

THE GHANAIAN CHURCH SCENE TODAY

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Abstract

For a vivid description of the nature and levels of patronage accorded the various types of churches in Ghana, one requires a bird's eye-view of what the picture looks like countrywide. "The Ghanaian Church Scene Today" therefore deals, first of all, with a Typology involving 1. The Historic Churches, 2. Other Mission-Related Churches, 3. The Pentecostal Churches, 4. The Independent "Charismatic" Churches and 5. The Independent "Spiritual" Churches. Secondly, there is the examination of labels, definitions and descriptions that take account of the historical context, the demographic distribution and also theological and other emphases of the various churches that have emerged on the Ghanaian church scene.

Introduction

By the turn of the twentieth century the various mission agencies and missionaries had done enough to establish a vibrant and growing Church in Ghana. Having overcome the initial inertia and having gathered the required momentum, the Church in Ghana, planted through a lot of pain, anxiety, struggle and immense sacrifice, was poised for very rapid advance and growth. The following testimony about Ghana Methodism, recorded by Bartels, is representative of the broad picture of the Ghanaian Church during the period:

There was a great deal to tell British Methodism. In the matter of numbers in the previous year Ghana was 'the most successful district in Methodism'. The Methodist Church in England reported a decrease in membership of 8,000. The churches outside the British Isles reported a total increase of 1,600, out of which the increase in Ghana was 961. The report for the year claimed that financial support had kept pace with expansion of the work, and firmly stated in no part of the world was Christianity making more rapid progress than in Ghana.¹ (Emphasis mine).

If this has been said before of the Ghanaian Church, the big question that should engage one's attention is whether or not this can be said of the Church today. This article seeks to answer this crucial question.

The extent to which the firm foundations laid by the missions have been built upon by subsequent generations of Christians has to be critically examined. This is what this article

attempts to do. Clearly, this is not an easy task in view of the constant change on the religious scene in Ghana and the problem of establishing the extent and character of the numerous churches that have emerged. One would require a bird's eye-view of the Ghanaian Christian scene in preparation for a critical examination of gains made by the Church since the early part of the twentieth century. Such a picture is required for a realistic comparative study and an objective analysis of growth trends in the various churches.

This calls for a careful attempt at categorizing these churches with a view to facilitating the much-needed attention. There is, thus, the need for labels, definitions and descriptions that will take account of the historical context, the demographic distribution and also theological and other emphases of the various churches. It is in the light of this that the focus of this article is an attempt at a typology of the churches and an examination of existing denominational groupings in the country.

A Typology

Generally, five broad distinctions may be made relating to the various types of the Ghanaian Church. This classification is based, firstly, on the roots and origins and in particular, the eras of missionary activities resulting in the various churches; i.e. the eras of the Pioneer missions, Pentecostal missions, African Independent missions, and other foreign missions. Secondly, the classification takes into account belief systems and modes of operation of the churches. The distinctions will prepare the grounds for raising analytical questions like.

1. Which of the various categories are active in Church Growth?
2. Which kinds of churches are growing and which are declining or growing only marginally?
3. Which of the sub-typologies in foremost in promoting growth?
4. How do the various sub-typologies hold the potential for and promote growth?
5. What would a comparison of the sub-typologies yield as far as growth within the main typologies is concerned?

My main typology comprises the following classifications:

1. *The Historic Churches*
2. *Other Mission-Related Churches*
3. *The Pentecostal Churches*
4. *The Independent "Charismatic" Churches*
5. *The Independent "Spiritual" Churches*

There have been earlier typologies of churches in Ghana. One such typology by Elom Dovo² that is concerned with the changing scenes of Christian Renewal in Ghana has three distinctions. The distinctions, which are based on three phases of renewal movements, are:

1. The Independent Churches originating in Ghana popularly known as the Sumsum Sore (Spiritual Churches)
2. The Classical Pentecostal movements originating in and outside Ghana with established churches such as the Assemblies of God etc; and
3. The Neo-Pentecostal movement which began in the Americas in the 1960's and found active expression in Ghana from the 1970's.

Arising from the above are three acceptable terms in popular usage, which can be adopted, for scholarly usage. These are Independent/Spiritual Churches for the first, Pentecostals for the second and Charismatics for the third.

Since this present work is not limited to the emerging renewal movements, which are Dovol's focus, there is the need for a different typology that will take care of churches in existence before the onset of the renewal movements. I have also found it necessary to re-designate the independent/spiritual and charismatic churches to bring out the fact that they are both African initiated "independent" churches.

Abamfo Atiemo³ also has eight categories in his discussion of the challenge of New Religious Movements. Three of his categorization (common to Dovol's referred to above) which are relevant to this work are:

1. African Independent Churches
2. Pentecostal Churches
3. The Charismatic Churches/Ministries

My typology is influenced partly by these three generally acceptable terms in popular usage. Consideration is also given to some sub-typologies partly borrowed from Dovol's sub-typology⁴ to reinforce my main classifications. These are: *Organisational Structure; Leadership; Membership; Worship; Emphasis on the Holy Spirit; and Sacraments*. These by no means exhaust the distinguishing characteristics but they will be helpful, at least, in helping us see the different groups in the right perspective as far as the main typology is concerned. The main classifications are described below.

Historic Churches

The sacrificial efforts of the pioneer missions from Western Europe and later from the United States of America resulted in a number of established church denominations in Ghana. These are denominations, which, besides being national in character, i.e. found virtually throughout the country, are very orthodox in their operation (i.e. following strictly the older, more traditional practices of Western countries). Referred to variously as "*mainline*", "*mission*", "*orthodox*" and "*established*", these churches differ from the others such as pentecostal and charismatic churches in many ways; and a majority of them have operated in the country for well over a century. They include the *Presbyterian Church of Ghana* (172 years), the *Methodist Church*,

Ghana (165 years), the *Evangelical Presbyterian Church* (153 years), the *Roman Catholic Church* (112 years), the *A.M.E. Zion Church* (102 years), the *Seventh Day Adventist Church* (102 years) and the *Anglican Church* (96 years). It is the length of their existence in the country, spanning a period of about 130 years on the average, which has influenced my choice of the designation “*historic*” for this group of churches.

Other Mission-Related Churches

A number of churches have resulted from the second wave of overseas missionary involvement commencing in the early 1940s, mostly among northern people groups in both Northern and Southern Ghana. Notable among the churches emerging from these latter missions are the *Evangelical Churches of Ghana* of the *Worldwide Evangelization Crusade (WEC) Mission*; the *Good News Churches* of the *Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)*; the *Evangelical Lutheran Churches* of the *Evangelical Lutheran Mission*; and the *Churches of Christ* of the *Churches of Christ Mission*.

Pentecostal Churches

Prominent Pentecostal churches resulting from missionaries activities of Pentecostal Missions that started work in the country in the early 1930s include the *Assemblies of God*, the *Apostolic Church*, the *Christ Apostolic Church* and the *Church of Pentecost*. These are the churches, which, to a large extent, subscribe to Steve Durasoff’s description of Pentecostals quoted below:

Pentecostals are Christians (who have an) earnest desire to recapture the early practices of the first followers of Jesus of Nazareth. They are Spirit-filled Christians who claim it is possible to duplicate the dynamic lives of the disciples, to know Jesus as a powerful person in the present through the enablement of God the Holy Spirit ... They have accepted Jesus Christ as personal savior (and) believe the miracles ... (An) experience common to all Pentecostals (is) the baptism of the Holy Spirit (which) occurs in answer to the humble, believing prayers of earnest Christians, when they meet Jesus in a new dimension as Baptizer in the Spirit (and as evidenced) by speaking in tongues and praising God in languages neither understood nor acquired.⁵

A number of Pentecostal churches, particularly those enumerated above, have assumed a national character, competing very effectively with the historic churches which started operating in Ghana over one hundred years earlier. The choice of the description “Pentecostal” for this group of churches is obvious considering the fact that the missions giving birth to these churches are described as “Pentecostal missions.”

Independent “Charismatic” Churches

In Ghana what has been internationally labeled as Neo-Pentecostal movement arising in the 1970s has not limited itself to fellowships and renewal in mainline churches. It has also led to the proliferation of a new breed of Independent churches of somewhat different ilk distinguishable from the other independent churches designated “spiritual” in this work. Investigations have revealed that many of the inter-denominational fellowships of the late 1960s were revitalized around the 1970s under the influence of international evangelist, particularly, the Nigerian Benson Idahosa who, in fact, encouraged the move from “fellowships” to “church formation”. Thus, existing evangelical fellowships like the Scripture Union and the University Christian Fellowship provided the initial source of recruitment for the movement.

It will be necessary, for obvious reasons, to draw a distinction between churches from this movement known in Ghana as “charismatic” and the other Pentecostal churches. This is important because of the possibility of drawing the conclusion that it is merely the semantics (or the meaning of the word by which either grouping is called) that spells out the difference between them. In making a distinction, it may be helpful to make reference to the observation of a French writer published a few years ago in a French newspaper, *Le Figaro*⁶. He argued that ***“both Pentecostals and Charismatics are widely different Christian religious sects, with the latter (the Charismatics) practicing what is “unorthodox”***. This was explained to mean that the Charismatics opt for what is cultural or indigenous, are preoccupied with the performance of miracles and preach ***“prosperity gospel”*** at the expense of salvation evangelism – exactly what the Pentecostals frown upon. Some of the many churches resulting from the neo-Pentecostal movement, who mostly prefer the designation ***“ministries”***, are the ***Christian Action Faith Ministry***, the ***Redemption Hour Faith Ministry***, and the ***International Central Gospel Church***. According to Dovo⁷ these churches prefer to be called “Charismatic Ministries” because they hold their activities to be under the dynamic guidance of the Holy Spirit; because they believe that individuals are endowed with the Holy Spirit and use His gifts and fruits to “minister” to themselves and the church. People with the same gifts are identified so that they could minister together as a team within the same church. For instance, they have such teams as “Praise Team, “Deliverance Team”, “Prayer Warriors,” etc.

Independent “Spiritual” Churches

Generally, the churches founded on the indigenous renewal of the first half of the century have been referred to as ***“African Independent Churches*** or ***“Separatist Churches”***. They are so called because, as Parrinder explains, they ***“split away from or sprung up in relative independence of the older mission churches”***⁸. Others call them ***“African Instituted Churches”*** probably to stress their indigenous foundations and membership. Baeta, however, prefers ***“Spiritual Churches”*** because they engage in activities that are either meant to invoke the Spirit of God or are meant to be signs of His descent upon the worshippers⁹. Mbon, in the

Journal *Update*, in view of their soteriological concerns, suggests the use of the adjective “**Protectionist**” because:

*... the members of African’s new religious movements are in the move – first and foremost because they feel a need to be protected against life’s circumstances and believe with all their hearts that they will find such protection in the new movement. The protection sought may be individual or command and may included physical protection, spiritual protection, political protection, economic protection and sociocultural protection.*¹⁰

In this present work these churches are referred to as **Independent “Spiritual” Churches** to distinguished them from the other independent churches designated “**Charismatic**”. This does not, in any way, suggest that the other churches are not spiritual. In fact, the local term, “*sumsum sore*” (meaning, **Spiritual Church**), it would appear, is applied loosely to all churches other than the historic churches.

It has already been pointed out that the visit to Ghana in 1914 by Prophet Wade Harris marked the beginning of Independent African churches. The Harris movement, as we have noted, gave this rise to certain churches, notably, “**The Grace Tanne’s Faith Healing Church**” and John Nackabah’s “**Twelve Apostles Church**”. Other churches like “**The West African Water Healing Society**” and “**The Kajirfeh Divine Healing Society**” had links with the Harris movement. Several other churches sprung up outside the Haris initiative and from break away prayer and healing groups in mainline churches. Currently there are over 600 of these “spiritual” churches (including many one-congregation churches).

Other key churches in this group included the “**Mozama Disco Christo Church**”, the **Apostles Revelation Society**”, the “**Divine Healers Church**” the “**Church of the Lord Brotherhood**”, the “**African Faith Tabernacle**”, the “**Cherubim and Seraphim**”, the “**Church of Christ (Spiritual Movement)**”, the “**Saviour Church of Ghana**”, and the “**United Christian Mission**”.

Organizational Structure

The **Historic Churches** have clearly defined administrative structures to cater for their congregations dotted all over the country. Generally, these churches have national Head Offices mostly located in Accra with Boards and/or Divisions which have corresponding committees and sub-committees at Regional, District and Congregational levels to ensure the co-ordination of all activities.

The **Other Mission-Related Churches** are relatively new mission churches that are yet to assume a national dimension in terms of how widely they are spread throughout the country. This is particularly because these churches mostly make specific Northern people groups their target. The result is that they do not have administrative structures as well defined as those of the

historic and Pentecostal churches; in fact, they do not even seem to require, at least for the movement, such elaborate structures for their operation.

The above-mentioned Pentecostal churches have very well organized administrative structures similar to those of the historic churches. With their Headquarters in Accra, their congregation (*assemblies* – is a preferred designation for congregations) are catered for administratively through office and office bearers at Regional and District levels. The structure of the Church of Pentecost is quite representative of the administrative structures of the Pentecostal churches.

Most of *the Independent “Charismatic” Churches* are yet to assume a national dimension and therefore may not have administrative structures as organized as those of the Historic and Pentecostal churches in the country. A few of them like the International Central Gospel Church have well organized administrative structures but it seems obvious that even in such cases they lack constitutions to back their administrative structures. For instance, the International Central Gospel Church is currently studying the Methodist Church constitution with a view to revolving one for themselves. In fact the leadership of this church asked for, and was granted observer status at the 1999 Methodist Conference held in Koforidua from 18th to 26th August.

The charismatic churches are mostly lone-man urban churches with only a few or no branches. The ultimate ambition of a number of these churches appears to be the establishment of mega *churches* reminiscence of the South Korean experience, where the membership of a single congregation could be as high as 700,000 served by as many as 750 pastors and having up to seven services on Sundays,¹¹. The administrative structures of Charismatics churches are therefore, quite naturally, geared towards achieving the objective of mega churches. The structure of *International Central Gospel Church* is characteristic of those churches that have this ambition.

A great percentage of these “spiritual” churches are one-congregation churches, therefore, quite naturally, they do not have any uniform organizational structure. Thus, in view of their being predominantly autonomous, their administration is rather varied. The following statement about the leadership structure of the Twelve Apostles Church illustrates this point:

The leadership is rather feeble. There is the Founder/Prophet, then the Executive Committee, the individual Committee and the local prophet. A ‘committee’ is not a Group of individuals, but a single elderly person¹²

A few of them would, nonetheless, be an exception in this regard. They include the Mozama Disco Christo Church, the Divine Healers Church and the Apostles Revelation Society, which have a few branches outside their original localities. The following is the administrative structure of the Mozama Disco Christo Church:

Leadership

At the national level *Moderators* (for the Presbyterians), a *Presiding Bishop* (for Methodist), *Bishops* or *Archbishops* (for Anglican, Roman Catholic and A.M.E. Zion) head the historic churches. The Episcopal churches in this group enjoy what may be described as Regional autonomy with regard to church administration. The Methodist Church, which went Episcopal recently (1999), is an exception here. Methodist District Chairmen are now designated Diocesan Bishops. For the others, under the national heads are, normally, Chairmen at the Regional level; District Pastors/Superintendent Ministers (Methodist) in the Districts and Pastors at the local congregational level, especially in the bigger towns.

Even though the laity feature prominently in the running of the historic churches, leadership is vested mainly in the clergy who are normally well educated (holders of diploma and above) with the requisite theological education from established institutions in and outside the country. The selection process for entry into the ordained ministry must include passing competitive examinations and screening interviews. The clergy are predominantly male even though in the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, for instance, some women have been ordained and given key leadership responsibilities. The titles “*Reverend Minister*” and “*Reverend Father*” (for Anglican and Roman Catholic) are what have been adopted by the generality of pastoral leadership. Additional titles, “*Most Reverend*”, “*Right Reverend*” and “*Very Reverend*” are given to the top hierarchy of these churches. Leadership style in these churches in respect to preaching, dressing, etc. is similar to that which obtains in the countries of origin. For instance, the white clerical collar, suits, cassocks, and preaching gowns of the Western countries have to be used by the clergy. Sermons, which should be brief, normally not more than thirty minutes, are mostly preached from prepared scripts or from set outlines.

Leadership of these mission-related churches at the national level is mostly expatriate missionaries whose “headquarters” are, unlike the historic and Pentecostal churches, located at key centres of the targeted mission fields. Surrounding these missionaries are a number of key local leaders, mostly men, trained to give pastoral oversight to the churches which are normally located in rural (sometimes deprived) communities and in the slums and the “Zongos” of the urban communities. A very good example of this is the Evangelical Church of Ghana, which has a vocational school complex at Maamobi, a suburb of Accra, right in the midst of the people. In fact the Headquarters of the church and the residence of the President of the church are on the same property housing the school complex.

The pastors may be teachers and other people who have only elementary education. In some cases, however, pastors of these mission-related churches receive theological education at institutions like the Christian Service College in Kumasi, the Maranatha Bible College in Accra and the Ghana Christian College and Seminary also in Accra. Unlike pastors of the historic churches who assume clerical titles like “Reverend”, the pastoral leaders of the mission-related churches have stuck mainly to “*Pastor*” and “*Evangelist*”. In terms of clerical outfit, most of

them, rather than being in prescribed western attire, choose to dress like the people among whom they minister.

Chairmen (for Apostolic, Christ Apostolic, Pentecost) and General Superintendent in the case of the Assemblies of God head these Pentecostal churches at the national level. They are respected leaders regarded by the rank and file as “*Prophet*” or “*Apostle*” depending upon their spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:11). In the Church of Pentecost, for instance, the Chairman has the status of “*Prophet*” and under him are *Regional Apostles, District Pastors, Pastors, Lay Elders, Deacons* with pastoral responsibilities. Even though the Pentecostal churches attach importance to theological education, and in fact have their own theological institutions, emphasis is given to proven gifts and abilities in their mode of receiving people into the ordained ministry. Leadership style of the clergy, mainly male, is virtually an imitation of that of the related Western missionaries. Thus, pastors of the Apostolic, Christ Apostolic and Pentecost churches, for example, opt for foreign clerical outfit, which are mostly simple suits with the clerical collar. On the other hand pastors of Assemblies of God Church, like their American mentors, generally prefer suits with tie.

Most Charismatic churches began as Fellowships with lay leadership and it was mostly this leadership that became the clergy as the ministries emerged as church organisations. As regards their call, most of them stress a deep yearning accompanied by prayer and fasting prior to a final decision. Educated people who have attained at least secondary education mostly lead charismatic churches. Some of them are graduates and people of various professional qualifications such as bankers, accountants etc. In recent times some Charismatic churches have set up their own Bible Colleges for the training of their pastors but the assumption of clerical titles has often been prior to theological training.

Often the title, “*Reverend Minister*”, has been acquired, as a popular Ghanaian Newspaper puts it, by acclamation (and we may add proclamation), rather than ordination. At times the title is assumed after a period of gestation as an “*Evangelist*”. Some still combine the titles of “*Pastors*” and “*Evangelist*”. Some of these pastors, having obtained doctorate degrees mostly from American universities, also add the designation “*Doctor*”. However, unlike the leadership of the Independent “*Spiritual*” churches who apart from the designation “*Pastor*” prefer titles such as “*Apostle*”, “*Prophet*” and other exotic titles in vernacular or sacred languages, the leadership of Charismatic churches have stuck mainly to “*Reverend*”, “*Evangelist*” and “*Pastor*”. In recent times a few of them including Duncan Williams of *Action Faith Ministries* and Agyin Asae of *World Miracle Bible Church* have assumed the title of “*Bishop*”.

The leadership style in Charismatic Churches in respect of preaching, dressing, etc. is mostly an imitation of American evangelists like Kenneth Haggins, Kenneth Copeland and Morris Cerullo and others who have visited the country. Whereas Charismatic pastors generally prefer to dress themselves up in a traditional “*boubou*” designer attire – an affluent “*tuxedo*” or expensive, “*Agbada*” to show their “*Africanness*”, or to be in simple suit without any clerical collar,

perhaps, to show their “independence”, pastors of the Pentecostal Churches on the other hand opt for foreign clerical dresses. This seems to be what constitutes, a significant difference between the leadership of the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. Even though pastoral leadership in Charismatic churches is predominantly male, female members assume very prominent ministerial roles. Currently, the practice of clerical couples is in vogue, i.e. both the man and the wife becoming Reverend Ministers.

The leadership of most Independent “Spiritual” churches is mainly *Prophet/Prophetess* centred. Some of them are, however, led by *Pastors* and *Apostles* who use the title “*Reverend*” like other churches. Originally laymen within the mainline churches, they assumed their leadership roles and titles generally on the basis of “*a call through revelation*” such as visions, dreams and traumatic experiences accompanied by gifts, particularly the gift of healing. The status configuration of leadership is generally quite low and at best the Pastors are either teachers or have only elementary education. Currently, a few of them have attained higher levels of education. In fact, there are holders of university degrees (including doctoral degrees) among the leadership of the “**General Council**” which seeks to forge unity among these churches numbering over 600. These include Prophet M. Jona Jehu Appiah (President), Rev. Dr. Peter S. Freeman (Vice President), Rev. Dr. Richard Lawson (Education Director), Rev. N. T. Mintah (General Secretary) and Rev. Nana A. Prempeh (Legal Advisor). But it is true to say that most of the leaders of the Independent “Spiritual” churches are illiterate with literate or semi-literate secretaries or assistants.

Until very recently theological education was not the concern of leaders of a great number of these “spiritual” churches. The following from Rev. Allotey Pappoe’s paper stresses this point:

Training of priests and prophets is done informally through acquaintance with the order of service. Formal training is done when candidates are chosen from the “gardens” to the Headquarters at Asuom during the Easter week. This formal training is full of oaths sworn to the Founder, the church, the angels and spirit beings.¹³

The situation is now changing. For instance, the “*Good News Theological College & Seminary*” in Accra is now the designated theological institution for leaders of most of these churches. Leaders generally seem to be content with designations like prophet/prophetess, apostle and other exotic titles in vernacular or sacred language (like *Akaboha* and *Akatitibi* in the M.D. C. C.) Unlike the “Charismatic” churches, leadership in the “Spiritual” churches is more inclined towards “Africanness” and accuses the Charismatic churches of perpetuating religious neo-colonialism. Their mode of dressing is more humble mostly white robes.

Membership

A majority of adult members of the historic churches is female and the age structure generally includes people of all ages. For example, in both the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the

female population is around 65%. Also the Presbyterian Church, for instance, has 29% children under 12 years, 16% children between 12 and 17 years, 18% youth (ie. 18-35 years) and 37% adults.

In the rural communities a substantial proportion of members are either illiterates or semi-illiterate. They are people who engage mainly in traditional agricultural activities, petty trading and blue-collar jobs. In the urban communities, however, a good number of adult members are very well educated and are gainfully employed. The historic churches come by their membership largely through recruiting children from their schools and through encouraging parents who are members to register their children as members. Evangelism, as a mode of recruitment, cannot be ruled out. For instance, the Camp Meeting of the Methodist Church and the “Asempatrew” of the Presbyterian Church are evangelistic programmes that have added to the membership of these churches.

Because these newer mission churches mostly serve deprived communities, membership is naturally drawn from the poor, the illiterate and the semi-illiterate – people who are mainly peasant farmers, petty traders and labourers in both urban centres and rural localities. As regards gender it could be said that these churches appeal to both sexes even though a few of them appear to have a slightly higher percentage of female membership. The following figures will illustrate this point. The Church of Christ has about 40% female members whilst the New Apostolic Church has around 48% female members. The Evangelical Church of Ghana, on the other hand has about 60% female members.

These days the Pentecostal churches appear to be attracting all kinds of people – the old, the young, men and women of varying educational and social backgrounds. This is a very interesting phenomenon especially when one considers the fact that during their early days they did not, for instance, appeal to the educated and people of higher status in society. Also the vast majority of members in those days were mostly illiterate or semi-illiterate. The situation is very different today clearly because membership now includes those who have been trained over the years by the historic churches, i.e. people who have either attended schools established by the historic churches or who were originally members of the historic churches but have now been “converted” by the Pentecostal churches.

Whilst it is true to say that female membership is still on the higher side in some of the Pentecostal churches, there are others like the *Deeper Life Bible Church* which is attracting equal numbers of male and female members and sometimes more male members. Like the Charismatic churches, members are encouraged to invite friends and other relations who are accorded warm reception by the whole congregation and followed up to ensure subsequent attendance. This method of recruitment is in addition to the regular open-air meetings and periodic evangelistic crusades aimed at winning new converts.

On the average, the Charismatic churches have an equal ratio of male and female members. This is particularly true of International Central Gospel Church. The trend is changing rather fast in some of these churches. In the Action Faith Ministries and Word Miracle Church International for instance, female membership is now on the higher side i.e. 67% for both churches. The membership is youthful; and it may be said that generally above the age of 45 one begins to look out of place in these churches. It is true, nonetheless, to say that these days a number of elderly people are found patronizing the services of these churches; but as Dovlo observes,¹⁴ a number of these elderly Charismatics do fellowship at these churches mainly when they require the services of the minister to solve particular problems. It is true, nonetheless, to say that more and more elderly people are becoming full members of these churches. Thus, on the whole, the Charismatic churches “cater largely for students and “Yuppies” (Young and upcoming executives). The membership is therefore naturally literate, most of them having attained at least secondary education”¹⁵.

The main avenue of recruitment in Charismatic churches is evangelizing to win new converts. Members are encouraged to bring friends who are warmly welcomed. They also keep track of first time attendants at their services to ensure that they get interested in membership. In this respect Charismatic churches are similar to Pentecostal churches. It must be noted, however, that membership of the Christian churches is drawn mainly from among the youth of the other Christian denominations, especially the historic churches. This, according to Dovlo, confirms the fact that the movement is essentially a renewal movement operating within Christianity and not necessarily beyond it.

The thrust of these Ministries is to increase the number of “born again” Christians through baptism of the Holy Spirit. Evangelism operates mainly along the line of an operational division of the Christians in Ghana into three classes – the “born again”, the large number of “church goers” surrounding them and an even larger shadowy penumbra of unchurched Christians. It is to the last two groups that Charismatic churches direct their evangelism. The membership of these churches is largely fluid due to the “grassroots ecumenical” nature of the Charismatic movement, i.e. members fellowship with and easily move from one Ministry to another. In addition, there is what has come to be known as “Flock stealing” whereby a Charismatic Minister may entice people away from one Ministry to his own Ministry.

A majority of adult members of “Spiritual” churches is female. The age structure includes people of all ages, as it is the case with the historic churches. The educational level of membership is generally low, and they are people who mainly engage in petty trading, peasant farming and blue-collar jobs. In contrast with charismatic churches whose main avenue of recruitment is evangelism, the spiritual churches, especially those that have not imbibed the classical pentecostal spirit, rarely go on evangelistic drives. They rather depend mostly on the fame of the leader spreading abroad and attracting new “clients” who may stay on as church members. This is again underscored by the following example of the Twelve Apostolic Church.

Missionary outreach among the Twelve Apostolic Church is never done through open air preaching or crusades. After an individual is healed a day is set for the Outdooring of the healed. This is done in the form of a procession through the principal street and within the communities amidst drumming and singing and dancing. The colourful attires and songs are expected to attract more sick and afflicted people to the gardens.¹⁶

Worship

Generally, worship in the historic churches is very formal with carefully prepared liturgies. In a good number of these churches both leadership and the generality of the membership would hardly tolerate departure from traditional modes of worship. Worship is, therefore, not as vibrant and lively as that of some of the newer churches. Hymns and canticles are mostly sung and prayers (except the Lord's Prayer) are said by the leader and sometimes by one or two people. It is not unusual, nonetheless, to find the use of local choruses with percussion instruments and clapping in some of these churches during worship. In fact such singing has become an integral part of the order of service in a number of these churches, especially during offertory time.

One of the strengths of the historic churches is the well-structured classes for Bible Study and teaching. The Methodist Church, for example, has inherited the class system, which is designed to ensure interaction during Bible Study because of the smallness of classes. For churches that have taken this system seriously it has proved very beneficial. Largely, preaching in these churches during worship is more intellectual than emotional. Care is taken concerning the doctrinal content of sermons, normally preached from prepared scripts.

The mission-related churches do not appear to have either a particular or peculiar mode of worship. This is clearly because of the varied background from which they have come. In a number of them, which prefer the designation "evangelical", their style of worship resembles that of the Pentecostals or charismatics. Preaching of the word is an important part of the worship service of these churches and most of their sermons touch on salvation, evangelism and mission.

Worship appears to be the greatest asset of the Pentecostal churches. Peter Wagne identifies worship of Pentecostals as a key factor for their rapid growth. Writing about Pentecostal churches in Latin America, he observes:

One of the first things you notice when you go into a worship service in a Pentecostal Church is how much the people seem to enjoy themselves. The Hardest thing to find in one of the Pentecostal services is a wide yawn. Unfortunately yawns are all too common in many other churches ... But since Pentecostals have fun going to church; they do not hesitate to bring others along.¹⁷

This description fits the Pentecostal churches in Ghana. They love “celebrations”, worshipping in large numbers. These large gatherings, Wagner observes, help to make the worship memorable and eventful. Going to church, for Pentecostals, becomes an occasion to renew friendships and share experiences. In these churches people arrive early and stay late because they like being together. It is unlike some other churches where greetings are never exchanged and where it is possible to attend church for years with only a “Good bye” at the door to the minister. People are free to participate. When it is time to pray, their natural and spontaneous prayers encourage even the timid to pray. When it is time for personal testimonies, there is no shortage of volunteers. They feel free to contribute with exclamations of praise etc. as the service progresses. They are allowed to move. They can raise their hands or kneel or dance.

Openness to the intervention of the Holy Spirit during services is another characteristic feature of these churches. There is a sense of expectancy and faith – an anticipation that God will speak and act. They expect the sick to be healed, unbelievers to be converted and the troubled to be comforted. Contemporary and popular music including local choruses makes worship livelier. Drums and instruments like the guitar; the organ and accordion are played to the accompaniment of clapping and percussion instruments during worship. Preaching is also directed to the heart rather than the head. Such preaching, though not without doctrinal content, is more emotional than intellectual, relating to the life situation of the ordinary church member. Particular effort is made at a simple yet effective presentation of the word.

Like the Pentecostal churches, it is the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit that is supposed to mark the worship of the Charismatic churches. Worship is conducted in English and is ecstatic, characterised by various motor reactions expressive of intense religious emotions. It is vibrant and full of lively music. They often make use of Western instruments such as the electronic organ, guitars, bands etc. and have largely contributed to the emergence of a vibrant gospel music industry in the country. Preaching of the word is an important part of the worship service of these churches. It is often heralded by a ‘worship hour’, when music and prayer are used to tune in the congregation before they are fed with the word of God. The predominant sermon theme is “Prosperity” – the concept that a believer in Christ is entitled to seek and expect prosperity from God instead of being content with poverty or with his poor estate in life. It is this emphasis or rather overemphasis on “prosperity gospel” which distinguishes this group of churches from the Pentecostal churches, for instance, who believe that such an overemphasis could be disastrous.

As Dovlo rightly observes, this emphasis “must have had much attraction within the historical milieu of acute economic deprivation of the 1970s and early 1980s when the Charismatic Ministries emerged on the Ghanaian scene”¹⁸. People were conscious of the abundant wealth available in the country but acquired immorally as symbolized in the practice of hoarding of goods, cheating and profiteering known as “kalabule”. The ‘prosperity’ message promised that wealth was available and could be acquired morally through relying on the power of Jesus and more particularly by sowing the seeds for such blessing through the payment of tithes. Indeed,

the anticipation/realization for this goal is reflected in the physical appearance of members at worship. They normally wear neat, fine and often expensive clothes.

Closely related to the issue of “prosperity” is the emphasis, in Charismatic churches and in this case, also in Pentecostal and “Spiritual” churches, on “deliverance” which involves being exorcised of all evil influences and powers. This insistence on, or the preachment of miracles by Charismatics, as Apostle Kwamena Ahinful observes¹⁹, is known to agree with the African’s ethos of expecting divine interventions in their daily problems. Thus, the penchant to remove evil spirits tormenting people or redeem those under satanic bondage, is more customary to a typical Ghanaian folk who has been or heard of someone having been set free from witchcraft by a one-time ‘Tigare’ cult or juju, and who with the advent of Christianity, would want to see similar deliverance for himself by the power of the Holy Spirit. Abamfo Atiemo²⁰ makes this point even stronger to be underscores the following **spiritual** reasons for the attraction of people to these churches.

- a. The need for a sense of mystery – the desire to be united with God, the search for a spiritual experience that transforms.
- b. The desire for supernatural power to overcome destructive habits, weaknesses, and difficulties in one’s life, e.g. help to overcome smoking, drunkenness etc.
- c. The need for spiritual guidance, i.e. people want leaders they can rely on and look up to for guidance through life.

Intensive Bible Study and teaching are also given credence in Charismatic churches. Because most members have attained an appreciable level of education, they organize regular Bible study sessions and other teaching seminars. Further, there is an extensive use of audio-visual aids to reach members in their homes. Tapes of sermons, lectures and deliverance services of both local and international evangelists are in wide circulation and are highly patronized.

Baeta describes the signs that mark out Independent Churches as:

*Rhythmic swaying of the holy, usually stamping, to repetitive music (both vocal and instrumental, particularly percussions), hand-clapping, ejaculations, poignant cries and prayers, dancing, leaping, and various motor reactions expressive of intense religious emotions, prophecies, speaking in tongues, falling into trances, relating dreams and visions and witnessing i.e. recounting publicly one’s own miraculous redemption.*²¹

This description, to a very great extent, fits the Independent Churches designated “spiritual” in this work. This description may apply to the “charismatic” churches as well; for worship in both churches is ecstatic and characterized by the above description. But whereas the charismatic churches use English, the spiritual churches use vernacular during worship. In the spiritual churches, instruments used are mainly drums, cymbals and the banjo. Where western instruments are used, the music may not be as polished and professional as is found in the charismatic churches.

Preaching of the word in most spiritual churches centres mainly on healing and restoration. The leaders lean mainly on the healing miracles of Jesus, drawing on New Testament examples to give the assurance that through His power the same can be effected today. The main thrust of preaching and practice is, therefore, seeking God's protection and help to overcome unemployment, barrenness, pursuit by evil spirit and all other ills. Dovlo observes that "this message may have been relevant to the historical milieu in which these spiritual churches emerged".²² It has been suggested that they emerged partially to replace discredited traditional means of combating evil powers and ailments that threaten life – powers mostly externalized. For instance, as Abamfo Atiemo points out, "the influenza epidemic at the end of the second World War led to the formation of small prayer and healing groups that were to form the roots of the "spiritual" churches".²³

According to Dovlo,²⁴ the protectionist emphasis of the "spiritual" churches may also be linked with their physical appearance at worship. Most of these churches require members to use white soutanes (flowing gowns) and the women normally use white scarves. It is believed that this signifies the purity of worshippers, a state that inhibits attacks from inimical powers. Sustained and planned Biblical teaching is lacking in most "spiritual" churches, probably because of the level of most leaders and members. In fact, it has been observed that rather than study the Bible, some of these churches treat it mystically and use it magically to ward off evil. This phenomenon marks out the "spiritual" churches from the "charismatic" churches, which, on the other hand, give prominence to Bible teaching.

Emphasis on the Holy Spirit

Dovlo observes that one major differentia that may be noted with respect to the operation of the Holy Spirit in various churches is the availability and use of spiritual gifts. It is in this respect that it may be said that emphasis is not placed on the Holy Spirit in the historic churches, that is, speaking generally. In contrast with most newer churches who maintain that each member can, and must not only receive the Holy Spirit but also the gifts (1 Cor. 12. 8-10), the historic churches do not put so much premium on such an emphasis, at least in practice. This does not suggest, nevertheless, that the Holy Spirit's work is looked down upon in the historic churches. Indeed there is constant reference to the Holy Spirit in sermons, hymns etc. but it is the type of emphasis found in the other churches that is lacking.

Being mostly evangelical, the mission-related churches give due regard to the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. However, they are generally not found to give the kind of emphasis on spiritual or charismatic manifestations found in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Like most historic churches, emphasis is rather placed on the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). In some isolated cases however, some similarities with regard to emphasis on spiritual manifestation could be observed.

It is the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit that supposedly marks the Pentecostal churches. This, in fact, is borne out by the designation, “Pentecostal” which is widely accepted by this group of churches. They maintain that each member can, and must not only receive the Holy Spirit but also the gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-19) and the fruit (Gal. 5:22, 23) of the Spirit. The word “Pentecostal” reflects the historical Christian ‘pentecoste’ or Pentecost Day occurrences – principally, the speaking in tongues of the disciples, and the bold evangelization power which descended on believers. Accordingly, Pentecostals in Ghana are known by their tongues-speaking and evangelization preoccupations. Like the Charismatics, Pentecostals emphasize the doctrines of “born-againism” and baptism in the Holy Spirit signified by speaking in tongues. They also give a level of prominence to the extraordinary powers of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, more particularly healing, miracles and prophecies.

The word “charismatic” refers specifically to the workings of the gifts (“charismata” in Greek) of the Holy Spirit. These divine charismata are essentially known to be nine in number (1 Cor. 12: 4, 8-10). Charismatic churches are, by implication, those which broadly emphasize upon all or most of the extraordinary powers or gifts of the Holy Spirit, more particularly, healing, miracles, prophecies and tongues. It is significant to note that partly because of their stress on the priesthood of the laity, the Charismatic churches maintain that each member can, and must not only receive the Holy Spirit but also the gifts (1 Cor. 12:4, 8-10) and the fruit (Gal. 5:22,23). This does not, however, mean that the leadership of these churches may not be acknowledged for their peculiar gifts. What is stressed in respect of the presence of the Spirit is not possession and ecstasy alone as is the case in ‘spiritual’ churches, but bearing the fruit and receiving the gifts of the Spirit through Holy Spirit Baptism to minister to personal needs as well as the corporate needs of the church.

Spiritual gifts are, therefore, not the prerogative of one individual leader. Rather the leadership is expected to guide members to mature in the faith, gifts and fruit. As Hollenweger rightly notes, there is an opportunity in the charismatic movements for every member to grow or develop into maturity autonomously. Accordingly, Dovlo observes that these movements are “a ‘Do it Yourself’ (DIY) movement. The main kit they use is the grace of the Holy Spirit”.²⁵

There is a marked difference between “spiritual” churches and “charismatic” churches with regard to members access to spiritual potency and maturity. Within the “spiritual” churches, it seems that the general membership is mostly restricted to the gift of glossolalia while the leaders are the custodians of other gifts such as healing, prophesying, etc. Such gifts are generally used for the benefit of members and “clients”. As a result people solicit their prayer, hence the local (perhaps derogatory) reference to them as “Pray for me churches”. In effect, one sees in the “spiritual” churches a leader-client type of relationship. Members approach the leader as a “spiritual luminary” who holds near monopoly of the solutions to all their problems. This creates some distance between the members and leaders and sustains a relationship of awe and reverence (in a number of instances members have to kneel before leaders). The few members that may

develop any spiritual potency are elevated to priesthood (after being taught how to heal for instance).

Sacraments

Prominence is given to the sacraments, especially the sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharists and Marriage in the historic churches. Unlike most newer churches that scorn infant baptism, the historic churches do not see anything wrong and in fact encourage it. Sprinkling is the mode of baptism adopted by these churches. Normally adults who convert to Christianity would rather go through the confirmation ritual instead of baptism. In some cases for the adult, baptism and confirmation are combined. Admission to the Eucharist is exclusively for communicant adults which means that all children and also adults who for various reasons are not “full members” are excluded from the Eucharist. Church weddings and marriage blessings are encouraged in these churches even though it is for people aspiring for leadership positions that this seems to be an obligation. Apart from the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches who value and use sacramentals such as candles, incense and holy water, a great number of the historic churches scarcely have anything to do with them.

The sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are particularly important in the mission-related churches. Generally, they practice adult baptism whilst conducting special reception services at which infants are “blessed” rather than baptized. A number of these churches are quite flexible when it comes to admission to the Eucharist that, to many, is a communal meal open to all. One may observe children going to the altar with their parents to partake in the Eucharist.

The sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharist and Marriage are important in Pentecostal churches. They believe and practice adult baptism, their mode of baptism being immersion. Instead of baptizing infants, these churches receive and “bless” or “dedicate” them. The Eucharist is open to adult members of the churches who are regularly reminded of the expected attitudes and lifestyle of those who come to the Lord’s table. Pentecostals maintain a strong teaching on monogamous marriage and encourage members to look for life partners, ideally, among fellow Pentecostals. Frequent weddings are therefore a mark of these churches. Like some of the other churches, Pentecostals do not encourage the use of sacramentals like Holy water, Florida water, candles and incense in their churches.

The sacrament of Baptism is important in Charismatic churches. They practice adult baptism by immersion. They also stress Holy Spirit baptism and prior to baptism, new members are put through convert classes. Normally, those who have already been baptized (usually in the historic churches) by sprinkling may have to be re-baptized by immersion. Some of these churches, however, receive new members in other ceremonies without re-baptizing them. The Eucharist is another important sacrament that is celebrated very often in Charismatic churches.

They also maintain a strong teaching on monogamous marriage and encourage and counsel membership (consisting mainly of people of the right age) to look for life partners. Frequent weddings are, therefore, a mark of these churches, which, in fact, are considered a place where one may find a suitable spouse. The fact that they have a balanced sex distribution indeed provides easier avenue for match-making and this could probably be the reason for an unprecedented mass wedding (at the same ceremony) recently involving 28 couples in the International Central Gospel Church in Accra. Unlike the “spiritual” churches, Charismatic churches greatly frown upon the use of sacramentals like Holy Water, Florida Water, candles and incense. They generally see such sacramentals as the means by which all sorts of spirits may be transmitted to people. The practice of anointing people with oil for the purposes of healing etc. could, however, be found in Charismatic churches.

The Independent “Spiritual” Churches do accept the sacrament of Baptism and believe and practice adult baptism by immersion (a number of these prefer to do this at the beach). The Eucharist, which is a very important sacrament of the Christian Church, is not much celebrated by most “spiritual” churches for several reasons. Andrew Walls²⁶ has attributed this to the fact that it has not been a prominent feature of African Christianity as a whole due to the insistence on, yet the lack of priests or ministers to officiate. Also there is the conflict with local marriage customs of polygamy which restricts the communion, in practice, to a minority. Again because a majority of the “spiritual” churches accept polygamy, the sacrament of Marriage is rarely celebrated.

One major distinguishing characteristics of the “spiritual” churches is the use of sacramentals such as Holy Water, Florida Water, Candles and incense. Some of these churches also celebrate special customs with extensive rituals, some in secret and at sacred place. Further, due to their predilection for the Old Testament most “spiritual” churches adhere to certain taboos such as Levitical laws on menstruating women and other purificatory rites which anchor the Christian faith in their traditional African religious experience.

The purpose of this article has been to give a bird’s eye-view of the Ghanaian religious scene as far as the various types of churches are concerned. To achieve this purpose, there has been the need for certain categorizations based on various factors including historical context, the demographic distribution and also theological and other emphases of the various churches operating in Ghana.

Endnotes

- ¹ F. L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (Cambridge, 1986) p.172.
- ² E. Dovlo, "A Comparative Overview of Independent Churches and Charismatic Ministries in Ghana", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* Vol. II, No. II (1992), p.56.
- ³ Atiemo, A.O., *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and Other Reflections* (Accra, 1997), p.30.
- ⁴ Dovlo, *op.cit.*, p.57. Whereas Dovlo's sub-typology does not include "organizational structure" (which I have included) his observations about what he calls *ICs* and *CMs* have largely been used.
- ⁵ Quoted in "History of the Church of Pentecost (West African)" by the Church of Pentecost History Committee as the basis for the eventual founding of the Church of Pentecost (see pp.6,7)
- ⁶ This was quoted in an article in the 30th May, 1998 issue of the *Daily Graphic* by Apostle Kwamena Ahinful.
- ⁷ Dovlo, *op.cit.*, p.62.
- ⁸ E. G. Parinder, *Religion in An African City* (Oxford University Press, London), p.107.
- ⁹ C. G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana* (SCM Press Ltd. London), p.1.
- ¹⁰ F. M. Mbon, "A New Typology for Africa's New Religious Movements" *Update*, Vol. 8, No. ¾ pp.34-42.
- ¹¹ Dr Bong Rin Ro reports that "Explosive church growth from 1975 -1990 has resulted in the development of some of the largest churches in the world the *Yoido Full Gospel Church (706,000 members)* *Youngnak Presbyterian Church (60,000 members)* and *Kwanglim Methodis Church (73,000 members)*".
- ¹² Quoted from a Missiology Research Paper on the Twelve Apostles Church submitted to the Faith Theological Seminary in Accra by Rev. J. H. Allotey Pappoe.
- ¹³ Rev. Allotey Pappoe, *op.cit.*
- ¹⁴ Dovlo, *op.cit.*, p.64.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.65.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ P. Wagner, *Look Out! The Pentecostal are coming* (Creation House, Carol stream, Illinois, 1973) p.106.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.69.
- ¹⁹ Kwamena Ahinful, *op.cit.*
- ²⁰ A. O. Atiemo, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections* (Presbyterian Press, Accra, 1997), p.34.

- ²¹ Baeta *op.cit.*,
²² Dovlo, *op.cit.*, p.69.
²³ *Loc.cit.*
²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.70.
²⁵ Dovlo, *op.cit.*, p.67.
²⁶ A. F. Walls, "The Anabaptists of Africa? The Challenge of African Independent Churches" *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 3 No. 2, April 1966, pp.48-51.

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