ability of the European to control his (*sic*) environment and (3) the ability to evolve a material culture that seemed superior were bound together with the white man's worship of Christ, and that to the African, they provided a strong motive for announcing oneself as a baptismal candidate.¹⁰ This intriguing observation by Smith of the materialistic nature of European Christianity happens to be the same criticism levelled against neo-Pentecostal churches today. These are today criticised for being more concerned with the existential needs of their members. The difference, however, is that many of these neo-Pentecostal churches place their belief within the indigenous cosmology that tends to address the needs of the whole person and provides answers to the anxieties of their members. The neo-Pentecostal church 'recognises malevolent spirit forces, while at the same time proclaims the supremacy of the All-powerful Benevolent Christ [...] setting the whole cosmic struggle in the context of the supremacy of Christ. This approach would have affected the worldview of the Akan from the centre, thereby influencing his entire religious outlook.'¹¹

The missionaries' attitudes towards Akan cosmology significantly hampered and undermined their evangelistic efforts. These attitudes manifested themselves in many ways; for instance, they questioned the validity of Akan cosmology and of the cosmic powers and the relationship between Christianity and that cosmology. Instead of connecting Christianity with this indigenous cosmology (which many indigenes could identify with) they were suspicious and sometimes outright negative. As a result, they produced Christians who would attend a mass or church service in the morning and go to *tigare* in the evening; this created a double allegiance and later led to accusations of syncretism.¹² The denial of the

⁶ Kofi Abrefa Busia, "Has the Christian Faith Been Adequately Represented?" *International Review of Missions* 50, (1961): 86-89.

⁷ Kofi Asare Opoku, "The Baobab Tree of Truth: Reflections on Religious Pluralism in Africa" World Council of Churches, wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd34-08.html.

⁸ Birgitte Meyer, "Make a Complete Break with the Past: Memory and Postcolonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse." *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28:13 (1998): 317.

⁹ Fossouo, 'Missionary Challenges,' 264.

¹⁰ Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 101.

¹¹ Larbi, *Ghanaian Pentecostalism*, p. 29.

¹² *Tigare* is considered one of the powerful deities in the southern part of Ghana. It is a deity known to originate from the northern regions of the country. Southerners generally consider these deities from the north as more powerful. The northern regions of Ghana have gained notoriety in the country as being home to some of the powerful deities.

existence of spiritual forces such as witchcraft, sorcery, amulets, charms and other *abosom*, (god), contravened the beliefs of the indigenous religions. Because Christianity failed to acknowledge the indigenous cosmology of the Akan, there was a basis for people to reject the Christian message while publicly claiming allegiance to the Christian God for other reasons. According to Asamoah:

"[...] anybody who knows African Christians intimately will know that no amount of denial on the part of the church will expel belief in supernatural powers from the minds of the Christian, and he becomes a hypocrite who in official church circles pretends to give the impression that he does not believe in these things, while in his own private life he resorts to practices which are the results of such beliefs."

Both African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal/neo-Pentecostal churches quite unconsciously operate within the framework of the reality and impact of spirit forces on humans. However, neo-Pentecostals consider all spirit forces within the indigenous religions as malevolent even though they also often resort to the indigenous religious practitioners for spiritual help. Some neo-Pentecostal pastors are reported to visit indigenous religious practitioners for spiritual powers to enable them to function effectively in their supernatural gifts.¹³ Despite the continuity of some aspects of indigenous religions in neo-Pentecostal churches, some neo-Pentecostal Christians still consult indigenous religious practitioners. This, in my opinion, demonstrates how Pentecostalism and indigenous religions complement each other in many ways even though there are often clashes between them resulting from their differences in praxis. Of course, most neo-Pentecostal churches and their leaders argue that their holistic gospel leaves little to no room for their members to consult the agencies of the indigenous religions for solutions to life's problems.¹⁴ However, it is evident that some of their members do actually visit traditional religious shrines – which makes one to wonder how much neo-Pentecostal preachers are placing the cosmic struggle under the supremacy of Christ instead of considering indigenous religions as demonic only to realise that their members patronise these practitioners. These double allegiances – one to Christianity and the other to

traditional religions – will continue to be a challenge. The gospel of neo-Pentecostals involves substantially presenting a Christian God who is interested in the total affairs of all those who worship him, hoping to maintain relevance to indigenous religious adherents. It will be interesting in years to come to see how neo-Pentecostal churches will negotiate this challenge.

Socio-economic Development among Neo-Pentecostals and Indigenous Religions

The early Christian missionaries to the Gold Coast made several contributions to national development and churches within the various strands of Christianity have continued in these efforts. Kwame Bediako is of the view that, 'The distinction between the historical churches, of missionary origin, and the independent or African instituted churches, have become less meaningful as features which were once thought to be characteristic of the latter have been found to be shared also by the former.'¹⁵ Ogbu Kalu adds, "Pentecostals believe that Jesus has bequeathed enormous power to the body of Christ and they are meant to re-establish the divine claim in every community and entire nations, not only through prayer but also by translating that power to meet people's physical needs."¹⁶ As such, since the late 1990s, neo-Pentecostals in Ghana have developed an emphasis on socio-economic development. There have been many contributions: The Light House Chapel, Perez Chapel (formerly Word Miracle Church), Action Chapel International, and the Church of Pentecost. Some have built universities, while others have built hospitals, schools, drug rehabilitation centres, professional and executive training centres, and many other social organisations. Notable among these initiatives is the Winners' Forum, a trade fair that was initiated in 1996 by the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC). The aim of the fair was to encourage entrepreneurship among the members of the church and Christians generally. Besides the forum, the ICGC set up a Central University College in 1997 which only received its Presidential Charter as a fully-fledged liberal arts university in March 2016, offering courses from certificate to doctoral level.¹⁷ In addition to these examples of development initiatives, the Royalhouse Chapel International set

¹³ Asamoah, E. A. "The Christian Church and African Heritage," *International Review of Mission* 44, no. 175 (1955), 101.

¹⁴ Modern Ghana, Online News, 14 May 2010, 'Pastor in Juju Scandal' <http://www.modernghana.com/newstthread/162109/1/117853>.

¹⁵ An interview between this writer and Rev. Derek Amanor, Royalhouse Chapel International in Accra, Ghana.

¹⁶ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 66.

¹⁷ Ogbu Kalu, 'The Third Responses: Pentecostalism and the Reconstruction of Christian Experiences in Africa, 1970-1995', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 7, no.1 (1998), 14.

up The Compassion Ministry in the year 2000. The main focus of the ministry has been the alleviation of poverty and pain of individuals in underprivileged communities, and help for those who have suffered natural disasters and tragedies, through their Outreach for Comfort and Rescue to the Needy Ministries.¹⁸ Some churches have also set up various philanthropic initiatives towards reintegrating the homeless and street children into their communities, providing spiritual support and rehabilitation for drug addicts and commercial sex workers, supporting single parents with developing employability skills, and supporting widows, widowers and the aged by providing them with financial and material support.¹⁹ Some of these churches have set up hospitals and prison-outreach ministries, with members visiting to donate items and fete with whoever is inside at times like Easter and Christmas. There have been instances where some of the leaders of these churches have celebrated personal milestones of their lives with inmates of prisons, at orphanages, witch camps and at disaster relief centres.²⁰ Some have even gone to the extent of refurbishing offices of state organisations, such as the police, prisons and doctors' and nurses' residences as a way of motivating these public servants to continue with their services to those deprived communities.²¹ Such acts complement the work of the state in reducing poverty and bringing relief to those in need.

These examples make it clear that the contributions of these churches to socio-economic development represent a shift from being organisations led by religious entrepreneurs milking their followers in order to enrich themselves to actually adopting a strategy that combines spiritual and scripturally-based beliefs, praxis, and initiatives to assist their members facing socio-economic deprivation.²² These churches have simply followed in the

footsteps of the older mainline churches and the early missionaries. This prompted Ogbu Kalu to note that this lack of understanding by some Western scholars is the source of agitation for a type of Christianity that fits into the African religious worldview, and this, he adds, is partly responsible for clearing the grounds for the establishment of the Pentecostal movement and subsequently neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa.²³ To the contrary, indigenous religion practitioners have, over the years, not established many socio-economic development initiatives, apart from their apprenticeships to train younger priests, such as exist at the Akonnedi Shrine in Larteh-Akwapim; Ataa Ahia Shrine in Bubuashie in Accra; and the Obuotabiri Shrine in Koforidua. Thus, it appears to me that the main difference between indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana so far has been their leaders' orientation towards socio-economic development. That said, I have to acknowledge that we are seeing changes as some of the leaders in indigenous religions, like Nana Kwaku Bonsam, are showing a change of heart. Quite a few of indigenous religious practitioners have claimed to provide scholarships for needy children in their communities.²⁴ Some have spoken of development plans to build primary and secondary schools to augment the efforts of the government for accessible education for all. Bonsam has stated that he has already built one primary school and handed it over to the government for management. Among other community-based initiatives, he founded a football team called Nananom Eleven Football Club to develop talent among young people. In his defence, Bonsam added, 'I have also built roads, tarred them and put streetlights on them. I would do more when I become MP as I already have my money and cannot steal the people's money. My gods would even kill me if I did that.'²⁵ This favourable orientation towards socio-economic development among some of these followers of

¹⁸ "Brief on Social Interventions of the International Central Gospel Church",

<http://www.centralgospel.com/?id=10433&PHPSESSID=be43d267964501dfef6d88159a0d54e3>.

¹⁹ A link on the homepage of the church's website. http://www.royalhousechapel.org/Christian_Leadership_College.aspx.

²⁰ Sam Korankye Ankrāh, *The Rising of the Sun: Shining from Obscurity*. (Accra: Royalhouse Chapel International, 2010), 121-133.

²¹ 'Bishop Korankye-Ankrāh celebrates 50th birthday with prisoners', Ghana News Agency, 26 February 2010, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=177542>.

²² A news and events item on the church website at

http://www.royalhousechapel.org/Events/Rev_Sam_Korankye_Ankrāh_fetes_Nsawam_Prison_Inmates.aspx.

²³ In his book, *Ghana's New Christianity*, Paul Gifford infers that some neo-Pentecostal pastors in Ghana are in the ministry to fleece the flock and enrich themselves. See Gifford, Paul. *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

²⁴ Ogbu U. Kalu "Yabbing the Pentecostals: Paul Gifford's Image of Ghana's New Christianity", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 15, No. 1 (2005): 3-15.

²⁵ Nana Kwaku Bonsam, also known in private life as Steven Kwaku Osei Mensah, was raised as an Adventist who attended the Seventh Day Adventist Church very regularly. See list of functions and areas of expertise at <http://www.kwakubonsam.com/service.php>. Nana Kwaku Bonsam attempted to run for the parliamentary seat of the Offinso North Constituency in the Ashanti region in 2012 and in 2016. Both these attempts did not materialise. See Jed Lipinski, 'The Devil is Running for a Seat in Parliament', *The New York Times*, 15 November 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/17/nyregion/the-devil-is-running-for-a-seat-in-parliament.html?_r=0.

traditional religions connects with the consciousness of the influence of the spiritual. Bonsam believes the awareness of the people to the spiritual and the continuing relationship between humans and the spirit-world can be greatly harnessed to inculcate discipline for development and to eradicate corruption – the bane of Africa’s development. This is the same line of thought held by the neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana.

Creating a New Neo-Pentecostals Identity in Ghana

Many African scholars, such as Afe Adogame, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Cephas Omenyo, Abamfo Atiemo, Ogbu Kalu and Emmanuel Larbi have observed over time that the indigenous religions have influenced the organisation, beliefs, and praxis of neo-Pentecostal churches. Although most Pentecostals would vehemently deny it, a great deal of neo-Pentecostal ecclesiology in Ghana is shaped as a direct result of the influence of indigenous communities that create their social context. While Pentecostals branded indigenous religious traditions, as doorways to demonic oppression, neo-Pentecostals seem to be reclaiming some of those traditions for themselves.²⁶ Indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostalism are not mutually exclusive of each other. Abraham Akrong commends neo-Pentecostals in their work in helping to redefine African Christianity in African culture, with all the peculiar concerns defined by the indigenous religions.²⁷ Ambivalent relationships exist between indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostals, for ‘Africans are religious and spiritual, almost unable to explain life without reference to religion and the spirit world.’²⁸ This can be explored further by examining how both indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostals contest for space by the use of media and other forms of communication.

Contesting for Space: Use of Mass Media and Communication Platforms

The continuous and ubiquitous growth of neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana has given church leaders who want to have a presence in the

religious marketplace few options to be seen and heard. It is a difficult thing to say of religion, and particularly of Christianity, but great competition exists among the various churches for space and recognition in Ghana. According to David Maxwell, ‘what is new about African Pentecostalism is its recent growth, enormous vitality, and its appropriation of the electronic media to the point that this has become part of Pentecostal self-definition.’²⁹ To add to Maxwell’s observation, electronic media has become a tool for neo-Pentecostal churches to create a new identity for themselves that blurs any influences from indigenous religions on their history, ethos, beliefs and praxis. The media is used as an ‘icon of modernity’ which the indigenous religions have not as yet fully taken advantage of, although a few indigenous practitioners have a media presence and virtual following.³⁰ It has become a contested space for prominence by a younger generation of leaders in some of the neo-Pentecostal churches alongside the established status of leaders such as Nicholas Duncan-Williams, Mensa Otabil, Gordon Kisseih, Charles Agyin-Asare, Dag Heward-Mills, and Sam Korankye Ankrah. Some of the younger generation of leaders of neo-Pentecostal churches have used the media to settle scores and quarrels about the authenticity of the source of their spiritual powers. The younger generation seems to be obsessed with creating an identity of superiority over the previous generation in order to create space for themselves in the religious arena, basically because there is saturation. Due to this saturation, they have often turned on one another to eliminate competitors and to remain relevant. Public feuds have continued, as some clergy, claiming others are fake and do not come from God, call for a contest to prove superiority in supernatural gifts creating more uneasiness within the church body by questioning the ability to work miracles purported to come from God.³¹ The contests not only occur within the churches. On numerous occasions they have occurred with practitioners of the indigenous religions too – calling for the re-enactment of the biblical contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.³² Such contexts seem to be embedded within the Pentecostal self-understanding; demonstrating the power of the Spirit is proof of authentic

²⁶ Daily Guide, 16 March 2011, ‘Nana Kwaku Bomsam to run for Member of Parliament’, <http://www.ghanatoghana.com/Ghanahomepage/nana-kwaku-bomsam-run-member-parliament>.

²⁷ Abamfo Atiemo, ‘Deliverance in the Charismatic Churches in Ghana’, *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 4, (1994 -95): 43.

²⁸ Abraham Akrong, ‘Salvation in African Christianity,’ *Legon Journal of the Humanities* XII, (1999-2001): 8-10.

²⁹ John S. Pobee, *West Africa: Christ Would Be an African Too* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996),10.

³⁰ David Maxwell, editorial, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3 (1998): 255.

³¹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, ‘Anointing through the Screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana,’ *Studies in World Christianity* 11, no. 1 (2005): 13.

³² A spat between Bishop Daniel Obinim and Rev Sam Korankye Ankrah and the eventual intervention of the Ghana Pentecostal Council. See <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/religion/Obinim-accuses-Sam-Korankye-Ankrah-of-fornication-421623> and <http://citifmonline.com/2016/03/08/gpcc-chides-charlatan-obinim-for-insulting-korankye-ankrah/>.

ministry, the gospel and the Christian God.³³ The response of indigenous religions has also been to step up to these contests to prove their authenticity as worshipping the Supreme Being who, they argue, is the same as the Christian God.

Stepping out of the Shadows: Using Media to Create a New Identity

In the 1990s, after the liberalisation of the airwaves by the government, several television stations and FM radio stations were opened. Some neo-Pentecostal churches, such as Christian Action Faith Ministry International, International Central Gospel Church, Lighthouse Church International and Word Miracle Church, quickly took advantage of the situation and registered their presence on the airwaves to feature their own programmes. Their advertisements for these programmes featured a presentation of their worship services that promised something new and spectacular; “your impossibilities shall be turned into possibilities, your lack shall turn into abundance, and your failures shall be transformed into successes.”³⁴ This continues to be their unique selling point and has helped most of these neo-Pentecostal churches to rise to prominence in Ghana. Harvey Cox argues that indigenous churches like neo-Pentecostals in Ghana “help people to reclaim ancient spiritual resources that seemed lost [and] are growing because they help people to apply those resources in a new and bewildering context.”³⁵ Such churches give members ‘confidence that with the aid of the Holy Spirit and prayer they can overcome all the vicissitudes of life’.³⁶ This helping people apply old spiritual resources in their Christian life has for a long time helped neo-Pentecostals to stay relevant in the society. These churches contextualise Christianity by making it look like a product of their members’ cultures and this enhances their acceptance.³⁷

It is worth noting that the way neo-Pentecostals use the media resonates with the “primary task of the new movements; to advertise God’s new salvific

plan in Christ through the power of the Spirit.”³⁸ Leaders are often presented as icons or exemplars of the message of wellbeing that they carry. The repeated airing of their programmes on television and radio turns them into ‘religious superstars’ as Gifford has referred to them.³⁹ The content of these television and radio programmes usually includes personal testimonies of the preachers portraying themselves as having been redeemed by God from poverty, moral failure, and captivity by the devil. The programmes are a way of giving the audience opportunities to deal with evil in their lives to demonstrate the superior power of God in overcoming the negative influences of Satan and evil spirits.⁴⁰

However, this appropriation of the media is also not entirely new. Only in the sense that it is a modern medium of communication that indigenous religions have not fully and widely utilised could one say that it is new. Asamoah-Gyadu observes that “what we see in the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches today are contemporary Christian appropriations of what has always been a crucial part of indigenous religions in Africa.”⁴¹ There was, for example, a radio and TV broadcast in the late 1980s to 1990s by the Afrikania Mission led by Osofo Okomfo Kwabena Damoah, which aired every Wednesday evening and ceased a couple of years after the demise of its founder and charismatic leader. Therefore, the domination of the airwaves by these neo-Pentecostal churches does not – in its entirety – represent a break in the influence of traditional religions on neo-Pentecostal churches. It is their message and promise to provide their followers with the supernatural weapons they need to confront the forces of evil as they manifest themselves in disease and discord that makes the difference.⁴²

³³ The biblical narrative of a contest between Elijah and the Prophets of Baal in a contest to prove whose object of worship is superior recorded in 1 Kings 18.

³⁴ Frank D. Macchia, “Pentecost as the Power of the Cross: The Witness of Seymour and Durham,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, 30 (2008), 3.

³⁵ Asamoah-Gyadu, “Anointing through the Screen,” 11. Other promises include, “your life will never be the same,” “come and receive your breakthrough,” “God will change your destiny,” and “the Spirit will meet you at the point of your need.”

³⁶ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven* (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1995), 258-259.

³⁷ Cephas Omenyo, “Charismatic Churches in Ghana and Contextualisation,” *Exchange* 31, (2002), 252-277.

³⁸ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 150.

³⁹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Of Faith and Visual Alertness: The Message of ‘Mediatized’ Religion in an African Pentecostal Context,” *Material Religion* 1, no. 3 (2005): 343.

⁴⁰ Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 32.

⁴¹ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Of Faith and Visual Alertness: The Message of “Mediatized” Religion in an African Pentecostal Context,” 351.

⁴² Asamoah-Gyadu, “Of Faith”, 351.

Indigenous Religious Response to Neo-Pentecostals' Use of Media

Bonsam has to some extent become the new public face of the mainstream indigenous religions in Ghana, making use of modern media technology to reach out to the wider public to extol the virtues of the indigenous religions. He has followed in the footsteps of Okomfo Kwabena Damoah. But, unlike Damoah, Bonsam remains conventional in his understanding and expression of the indigenous religion. His regular pay-per-view use of the media poses a 'pound for pound' challenge to neo-Pentecostals who have dominated the airwaves after the death of Damoah. Overall, indigenous religions' use of the media follows a pattern already used by neo-Pentecostals. Bonsam, like many other indigenous religious practitioners often narrates his encounters with his god, *Kofio Kofi*, in a very succinct but subtle manner, stating that his charge from the *nananom* (ancestors) is to help humanity. He has stunned viewers and listeners by insisting they offer Christian prayers before the start of interviews and proceedings at functions where he is invited. He has managed to create an image for himself through the media which De Witte observes is usual in the neo-Pentecostal churches.⁴³ Again, like other leaders within the neo-Pentecostal churches, he has a fully functional website.⁴⁴ To promote his famous god, whom he claims provides help to people from diverse backgrounds (including pastors), Bonsam is presented as the perfect image of wellbeing. Bonsam features videos and pictures of himself divining, dancing or being possessed and providing solutions to people's problems.⁴⁵ Generally, most of the stories presented in these pictures and videos depict the priest intervening with incantations to cast out malevolent spirits and giving *akwankyerε* (prophetic spiritual direction) free people to enjoy God's grace and material prosperity. Bonsam also maintains international connections just like neo-Pentecostal religious leaders. He pays frequent visits to Europe, although he has not yet established a shrine on the continent. He is aware that for many Ghanaians, if 'a pastor belongs to an international network, it

legitimizes the gospel that he or she advocates.⁴⁶ He therefore uses his trips abroad as a medium to obtain recognition to legitimise what he does. Videos of his events and functions are then carefully edited, with special sound effects with Akan traditional music for appeal, and posted on YouTube.

Bonsam and other indigenous religious practitioners use mass media to espouse the virtues of indigenous religions and to convey that they are not evil as some Christians have made them to be. They also argue that intentions of god and the ancestors are to provide the weaponry needed to defeat evil, witchcraft, and any negative forces that create discord and disharmony with the cosmos. In an interview with an Accra-based newspaper, *The Daily Guide*, Bonsam tried to differentiate the position of the Creator and his famous god, *Kofio Kofi*. He claimed, "I am a Christian and cannot challenge the Almighty God. I am called Steven Osei Mensah. I give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."⁴⁷ In effect, Bonsam identifies with some aspects of Christianity. He is, however, very emphatic about the role of other 'gods' like *Kofio Kofi* who serve as mediums of the Supreme Being to humankind. In a YouTube video at a divination function in Amsterdam he is seen praying in Jesus' name before beginning his activities.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The awareness of the Supreme Being (God) was part of the cosmology of the indigenous Ghanaian peoples long before the arrival of the missionaries. Despite the early missionaries' efforts, the indigenous Ghanaians still wanted to be identified as Christians who sympathised with the indigenous religions. This was largely because the missionaries failed to contextualise the gospel in ways that recognised the role of indigenous religions. As a result, many people went to the church during the day and visited the traditional shrine at night. The missionaries of old were accused of imposing their European understanding of Christianity on the Ghanaians while totally ignoring the powerful role

⁴³ The Afrikania Mission "a neo-traditional movement" sought to reform and 'update African traditional religion, and to promote nationalism and Pan-Africanism' Peter B. Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁴ Marleen De Witte, "Altar Media's Living Word: Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 2 (2003), 180.

⁴⁵ The website of Nana Kwaku Bonsam Shrine: www.nanakwakubonsam.com.

⁴⁶ Video of Nana Kwaku Bonsam at a function: <http://www.kwakubonsam.com/video1.aspx>.

⁴⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, "Of Faith", 347

⁴⁸ The Daily Guide, "Nana Kwaku Bonsam declares, 'I am a Christian.'" <http://news.myjoyonline.com/news/200805/16604.asp>

⁴⁹ A YouTube video of a divination function in Amsterdam where Nana Kwaku Bonsam is seen chanting 'Praise the Lord', a popular Christian chant among neo-Pentecostals in Ghana. He begins his function by praying in the name of Jesus; link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtVX5dzVZeI>, accessed on 23 June 2011.

of the indigenous religions. The same problem exists today, even though neo-Pentecostal churches have been able, in small ways, to place the Christian message within the context of indigenous religions in order to make the message more meaningful for their converts. However, this overlap between indigenous religions and the neo-Pentecostal churches causes conflicts between the two as indigenous religious practitioners want to claim authenticity and originality in providing the

foremost understanding of the existence of God. One can assert, therefore, that both the indigenous religions and neo-Pentecostal churches need each other to remain relevant to their communities. The contest for space in the religious market place provides them with the impetus to out-do each other to gain the recognition and approval of the people, and to remind them of their relevance to cosmic balance both in private and national life.

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