

## PROPHETIC PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY PENTECOSTALISM IN GHANA

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### Abstract

*This paper examines some current practices evident in Ghanaian Pentecostal prophetism. It describes some of these practices and the criticality of these in the faith of both prophets and patrons. These prophetic rituals/practices are important because of the belief that the world is a place of battles with enemies, whose main purpose is to destroy human life. To cope with this, prophets lead patrons to engage in rituals of positivisation that seek to overturn the activities of their enemies. This is achieved through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the blood and name of Jesus Christ. The paper employs the discursive and analytical approach to the topic. It concludes by examining some contextualized issues in relation to the prophetic problem in Ghanaian Pentecostalism.*

### Key words

Prophetism, prophetic rituals/practices, exorcism/deliverance, blood metaphor, battles of life

### Introduction

In Ghana ripples of prophetism have always characterized Christianity since the turn of the twentieth century. Yet this phenomenon is not restricted to the Ghanaian scene alone. In fact, it has been part of African Christianity ever since the faith was reintroduced into the continent by Western missionaries.<sup>1</sup> Today prophetic ministries have become

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<sup>1</sup> Earle Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 26. Concerning the relevance of Africa's place in global Christianity Sanneh is right when he writes: "There is the need also to treat African Christianity as a legitimate tributary of the general stream of Christian history. The North African church of the early centuries, the Coptic Church of Egypt as well as the Ethiopian Orthodox Church should all be seen as manifestations of the on-going history of Christianity on the continent. As long as Western Christianity continues to consider itself as the true and sole guardian of the heritage of the Apostles,

more or less a “normal” religious phenomenon in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Yet Pentecostal prophetism still remains an “unexplored” field that calls for serious scholarly investigation. This paper seeks to respond to the question: What is the nature of contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostal prophetism, and what are some critical issues that arise from its practices? The paper therefore is a discussion on some observable practices of contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostal prophetism. I gathered the data of this study during the fieldwork of my MPhil and PhD studies between 2005 and 2013. During this period I observed the centrality of a number of religious practices which were embedded with insightful and challenging theological symbolisms. Challenging because they provoked investigation; insightful because they provided rich data for analysing, assessing and formulating the understandings of contemporary prophetic practices in Ghana. As at 2013 I had made several visits to the revival and prayer services of seven prayer centres of the Church of Pentecost (COP) and other allied churches, and ten New Prophetic Churches (NPCs) in Accra, Kasoa, Asamankese, Agona Swedru and Enyan Abonwimu areas within the Greater Accra, Central and Eastern Regions in Ghana. Thus, although most of the data was obtained from Accra, I have also included data from other parts of the country to give a fairly composite picture on the topic.

The groups whose activities/practices are covered in this paper are mainly the emerging prophetic ministries/churches because they are the ones which are still in the process of developing and “refining” their theology and practices. In this case they provide the “undiluted” raw material for assessing what is characteristic of Pentecostal prophetism in Ghana today. This understanding therefore facilitated the collection of data since I was able to visit the leaders of the groups discussed, as well as easily participate in many of the prophetic activities either during the day or night. Data was thus collected through a variety of techniques namely, participant observation, testimonies, posters, radio/video sermons, cassette recordings of sermons, and prophetic meetings.

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so long will it continue to appropriate the North African church as a European phenomenon with corresponding repudiation of other manifestations of Christianity such as the great Orthodox Churches of the East, as false or inadequate.” Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), xvii.

COP's prayer centres are akin to the New Prophetic Churches (NPCs).<sup>2</sup> Both groups are becoming the most popular characteristic of Ghanaian Pentecostalism today. Actually, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu,<sup>3</sup> Kwasi Addo Sampong<sup>4</sup>, and Cephas N. Omenyo<sup>5</sup> posit that the phenomenon of prayer centres/camps are not peculiar to Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, but is also present in the mainline historic churches. Indeed, Christian G. Baëta<sup>6</sup> associated prophetism with the "Sunsum Sore," the precursors of the Pentecostals. Both the prayer centres and NPCs are led by prophets; the former by "Grassroots Prophets," the latter simply by "Prophets."<sup>7</sup> Together with the NPCs, COP's prayer centres provided the "undiluted" raw material for assessing what was going in peripheral Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana today. Among Ghanaian Pentecostals, especially in prophetic circles, there is a strong belief that nothing happens accidentally or naturally. There is always a connection between physical evil and supernatural wicked forces.<sup>8</sup> These

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<sup>2</sup> The prayer centres and the NPCs sing not only the classic Pentecostal songs but also gospel songs. Gospel songs are a brand of Pentecostal praise and worship songs. Some mix ecstatic Ghanaian cultural militaristic music with Christian lyrics. Their patrons include Ghanaians and foreigners, old and young, males and females, rich and poor, politicians and elites of society, Christians and non-Christians (such as Muslims). "New Prophetic Churches" are those Ghanaian Charismatic churches with strong emphases on the place and functions of prophets and prophetic ministration and gifts. Since 1993 they have become a commonplace phenomenon on the Ghanaian religious scene, commanding a large following in all major cities and towns.

<sup>3</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretation from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 65-86.

<sup>4</sup> Kwasi Addo Sampong, "The Growth of Prayer Centres in Ghanaian Christianity: The Quest for Health and Wholeness", an unpublished MTh dissertation submitted to the Regents Theological College, UK. (June, 2000), 1, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer, the Netherlands: Boekencentrum Publishing House 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Christian G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some "Spiritual" Churches* (Reprint) (Achimota, Accra: Africa Christian Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> "Grassroots Prophets" are COP's lay leaders who function as prophets in prayer centres. These are the ones to whom people perplexed by the blights of life resort for supernatural help and intervention. They do not belong to the class of official prophets in the ordained pastoral ministry of COP. Yet they are the ones who are in constant touch with the ordinary mundane affairs of the suffering masses, hence their designation as Grassroots Prophets.

<sup>8</sup> See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'On the "Mountain" of the Lord': Healing Pilgrimages in Ghanaian Christianity," *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 36 (2007), 68.

include witches and wizards, charmers and sorcerers. As in Nigerian Pentecostalism, Ghanaian peripheral prophetism is organised less on denominational lines, with fluid memberships marked with zero-sum struggles for survival, anxiously in search for protection against the envy, jealousy, and hostility of malevolent spiritual forces.<sup>9</sup>

The proliferation of Pentecostal churches has led to the extensive “intrusion” of Pentecostal practices into Ghanaian society. Pentecostal churches/fellowships can be found every 100 meters in Ghanaian cities, towns, and villages. Many of these organise church services throughout the week, ranging from early morning devotions, prophetic/miracle services to revival services lasting from 40 to 90 days. Several Pentecostal songs, sermons, and services can be seen and heard daily on over ten TV channels and radio stations in Accra (the nation’s capital) alone. This media ubiquity of the Pentecostal presence in Ghanaian cities and towns is not unlike Nigeria’s “roadside Pentecostalism” whereby “the medium is the messiah” to contemporary urban Pentecostalism.<sup>10</sup> This Pentecostal ubiquity “today defines the public environment of (Ghanaian urban life) (whereby the) landscape may be read as a rich visual text that tells of popular understandings about the sacred, about everyday desires and expectations, and about the general orientation of social values.”<sup>11</sup> In a sense this gives rise to a “religious marketplace” and a “religious economy” that “emphasizes the plurality of religious practice and options in an unregulated environment which forces religious organizations to operate according to the logic of a market underscored by competition, rivalry, profit and self-interest.”<sup>12</sup>

Ghanaian Pentecostals’ attempt to come to grips with the incidence of evil and suffering in their lives makes them use various religious techniques or prophetic ritualism/practices. Since the Pentecostal self-understanding about evil and suffering is that of spiritual battles I

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<sup>9</sup> Ruth Marshall-Fratani, “Mediating the Global and Local in Nigerian Pentecostalism,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXVIII (1998), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Asonzeh Uka, “Roadside Pentecostalism Religious Advertising in Nigeria and the Marketing of Charisma,” *Critical Interventions* 2 (2008), 125.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 128; see also Asonzeh Uka, “Seeing is More than Believing: Posters and Proselytization in Nigeria,” in Rosalind I.J. Hackett (ed.), *Proselytization Revisited: Rights Talks, Free Markets and Culture Wars* (London: Equinox Publishing Press, 2008), 165-96.

<sup>12</sup> Asonzeh Uka, “Advertising God: Nigerian Christian Video-Films and the Power of Consumer Culture,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, Fasc. 2 (2003), 207.

will approach the discussion in this paper by first describing the Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding about victory over life's battles as revealed in their prophetic practices. This will involve a discussion on the nature and characteristics of life's battles and the sources of enforcing the victory in Christ. I will follow this up with an analysis of some contextualized issues in Ghanaian Pentecostal prophetism.

### **Victory over Life's Battles**

What ideas about the nature/characteristics and coping with the battles of life are there in Ghanaian Pentecostal practices? Ghanaian Pentecostals conceive victory in Christ in terms of subversion of evil and suffering. They believe that evil and suffering sour and discolour existential enjoyment and freedom. Thus, one great, popular and very important theme in Ghanaian Pentecostalism is "warfare" in the battles of life.

Positively, ideas of cosmic battle imply that believers can access spiritual empowerment from Christ to combat evil forces. This was the crux of the sermon of one Brother Timothy Yartey at the revival service of the Paradise Spiritual Revival and Healing Centre, in Odorkor-Accra on August 26, 2009. He told the congregation "the anointing of the Holy Spirit enables, empowers and equips believers to do mighty things. It also enables them to be fearless of the wiles and activities of Satan." Spiritual empowerment emanates from Christ's dethronement of Satan and his agents. The believer co-joins Christ in translating supernatural victory into the physical reality of humanity (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 2:10). Thus, in Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding through the Spirit's empowerment believers are enabled and invested with a new authority with which to withstand fear and command Satan to flee from their affairs.<sup>13</sup> And this is possible because of Jesus Christ.

Victory in Christ suggests at one point a battle already won. Nonetheless, this does not in any way mean there is no ongoing battle. True, Christ's victory assures the believer that the battle is won in advance yet there is warfare in every area of life. The ubiquity of warfare does not allow for passive living. This means that the believer should adopt both defensive and offensive ways of neutralizing or annulling the activities of enemies. This leads to a discussion of the place of spiritual warfare in enforcing victory in Christ in peripheral prophetism. Ghana-

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<sup>13</sup> See John V. York, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, Missouri: Logion Press, 2000), 183-84.

ian Pentecostals see in Jesus a once-for-all-time victory with far-reaching relevance and consequence.

### **Evil and suffering as cosmic battles**

Ghanaian Pentecostals believe there are enemies which work relentlessly to destroy weakling humans. The activities of such enemies are so dangerous that it requires superhuman effort to reverse them. This crucially places human beings in a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. Significantly, the battles of life are not the prerogative of non-Christians; Christians are also partakers. Accordingly, the battles of life are fought on the spiritual plane and the outcome manifests existentially. Ghanaian Pentecostalism's idea of warfare, interpreted as power encounters between God and demons, is a commonality of global Pentecostalism. The idea of warfare is very important to Ghanaian Pentecostalism because of the interconnection between material problems and supernatural causality. Though this is the general reaction to the problem of evil and suffering it is in the peripheral prophetism that it is very pronounced. Ideas of cosmic battle imply a need for identifying sources of evil and suffering, a need for deliverance using appropriate weapons, taking personal responsibility and interest in ensuring the prevalence of true victory and freedom. In what follows I will examine the way Ghanaian Pentecostals employ prophetic rituals and practices as sources of victory and freedom in Christ.

### **Prophetic rituals/practices**

In Ghanaian Pentecostal prophetism victory and freedom in Christ may be achieved through rituals of liberation. They include the following: the sale of special anointing oils, blessed water, blessed herbal substances, deliverance (exorcism), prophetic declarations and rituals. Coupled with these the blood of Jesus becomes a metaphoric tool of destruction of evil in peripheral prophetism. Peripheral prophetic spiritual warfare occurs in the context of militaristic songs, prayers and prophetic practices/ritualism. Critical also are the soteriological functionalities of the blood and name of Jesus.

In Pentecostal prophetism, prophetic rituals are believed to put "a stop to the nonsense" of wicked forces. They are carried out for spiritual protection, promotion, success and security against enemies. Prophetic rituals/practices thrive on the understanding that freedom and victory in

Christ are primarily spiritual. In other words, Christological release into significance assumes spiritual characteristics. This Christological release may be oral and involve “sending back” evil plots to enemies.<sup>14</sup> Such rebounds of evil are carried out as invocative declarations of enemies’ defeat. I cite two examples. On March 17, 2009 Prophet Isaac Antoh of Conquerors Chapel International told his Dansoman-Accra headquarters church that by the word of their mouths they could bind and kill their husband snatchers. Similarly, on August 27, 2009, at a revival service of the Paradise Spiritual Revival and Healing Centre, Odorkor-Accra, the COP grassroots prophet, Elder Dan Owusu orally “returned” a client’s son’s intended ritual destruction of the client to him.

Again, one cannot ignore the presence of symbolism in prophetic practices/rituals. One such ritual involves the pouring of “anointing” oil on objects such as clients’ bathrooms, toilets, garbage cans, floors and entrances to homes, handkerchiefs, door keys and car keys, etc. Such “anointing” is meant to mark out clients and their property beyond the interference of enemies.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Asonze Uka asserts that this “anointing” ritualism pervades the practices of Nigerian Pentecostal churches in South Africa where,

[I]n the churches that specialise in the production of miracles, signs and wonders, new forms of rituals are emerging designed to produce wonderment and sacralise hitherto secular materials and practices. In one such church, for example, [there is] blessing and anointing of cell phones, passports, business documents (including letters used in perpetuating advanced fee fraud, popularly called “419” after the section of the penal code that criminalises such practice) so they could be the conduit of miracles of personal improvement and wealth creation...(thus in these churches) the manifestation of, and transmission of divine pow-

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<sup>14</sup> Christiana Gyawu. Interview by the author. Bethel Prayer Ministries International Prayer Camp Kookooase, Asamankese. October 20, 2009

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Christology and Evil in Ghana: Towards a Pentecostal Public Theology*, Currents of Encounter: Studies on the Contact between Christianity and Other Religions, Beliefs and Cultures, Volume 49 (Amsterdam, New York: Editions Rodopi, 2013), 91.

er and miracles of financial wellbeing (is) through a (prophet's) usual intervention.<sup>16</sup>

Obviously, such ritualising of anointing potentially can blind clients to unacceptable and unchristian conduct and practices. It can undermine Christian morality and ethics of honesty, hard work, patience and contentment. Under such circumstances the biblical view of miracles is sacrificed on the altar of religious naivety and personal convenience. Clearly, Jesus and the early church worked miraculous signs to point people to God. The healings and miracles of Jesus were not meant "to 'prove' his messiahship or to vindicate his personal authority."<sup>17</sup> Jesus' healings and miracles were messianic "signs" that marked the dawning of the reign of God with preliminary assault on the power of evil in the land.

A similar symbolic ritual involves the place of supposed biblical motifs. For instance, "Altar Erection" is grounded on Jacob's stone pillow altar to the Lord (Genesis 28:18, 22; 31:45; 35:14). Hence, the ritual involves placing "anointed" stones at designated spots at homes, offices and workplaces to mark out divine presence for success and security. Unlike in the biblical story Altar Erection does not aim at getting access to heaven. Rather, it aims at providing a sort of protection to prophetic devotees.

Such prophetic symbolisms transform biblical acts into repeatable and transferable motifs with contemporary significance. Hence, "Prophetic hours/walks" or "spiritual mapping"<sup>18</sup> re-enact Joshua's march around the city of Jericho (Josh 1:2-5). It is Asamoah-Gyadu's contention that this phenomenon in Pentecostal prophetism was an innovation of Bishop James Saah of the Action Chapel International,

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<sup>16</sup> Asonze Uka, "God@ebay: Nigerian churches in South Africa," in David O. Ogungbile and Akintude E. Akinade (eds.), *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity* (Lagos, Benin, Ibadan, Jos, Port-Harcourt, Zaria: Malthouse Press Ltd., 2010), 339.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur G. Glasser with Charles E. Van Engen *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 187.

<sup>18</sup> Among proponents of "spiritual mapping" there is the belief that countries, communities and localities are scrambled among wicked spiritual forces. These rule over the inhabitants under their domain and oppose God and his work among such people. This idea is imbibed and carried out by many Ghanaian Pentecostals. René Holvast's Ph.D work on "Spiritual Mapping: The Turbulent Career of a Contested American Missionary Paradigm, 1989-2005" offers an in-depth discussion on the topic.



Accra, which has been duplicated by other churches/ministries.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, this author can state that as far back as 1991, a COP pastor, John Yaw Acquah led his Dansoman District members to go around the Gbgbese-Accra chapel during a prayer meeting for divine victory. Critical to this type of prophetic ritualism is imprecatory prayer.

“Prophetic hours/walks” then are a kind of prayer that invokes divine judgement on one’s enemies. One Apostle Afotey Odai of the Maranatha Power Ministries told a pastors’ conference at Kasoa on October 21, 2011, about how he dispossessed the “territorial powers” of Nungua-Accra, by walking through the township with his prayer team. They anointed spots including a lagoon and commanded them to release their captives to Christ. Thus, prophetic enactments are embedded with prophetic assurances of territorial possession and occupation. Here, territorial possession means transferring physical, material, financial, physiological and spiritual ownership from enemies to clients.

If “prophetic walks” mean walking into one’s inheritance then foot-washing cleanses one’s “spiritual feet” from spiritual contaminations of curses and spells. During foot-washing, clients’ feet are washed with consecrated water and anointed with oil either in the church or some designated spots. The washing may be self-performed or performed by a pastor/prophet. The practice is seen to accord with Abraham’s angelic visitors’ washing of their feet (Genesis 18: 1-4). In this way the washing of the angels’ feet typifies the cleansing of spiritual dirt from clients’ lives. In performing the act the prophet may make such declarations as:

Today, I wash your feet from setbacks, faulty foundations, and pray for your promotion, [I pray for you] to be lifted up. Any filth around you, any demonic spell you have trodden upon, I wash you of it, lifting you from the pit to your glorious height.<sup>20</sup>

Foot-washing then is seen as a symbolic act that helps to impact divine goodness into believers’ lives with promotional effects such as acquisition of job or visa for overseas travel. For example, in the “Letter from Abroad” column of the *Ahenfie News: A Bulletin of the Royalhouse Chapel International* dated September 24, 2006 one Ama Boatema Sarpong narrated how she succeeded in obtaining a US visa after going through

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<sup>19</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 35-57.

<sup>20</sup> The above illustration came from Rev. Anthony Lerbuny during a foot washing ceremony at the Watered Garden Church, Dansoman, Accra. September 15, 2005.

foot-washing at the Royalhouse Chapel International headquarters church, *Ahenfie* in Accra.

The acquisition of overseas visas is crucial in prophetic services for a number of reasons. First, the poor economic conditions of many Ghanaians make them believe that travelling abroad, particularly to the West, will alter their status positively.<sup>21</sup> Second, the ability to travel abroad is embedded with social recognition. This explains why prophets often spice their declarations with visa possession to clients. Of course, migrant documentary and occupational difficulties and problems do not find a place in the prophetic promises and assurances. For example, Andrea Fröchtling touches on what he calls “essentialisation” and negation of identities and identity-markers of Ghanaian migrants in the Schengen.<sup>22</sup> They include ideas such as diasporic existence as “the hyphenated, and,” “the inside-out,” and “a bridging experience.” In the latter case, migrants undergo experiences of assimilation, separation, marginalisation and integration.<sup>23</sup>

In the same vein “Atmospheric Invocation” reveals a belief in astral powers. It involves a prophet speaking to supposed lunar or solar elemental spirits to release their controlling influences and effects on clients. According to some NPC prophets traditionally medicine men curse people with these atmospheric elemental spirits. To undo the effects of such curses requires an equally but positive invocation to the same elements.

Similarly, during “Warfare Prayers,” clapping supernaturally neutralises, subdues and punishes enemies. Participants walk about or stomp their feet while they pray and clap their hands by such formulas as: “Lord Jesus, as I clap my hands and pray may it become military missiles against my enemies in my father’s clan, my mother’s clan, my workplace, my residence, etc.” Such prayers are considered to be “Bull-

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<sup>21</sup> See Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah, “Perspectives on Theological and Biblical Migration and Mission”, in J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Andrea Fröchtling, Andreas Kunz-Lübecke (eds.), *Babel is Everywhere! Migrant Readings from Africa, Europe and Asia: Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*. Vol. 157 (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, and Wien: Peter Lang Publishing Group 2013), 15-24.

<sup>22</sup> Andrea Fröchtling, “Crossing the Waters of Babylon: Diasporas between Glob/calisations and Spiritual Homelands”, in J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, et al. (eds.), *Babel is Everywhere!*, 53-62. 36-75.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-58.

dozer or Dangerous Prayers” meant for “calling down thundering fire” to deflate and destroy enemies’ camouflaging activities.

Thus, prophetic rituals and practices are meant not only to neutralise satanic powers but also to mediate and channel divine favour and assistance into clients’ lives.<sup>24</sup> Therefore crucial in many of these rituals is the role of angels as divine couriers of victory in Christ. Again, prophetic rituals thrive on the belief of spiritual empowerment of believers. Spiritual empowerment supposes that Jesus differentiates between believers and their enemies. This differentiation results in existential prosperity that baffles believers’ enemies. Characteristically, prophetic meetings are associated with shouts like “heyi, heyi,” from congregants.

In prophetic circles sermons are interrupted with reciprocating catchy interjections like “Prophesy, you are *Odi* (prophet/seer),” “Prophesy to me,” “Father, go deep,” “You have seen correctly,” or “A Daniel is in the house,” from congregants. Sermons are followed by times of intensive, prolonged militaristic, perspiring, muscular prayers targeted at “demolishing the strongholds” of enemies. According to one Prophet Marfred Acheampong of Fruit of Christ Ministry International at Been-To in Accra, prophetic meetings are times when “believers are raised from zero to heroes, when expectations become manifestations.” In prophetic meetings the prophets may call individuals and blow air into their faces. They may also throw water or anointing oil onto clients’ bodies or faces to make them experience the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The idea that the prophetic word releases full life defines the *modus operandi* of peripheral prophets and the appropriation of the Christ-event. This often defines clients’ conversional experiences and underlines their understanding of victory in Christ. In fact, victory and freedom in Christ may be achieved through rituals of liberation: the sale of special anointing oils, blessed water, blessed herbal substances, deliverance (exorcism), prophetic declarations and rituals. All thrive on what the prophet claims to be God’s direction. So Asamoah-Gyadu intimates that the setting up of Jericho Hour in the Christian Action Faith Chapel was, according to the Bishop James Saah, a divine direction “to establish a ‘prophetic prayer service’ where “giant problems

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<sup>24</sup> Christiana Gyawu. Interview by the author. Bethel Prayer Ministries International Prayer Camp Kookoase, Asamankese. October 20, 2009

would receive giant solutions.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, through the prophet the miracle-working Jesus becomes real to clients.

From the foregoing it is not difficult to see why Ghanaian Pentecostals mince no words to declare: “*Jesus is the living Saviour.*” This is because it is Jesus who is believed to correct the imbalances in life. They insist that deliverance from evil and suffering is the result of Jesus’ intervention in one’s life. So Apostle Ofori Yeboah, an Executive member of COP observes in his sermon, “The Great Redemption of God.” In this TV3 COP-sponsored “Pentecost Hour” programme of June 10, 2009, the apostle intimated, “Deliverance comes from the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Just as the mighty hand of God represented in Moses’ rod delivered Israel so Jesus’ name delivers those who put their trust in Him.” Consequently, through Christ believers are enabled to reverse their negative conditions.

Many times the prophets move among the congregation to divine clients’ problems, and also offer them solutions. Just like Baëta reports of the Spiritual Churches,<sup>26</sup> the prophets are aided by assistants who carry bowls from which the prophets scoop and splash water or anointing oil onto the congregants. The eviction of demonic presence may be carried out by the prophet or by the congregation per the prophet’s instruction. Prophetic eviction of demonic presence is often accomplished by the raising of arms coupled with confessional declarations such as “You spirit of poverty, sickness, disease, bad marriage, shame, embarrassment, disappointment, etc., today as I raise my hands to heaven, I command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to leave me now.” Or, they may say, “I command the fire of heaven to consume you right now...etc.” Such prophetic declarations are understood as a display of spiritual empowerment.

In peripheral prophetism spiritual empowerment means spiritual lubrication for Christian mission and evangelisation.<sup>27</sup> The empowerment effect of the anointing is the liberation of believers from all that

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<sup>25</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 36.

<sup>26</sup> Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Peter C. Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1979); William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 1971); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Contours of Christian Theology: The Holy Spirit* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996); Jack K. Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993).

threatens them. The liberation effect of the anointing is that it catapults the possessor into divine blessing and favour. This is what Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako meant in his sermon on his Alive Chapel International programme on TV3, on Friday, August 21, 2009: “A blessing of God upon a person’s life transforms wilderness experiences into fruitfulness.” This means divine favour is what neutralises curses and setbacks in the believer’s life. So Prophet Stephen Asamoah Boateng also sermonised in his Great Light Worship Centre at Weija Junction in Accra on June 14, 2009 thus, “Beloved, God is going to make you great and significant in your life such that your spite will turn to glory. The Lord’s favour will displace plans of your enemies.”

In Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding there are two sides to satanic onslaught against believers: defeat or victory. Either depends on believers’ character and relationship with the Holy Spirit. Believers’ faithful living guarantees their access to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, COP grassroots prophets insist that the anointing is closely connected to believers’ moral life and the operation of spiritual gifts.<sup>28</sup> It comes along with its own suffering to purify believers’ lives.<sup>29</sup> The anointing thrives on persistent and intense prayer habit since “prayer is understood to have the power to stir the supernatural by decimating the powers of evil and releasing the anointing of the Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> It is when the fire of the Spirit overwhelms believers’ lives that they are insulated against the works of Satan on one hand, and on the other conquer the enemy. This is true liberation. Thus, spiritual liberation assumes a characteristic revitalisation of life. Consequently, the Spirit’s anointing is very crucial in appropriating victory in Christ.

### **Exorcism/deliverance**

One very important prophetic ritual believed to effect victory and freedom in Christ is exorcism/deliverance. Scholars on African Christianity intimate that it characterised the ministries of the *Sunsum Sore* (AICs)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dan Owusu. Interview by the author. Paradise Spiritual Revival and Healing Centre, Odorkor-Accra. August 27, 2009

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Johnson Andoh. Interview by the author. Down Town Prayer and Revival Centre, Kasoa. September, 23, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Born of Water and the Spirit’: Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa,” in Ogbu U. Kalu (Ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eriterea: Africa World Press Inc., 2007), 341.

and the para-church campus fellowships.<sup>32</sup> According to proponents, deliverance is the act of liberating someone from the power, influence and bondage of an evil source through prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit. Deliverance is broader than exorcism. The latter may be included in the former. In the book *Psychic Disturbances and Occult Involvement* exorcism is defined as “a specific act of binding and releasing, performed on a person believed to be possessed by a non-human malevolent spirit.”<sup>33</sup> It may also refer to the “spiritual cleansing of a place believed to be infested by the demonic.”<sup>34</sup>

For Opoku Onyinah although demon possession is not a biblical term, it is often used to mean the presence of some evil spirits that take control of people, use them, and seek their destruction. He differentiates between exorcism and deliverance thus:

Exorcism usually means casting out a demon from a person who is possessed. Deliverance is usually distinguished from exorcism and means freeing people from the influence or bondage of Satan and demons who are behind afflictions, sufferings, bad habits, curses and failures in life.<sup>35</sup>

This means that the goal of deliverance is the ultimate liberty of the human victim from the influence and control of a demonic force. Exorcism is the means by which deliverance is achieved. It also means that unless the victim enjoys freedom from the alien satanic power deliverance is incomplete. This underpins peripheral prophets’ insistence that clients “maintain” their deliverance through consistent Word confession, application of Jesus’ blood and destruction of any demonised material substance.

Deliverance involves a person, often a deliverance minister, praying effectively for the victim by laying on his/her hands, and/or

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<sup>32</sup> Graham Duncan and Ogbu U. Kalu, “Bakuzufu: Revival Movements and Indigenous Appropriation of Christianity”. In Ogbu U. Kalu (Ed.), *African Christianity*, 267; Samuel Adubofour, “Evangelical Para-Church Movement in Ghanaian Christianity: (1950 to Early 1990s)”, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Edinburgh, 1994.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Perry (ed.), *Psychic Disturbances and Occult Involvement* (London: SPCK, 1987), 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Spiritual Warfare: A Fresh Insight into the Nature of the Warfare, Identification of Strongholds, and Exposition on the Weapons* (Accra: Advocate Publishing Ltd., 2008), 219-20.

speaking a word of command, sometimes applying anointing oil or water, thereby casting out the evil spirit, and inviting the Holy Spirit to take over the victim's life after he/she has accepted and committed him/herself to Christ. According to proponents, deliverance helps to liberate victims from sinful habits, demonic controls and influences. Hence, deliverance sessions are "surgery hours" when demonic badness is "removed" and "replaced" with divine goodness in clients' lives. During deliverance sessions candidates are made to denounce sins, ancestral curses, demonic or evil associations (known or unknown). Victory is believed to be achieved by invoking Jesus' name, pleading his blood and enforcing the power of the Holy Spirit.

Underpinning deliverance is the idea of divine retribution of believers' enemies. Nonetheless, divine retribution does not necessarily mean human aloofness in spiritual freedom. Thus, during deliverance sessions clients are taken through rigorous, often very muscular, spiritual experiences. Candidates vomit, cough, scream, cry, wail, shed tears, gallop, jump, slither, fall asleep, collapse and even appear to be dead. I cite an eyewitness account to illustrate this. During my visit to the Zion Prayer Healing and Evangelistic Centre led by the COP grassroots prophetess, Mrs. Georgina Grant Essilfie, at Enyan Abowinmu on September 15, 2009, a young man was taken through a long period of deliverance. The victim, a former convert from Islam, was believed to be tormented by demons that made him slither or stretch out himself, sometimes with one leg lifted up, tongue pulled out like a panting deer. At other times too he behaved like an angry, ferocious beast ready to gallop off or attack a prey. At one point he broke loose holding his genital organs and attempted to flee through the crowd but was overpowered by some assistants of the prophetess. His deliverance was sealed with prayers and he fell and lay down calmly. Dealing with some demons can be very dangerous indeed. For example, at times the prophetess or an assistant showed signs of being "bitten" by the tormenting "beasts" when they symbolically "cut" certain parts of the victim's body.

Peripheral prophets believe and insist that diseases, joblessness and poverty are part of the setbacks of life which the new life in Christ must necessarily negate. On August 12, 2009, one Prophet Louis A. Michaiah of Christ Vision Sanctuary preached on TV 3, a private television station in Accra. In that sermon he pictured setbacks as darkness, those things which taint various spheres of human life. He asserted,

The believer does not need darkness: disease, joblessness, poverty, etc. Accepting Christ effects a new identity and so all ancestral and generational curses are passed and gone; they have no control on the believer. Darkness may be typified in agony, poverty. Darkness is disease, it is poverty and it is shame. Lack is darkness.

Hence, to him, receiving the Christ life demands refusing setbacks. Consequently, there must be a personal disenchantment with negative circumstances and a quest for deliverance from the powers of darkness. It may now suffice to say that in this theology the provision of full life is seen as the prophetic answer via deliverance and the employment of other faith props.

### **Faith props**

As in Nigeria's Aladura churches,<sup>36</sup> in peripheral prophetism victory and liberation in Christ are aided by faith props or points of contact. Faith props could be the application of pecuniary or material substances to mediate divine power to offset satanic manipulations in believers' lives. In this way patrons give or "sow" material or monetary substances to support God's work to procure supernatural breakthroughs and protection. As I have observed elsewhere, they may also take the form of patronising protective materials or substances from prophets for propping onto victory and liberation.<sup>37</sup>

Such substances may include olive oil, water, a crucifix, monetary donations, a blessed handkerchief, wall paintings of the passion of Jesus and even sand from prophets' footsteps. But a point of contact can also be negative whereby both animate and inanimate objects become the mediums of demonic invasion into human lives. The demonic conduits could be ants, mice, fowls, vultures, crows, dogs, cats and swine. Even a stolen fabric may become a negative point of contact for ill in the owner's life. It is this idea of negative point of contact which underlies the logic of what I have described elsewhere as the "causal other" in peripheral prophetism. The idea of the "causal other" means that causes of evil originate from outside victims; they come from exter-

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<sup>36</sup> See Isaac Deji Ayegboyin, "Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions." *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* XVI. No. 1 (2011), 170.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "Prosperity and Prophecy in African Pentecostalism," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20 (2011), 298. 291-305.



nal enemies.<sup>38</sup> It is to cope with the activities of “causal others” that Christ’s name becomes critical in the prayers of prophets and patrons.

### **Invocative prayers and the name of Jesus Christ**

In peripheral prophetism prayers may assume invocative declaration whereby Jesus Christ’s name acquires “magical” ascription. This is even more pronounced during times of deliverance/exorcism. As stated above during prophetic prayers participants are instructed to use Jesus’ name to drive out “illegal” satanic occupants and attackers in their lives. Thus, feet stomping, clapping and pointing hands in the direction of perceived enemies are always accompanied with an unrelenting invocation of Jesus’ name. In fact, some practitioners do not start a prayer of declaration without prefacing it: “In Jesus’ name I pray...”

Indeed, the vocalisation of Jesus’ name is believed to vanquish demons, gods, and witches; heal the sick, deliver the demonised, break all forms of satanic strongholds such as poverty, death and marital problems. In fact, Jesus’ name becomes a crutch to lean on in times of difficulty. Hence, this Pentecostal cosmology sees Jesus sharing kinship with Christians as he desacralises the powers of darkness while at the same time he sacralises their realm for his glory.

Closely related to this is the role of selectivity of scripture. In fact, declarative prayers are almost always said with some enforcement from specially selected biblical proof texts many times with reference to the blood of Jesus. Such scriptural texts are carefully chosen because they are supposedly embedded with some spiritual power. In this light victory Psalms and vindictive Psalms offer good sources. This is very characteristic of the peripheral prophets who, as ordinary Bible readers, attach a spiritual dimension to their reading of the Bible. This is aimed at tapping into the spiritual promises of the Bible to transform the negative circumstances of clients/seekers.

Of course, people’s socio-cultural and economic circumstances impinge on their theological hermeneutical reflections. And so perhaps, this hermeneutical approach of the peripheral prophets is not “a contamination or unimportant addition” since “texts demand a different

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<sup>38</sup> Quayesi-Amakye, *Christology and Evil*, 64, 84, 106; “Prosperity and Prophecy,” 296-99.

attitude, an existential one, an attitude focused on appropriation.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the recognition of the “reader-response” approach to the reading of the Bible is not without problems. Reading the text with our presuppositions, “easily becomes prejudice, a set of a priori [assumptions] that place a grid over Scripture and make it conform to these preconceived conceptions.”<sup>40</sup> Thus existential appropriation of Scripture may not always lead to a correct interpretation/appropriation of the text’s meaning. The solution to this inherent “reader-response” problem is to “‘bracket’ these ideas to a degree and allow the text to deepen or at times challenge and even change those already established ideas.”<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile the general theological presentations of COP’s leadership have followed “established” Western systematic theological methods which oftentimes find problematic peripheral prophetism’s interpretation of Scripture. To leadership peripheral prophets’ contextualisation of the Christian message is unduly impinged with the Ghanaian primal cosmology. This primal cosmology, unlike the Western one, is disinterested in logical explanations of events and circumstances. Rather, it reads spiritual meaning into every situation that bedevils people. Perhaps, what Ogbu U. Kalu says of the AICs’ recovery of the pneumatic resources of the Gospel through hermeneutic subversion is true of Pentecostal prophets. They show that as Africans they appropriate Scripture “from a primal, charismatic worldview and read the translated Scriptures from that hermeneutic.”<sup>42</sup> It is in this vein that we may appreciate why the blood of Christ takes on a prophetic metaphor of destiny transformation.

### **The blood metaphor as destiny transformer**

In peripheral prophetism victory and freedom in Christ are seen as “battles of blood” whereby the “altar of God overturns the altars” of the forces of darkness. This is a battle of allegiance; a determinate transfer-

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<sup>39</sup> Hans J.D. de Wit, “Through the eyes of another: Objectives and backgrounds,” In Hans de Wit et al (eds.), *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible* (Elkhart, Indiana: Evangel Press, 2004), 8, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Grant R. Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 29.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ogbu U. Kalu, “Introduction: The Shape and Flow of African Church Historiography,” in Ogbu U. Kalu (ed.), *African Christianity: An African Story* (Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press Inc. 2007), 35.

ence of allegiance from Satan to God. It is an inexcusable Christian vandalising of the kingdom of Satan. In this combat the believer rejects any passive involvement but becomes purposefully active in enforcing God's reign in all human affairs. This is the natural implication of the displacement of Satan by Christ. Consequently, Jesus' blood becomes a reversal tool for unmasking and undoing demonic activities in people's lives. It also becomes a confessional enforcer for destiny transformation. Hence, in prophetic/deliverance services songs about the potency of Christ's blood are crucial. Such songs naturally stimulate confessional establishments of victory and freedom and delimit the parameters of satanic operations.

With outstretched hands participants may repeat declarations such as the following: "Today, I scoop the blood of Jesus. I make the blood a bomb, a thunderbolt which I throw against my enemies from my father's clan, my mother's clan, my workplace, my residence, etc." Prophets tell their clients that such confessions ably and effectively neutralise and strangulate their enemies, mostly the causal witches of their problems. What this means is that clients transfer the consequences of Christ's crucifixion from soul salvation into their existential needs and concerns. In other words, Christ's death becomes a neutralising weapon against clients' enemies. Thus assured clients confront life unperturbed of the wishes of real or imaginary adversaries.

Also emanating from this blood metaphor is the affirmation of the believer's personhood. To the Ghanaian Pentecostal conversion positivises identity which is a reversal of evil control and enslavement of fear, death and nonentity. Identity positivisation means belongingness to the commonwealth of God. In other words, to the Ghanaian Pentecostal the new birth results in a positive change in all aspects of life: spiritual, social, economic, emotional and psychological. The Ghanaian Pentecostal pictures the pre-conversion life as a wasted life outside of God. With conversion comes a royal and priestly identity. This new identity is linked to membership in the kingdom of God; a membership that transcends beyond mere citizenship. It connotes ideas of familial relationship to God that makes the believer God's royal (cf. Ephesians 2:19). More important is the acknowledgement that conversion means being a special race of God, a holy nation made possible by the One who loves them.

In 1 Peter 2:9 the writer transfers the Lord's assurance to the Israelites in Exodus 19:6 to the church when he writes, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (NKJV). The Ghanaian Pentecostal's royalty and priesthood cannot be as a result of submission to the Mosaic Law since that same Law debarred him/her from membership of the commonwealth of Israel. Consequently, it must be by another and a new way. The identity of the One who makes this new way possible is clarified by the Revelator when he writes,

...from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, [and we shall reign on the earth (Re 5:10)] to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Re 1:5, 6).

This is in accord with 1 Timothy 2:5 which states that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and human beings. Jesus achieved this new identity for believers because of his vicarious death. Hence, his blood is crucial in appropriating this new identity.

To Ghanaian Pentecostals then the appropriation of Christ's blood militarily enforces the new identity of significance and overturns the purposes and intents of one's enemies. The blood metaphor therefore becomes a Christological dethronement of devils and confirms Christ's victory over believers' enemies. Consequently, victory in Christ is conceived in terms of destiny transformation in "tomorrow" when God makes a way where there seems to be no way.

The interpretation of destiny transformation may be viewed from some Old Testament divine assurances. In Genesis 18: 10, 14 the Lord promised Abraham thus, "Next year we will come back and Sara will have a son ... Is there anything impossible for God?" Later Isaiah also told Judah to look up to God for guidance along unknown ways (Isaiah 42:16), to make a way in the waters (Isaiah 43:19) and in the desert (Isaiah 43:19) in realisation of new happenings. Elisha had also promised Samaria of the abundance of food "tomorrow" in the face of Syrian military campaign (2 Kings 7:1). In both instances, there is the immense presence of lack and despondency. It takes only divine inter-

vention to positively alter such discouraging and hopeless circumstances.

Ghanaian Pentecostals read these scriptures and draw inspiration from them. Associating with the Israelites they turn their hope God-ward and believe, without seeing, that God will change their destiny soon. Accordingly, destiny positivisation is the carving of new ways. Such positive alteration is retrospective and prospective at the same time: yesterday's blessings insure against enemies' wicked designs tomorrow; the believer's blessing is the enemy's shame, all coming from God.

The metaphorical use of Jesus' blood as destiny transformer takes time seriously. It looks back into the past, the Ghanaian Pentecostal pre-conversion past, across the present circumstances, and into the future. In this sense the prophetic concept of time becomes linear rather than cyclical. The linear chronology encapsulates God's new work that the believer longs for and rejects a cyclical recurrence of the bad past. This rejection of the reverberation of negative destiny is believed to be achieved through Christological subversion of evil forces when, through prophetic ritualism/deliverance, the power of Jesus overturns the forces of evil for the good of the Christian. It is in the same vein that fire becomes a critical source tool in enforcing victory in Christ and freedom.

The prophetic ritualism of fire is carried out through confessional declarations. On the surface the appeal to fire is an appropriation of biblical motif. God is said to be a consuming fire; the Holy Spirit is symbolised as fire and the Word of God is a fiery sword (Acts 2:3; Hebrews 12:29). Fire also symbolises purification for religious and good use (Matthew 3:11-12; 1 Peter 1:7). At a deeper level such fiery declarations interface with primal religious ritualism. In primal religion some people are believed to be fire makers and controllers of thunderbolts and lightning. They manipulate these elemental forces to harm others. Also witches and river deities are believed to transform into fireballs or emit fire from their bodies to harm their victims.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, when Pentecostals send fire against their enemies it appears there is a rebound of evil against their enemies. In other words, they repay them in their own coin.

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Kwabena Ntummy, *Coming with Fire: Autobiography of Apostle Dr. M. K. Ntummy* (Accra: Advocate Publishing Ltd., 2005).

Indeed, victory in Christ may sometimes be understood in terms of a bright tomorrow when God intervenes to transform the believer's life. As one Ernest Opoku Jr. captures in his song, *Onyame di hene wō adeē nyinaa so* (God reigns over all situations) the believer has every reason to hope for a better life. Hence, although circumstances may elicit the desire "to poison or hang" oneself, life must not be approached with desperation. As there is a season of fruit bearing so there is a due season for destiny transformation. God can be trusted with the destinies of his servants because as their Creator he has all things under his control (cf. Psalm 46). His is not an elected government that can be challenged or threatened by competitors. Thus, tying God's reign to his Creatorship, Ernest encourages fellow believers to trust God because he is neither oblivious nor passive to their circumstances.

The Pentecostal "tomorrow" takes biblical prophetic assurances seriously. In the Old Testament, Job takes consolation in his living Redeemer who "shall stand at last on the earth" (Job 19:25). While the text may primarily refer to Job's hope of a resurrection future it may also have a secondary meaning of freedom from his present despicable circumstances. In the New Testament Paul's reference to the Parousia (1Thessalonians 4:16) is to be gauged as pastoral hope to a despairing church in the midst of persecution. Furthermore, one of the goals of the Revelator was to assure the persecuted church that there awaited them a better tomorrow when their enemies would be finally defeated and suffer divine retribution in perpetual flames of torments, far surpassing what they made the church to suffer. Therefore, it may not be an understatement for Ghanaian Pentecostals to also hope for a better day when all their problems would be over.

In the foregoing discussions we have seen the way Ghanaian Pentecostals interpret victory and freedom in Christ in terms of subversion of evil and suffering. This is approached through various prophetic rituals and practices steeped in the hope of transforming believers' destiny. In the section that follows we shall analyse some contextualised issues in Ghanaian Pentecostal prophetism.

### **Towards a contextualised prophetic theology**

Throughout this paper we have seen how Ghanaian Pentecostals contribute to the contextualisation of African Christianity. Their conception of victory in Christ over evil and suffering reveals the impingement of the Akan culture on their practice of the Christian faith. Such impingement is not surprising when we appreciate the role that a people's culture plays on their interpretation of life. Thus, the whole idea of victory and freedom in Christ in Ghanaian Pentecostalism may be gauged within the context of the Akan primal worldview or cosmology, which is integral to their religion. Just as in the traditional religion, peripheral prophets attribute the causes of evil to spiritual enemies, namely, the Devil, evil spirits, witchcraft and other demons whose motives are to "kill, steal and destroy" (John 10:10). Such an approach to the problem of evil and suffering spiritualises morality, denies the ethical dimension to it and effectively overlooks the anthropogenic explanations to some evils. This understanding of evil and suffering sees the "causal other" as a ritual pollution or social offense. Many Ghanaian Pentecostals believe that misfortune is closely connected to the activities of witchcraft, sorcery, bad medicine and evil activities of other entities which always seek for the ill of less powerful people. This belief is not different from the Akan traditional belief. In fact, the Akan perception that witchcraft offers an explanatory tool for the existence of evil is akin to many claims and practices of Ghanaian Pentecostal common believers.

We have noted the role of the coping effects of prophetic rituals. Behind the patronage of the rituals and practices is the belief in particularised prophecies. For prophets and patrons it is in the context of this that signs and wonders are wrought. This leads us to ask about the contextual significance of particularised prophecies. In peripheral prophetism seekers/clients go to prophets to seek for *akwankyerē* (spiritual direction). This is aimed at helping clients to elicit information or acquire knowledge about their lives. Through spiritual direction the Pentecostal prophet is welcomed to "read" and "speak" into clients' lives.

An appreciation of particularised prophecy provides a fresh way of probing into the spirituality of the Ghanaian Pentecostal which should not be ignored. Such an appreciation will help us as a church to *know* how to respond to the fears and aspirations of the Ghanaian person. Ghanaian Pentecostals' patronage of particularised prophecies reveals that they have not as yet abandoned their Akan traditional religious views about the uncertainties of life. In fact, it exhibits their

strong and ardent desire to explore the *unknown* to explain life's vicissitudes. In a sense, this desire is more than a mere religious inclination; it has sociological and psychological dimensions to it.

The fact that through the provision of *akwankyerē* peripheral prophets subvert the role of traditional priests in solving life's problems is significant. For it means any unguarded attempt by the church to "control" the prophets and the phenomenon can result in some negative consequences. At the same time any nonchalance can also mean a subtle and unconscious surrendering of the unwary into the web of some prophetic miscreants. This is because clients' gullibility can open them up to the exploitative whims of unscrupulous mystics.

Again, the prominence of the phenomenon today forces the church to examine its ethical responsibility to the vulnerable in society. This is because many times directive prophecies and prophetic accusations can become tools of psychological oppression to supposed enemies. This can result in familial conflicts and stigmatisation of so-called witches. As can be expected "compelled" confessions from witches can result in rejection and confusion in a family rather than effect healing and happiness. Indeed, accusations of witchcraft are very subjective and dangerous. The whole issue of witchcraft remains an unresolved tension in the Ghanaian socio-religious psyche and experience.

In any case we cannot be totally unfair to the prophets. After all, they make their own contribution to society's wellbeing. In a country where access to professional counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrics and medical personnel is difficult to many or unknown by some the prophets provide the needed stopgap services. Clients/seekers resort to them in times of troubles and difficulties for what they consider to be spiritual support. Actually, through prophetic assurances most of such services provide psychological support that helps to calm down confused minds to embrace the future with confidence.

We can say that many prophetic practices hinge on scriptural (mis)appropriation. While peripheral prophets appeal to Scripture to underline their practices there is ample reason to think that such scriptural appropriation could be at disjunction with Scripture. One key scripture that is critical in the prophetic scriptural literalism is Revelation 12:11, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (NKJV). To buttress their use of blood metaphor, peripheral



prophets interpret the text to mean confessional appropriation of Jesus' blood as a liberative instrument. They believe that such an approach makes the believer able to access divine victory and freedom in the midst of satanic controls.

It is significant to note that the appropriation normally stops short of the second part of the text which reads, "and they did not love their lives to the death." First, this is understandable when we appreciate that this second part is antithetical to their kind of "suffering-free" Christianity. Consequently, it betrays their "unconscious" attempt to make Scripture fit into their own theological framework about evil and suffering. The problem with this prophetic literalism is that it fails to accommodate the context of the Scripture in the interpretive process and so succeeds in attaching a magical signification to Jesus' blood. But Jesus' blood is used in this text and others to signify his death and its beneficent effects to the believer. In the present text the Revelator is referring to how the church appropriated Christ's death during persecution. They sealed their faith in the salvation wrought by Christ's death with their own blood. And it is this voluntary martyrdom that gave them victory over their persecutors. Like their Lord, through their martyrdom they "outwitted" their enemies into defeat (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:7, 8). Thus, the scripture is not about appropriating Christological freedom or victory for a problem-free religion.

Many practices in peripheral prophetism could pass for mere religious rituals that pretend to be prophetic acts. The rituality of practices reveals through their repeatability or their lack of scriptural typology. Consequently, practices like "back to sender" or warfare prayers of rebounding whereby clients "confess back" their mishaps to their supposed "causal others," pose serious theological problems. This means that Pentecostal leadership in Ghana must make conscious efforts to provide a biblical/theological framework through which prophetic manifestations and physical phenomena may be viewed and interpreted. To this end Mike Bickle offers us the criterion.<sup>44</sup> This involves asking such questions as: Do we have its scriptural example? If not does such practice contravene clear scriptural teaching? Is there the possibility of connivance between the prophet and the client or an inherent use of magic in the act? In case there is connivance does it not portray the prophet as

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<sup>44</sup> Mike Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic* (Aba, Nigeria: E.O. Overcomers & Co. Ltd., 1996).

false or spurious religious charlatan? How does such image affect Christian ministry and Pentecostal prophetism?

In this paper we have seen that Ghanaian Pentecostals approach life as a matter of life and death affair that requires supernatural intervention. This understanding takes life's battles beyond the material into the supernatural realm. It makes battles of life transcend all spheres of human existence. Hence, in their practices they long for supernatural liberation that will turn their circumstances around. We have discovered that in order to effect such victory and freedom in Christ Ghanaian Pentecostals employ various prophetic techniques or rituals of positivism. These prophetic rituals and deliverance activities make exorbitant use of Jesus' blood and name in a confessional manner. Thus militaristic songs and declarative confessions are fully infused with the metaphoric use of Jesus' blood and name.

This Pentecostal effort at contextualising victory in Christ over life's battles is not without problem. For example, the ritualism involved tends to promote the devil over and above the power of God. Such problematisation reveals the impingement of primal culture and religion on proponents and adherents' approach to evil. The church cannot ignore this and so I propose a pastoral approach to the issue. Such an approach should be proactive in dealing with the inherent fear common believers attach to life. This will mean recognising fully, without pretention, and without dismissing entirely the claims as superstitious, the reality of evil and suffering and engaging the issue theologically and biblically. And this calls for real involvement of the ordained ministers whose duty is to shepherd the flock and ensure they do not fall prey to unscrupulous "shepherds."

This paper about prophetic practices has presented critical issues about the way Ghanaian Pentecostals see Jesus in the context of evil and suffering. In so doing Ghanaian Pentecostals contribute to the ongoing debate on the faces of Jesus in theological discourses. It is important to reflect on the various ways this Pentecostal face of Jesus presents to us. One critical idea that this Christology presents us is the power of Christ. Power is crucial in Ghanaian Pentecostalism in several ways. First, it is associated with Spirit empowerment. The Pentecostal idea about spiritual warfare brings on board the need for spiritual anointing. It is the anointing that empowers the believer to work the works of God

in dispossessing the devil over his usurped possessions. In this way power becomes divine enablement for discomfiting satanic controls.

Second, this idea of power is not just a religious terminology but can be socio-economic and political also. The idea of power is very important in Ghanaian religio-cultural, socio-economic and political understandings. It conveys undertones of social significance, control, influence and authority over people. In Ghana power defines who rules and who is to be ruled. But often underpinning all is economic power since it is common knowledge among Ghanaians that real power lies in wealth. Power underpins both secular and sacred politics. Through my interaction with theological students, mostly pastors, as a lecturer, and personal discussions with many pastors/prophets I have come to conclude that some so-called prophets/pastors acquire occult powers to exercise unrestrained influence on their church members. It is the same craving for influence, significance and control that underline many Ghanaian politicians' alleged dabbling in the occult. It is their quest to control that even makes many of them use religion as a façade for legitimising their clinging to power. And yet intimidating as the powers of this world are, the Ghanaian Pentecostal will insist they stand before their Lord as weaklings, unable to match the incomparable power of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have examined some characteristics and practices of Ghanaian Pentecostal prophetism in order to answer questions about its nature and some of the critical issues that arise from its practices. We have seen that Pentecostal prophets employ certain rituals to mediate divine help in their clients' lives. The potency and persistency of prophetic services by all indications thrive on clients' fear and some prophets' desire to make the Scriptures work at all cost. Fear of the unknown offers unscrupulous prophets a sure means to cash in on clients' commitment and wealth to sustain their lives and operations. The situation may not be different from Hank Hanegraaff's "fear and sympathy" antics of prosperity preachers.<sup>45</sup> This leads us to what we may call Pentecostal pragmatism which plies on the belief that as long as an act or practice works it is authentically divine and should not be questioned.

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<sup>45</sup> Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 193-209.