

# **Clothed with Power: Spirit-Inspired Renewal in African Christian- ity and the World Church**

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu PhD

Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra, Ghana

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## **Introduction**

These reflections examine the importance of charismatic renewal as a Pentecostal form. We will consider how it has inspired growth and dynamism in the church in Africa and what the implications of this development are for the world church. Pentecostals belong to the larger Protestant family and they share the traditional Evangelical theological emphases on the authority of the Bible, the centrality of the Cross, regeneration as the way to Christian salvation, and a call to holiness as the outflow of a new relationship with Christ. In addition to these theological themes, Pentecostal and charismatic movements became the 'third force' of Christendom from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because of the additional emphasis placed on the experience and power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism developed because historic mainline Protestantism has been accused of taking a very intellectual and liberal attitude to the Scriptures and thus neglecting the experiential elements of Christianity. This has been explained as being partly due to the Enlightenment culture in which things that cannot be proven by science and rationality were not taken seriously. In the process, Christianity suffered setbacks and today the major heartlands of the Christian faith have moved from the Western to the non-Western worlds.

There is still hope for the future because even in the secularizing West, there are quite a number of Christian communities who have kept the spirit of experiential Christianity alive. There are very dynamic renewal movements the world over, although by and large, it is in the global south these have really helped to energized Christianity by giving it a fresh lease of life in the hearts and lives of people. In Africa today, for example, even churches that trace their roots to the work of German European missions from Basel and Bremen are all turning to charismatic renewal. The argument of contemporary charismatic movements is that the absence of the dynamic presence of the Spirit from the church, particularly in its older Western contexts, turns it into something other than a place to encounter God. As an enthusiastic form of religion therefore, Pentecostalism generally promotes radical conversions, baptism of the Spirit with speaking in tongues, healing, deliverance, prophetic ministries and other such pneumatic phenomena including miracles and supernatural interventions in general.

## Pentecost and the Renewal of World Christianity

Pentecostal revivalism in the world is driven in part by a statement made by Peter following an enquiry from the crowd on what they should do in response to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. After hearing Peter preach so powerfully on what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ, they asked: “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and those who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:38-39).

Pentecostals took this promise seriously and not only did they appropriate it for the Christian lives but also share its message with people outside their own geographical locations. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pentecostalism was still a religion on the margins of world Christianity. Today, it is impossible to talk about world Christianity without reference to Pentecostalism. That the John Templeton Foundation, through the University of Southern California made available \$3.5 million USA dollars in 2008 for researching Pentecostalism worldwide was an indication of how important this stream of Christianity has become as a world religion. In this vein Harvey Cox, writing at the tail end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century noted how Pentecostal Spirituality was ‘reshaping religion’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In *Fire from Heaven* he explains the importance of Pentecostalism in terms of its experiential orientation:

The story of the first Pentecost has always served as an inspiration for people who are discontented with the way religion or the world in general is going. They turn to it because it is packed with promise. ...It is about the experience of God not about abstract religious ideas, and it depicts a God who does not remain aloof but reaches down through the power of the Spirit to touch human hearts, therefore...in our present time of social and cultural disarray...Pentecostalism is burgeoning everywhere in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity is itself a world religion and discussions on its growth and dynamism in non-Western contexts cannot be divorced from developments taking place in other parts of the globe. Thus it is not for nothing that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century many Faculties of Theology and Seminaries are appointing professors of world Christianity who would help to interpret prophetically the changing face of the faith globally. A useful example of the way in which Western and non-Western churches are influencing each other is how Anglican Churches in Africa are leading the way in the ‘rebellion’ against the authority of the Worldwide Anglican Communion in the face of the alternative sexual lifestyles ordination debate. The differences have been so sharp that one African schism in that part of the continent inspired a visit to Central Africa by the Archbishop of Canterbury in October 2011. In the same

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 4-5.

vein, the current recession of Christianity in the modern West must be interpreted against the backdrop of its accession in non-Western contexts.

This is where Spirit-inspired or pneumatic Christianity becomes important. These reflections take the position that the pneumatic orientation of non-Western Christianity accounts in significant measure for the growth and dynamism of the faith in these contexts. Christianity has since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century developed primarily as a non-Western religion and its public face is Pentecostal or Charismatic in outlook. The growth of the church in Africa, as elsewhere in the non-Western world, draws attention to the theological truth that the presence of Jesus Christ in the life of the church continues through the work of the Holy Spirit. Frank D. Macchia is a Pentecostal theologian with several useful books on the Holy Spirit. Against the backdrop of the fact that Acts of the Apostles is a historical account of the Holy Spirit and the great renewal that the Spirit accomplished through the early disciples, he writes that ‘God was so real’ to the apostles that ‘they lived daily in the awareness of his presence and guidance’ and this included God’s visitations ‘with undeniable signs of divine favor and power.’<sup>2</sup>

This experiential presence of the Holy Spirit, captured for us by Macchia, is a promise that has been fulfilled through Pentecost and is now being experienced by the church as an existential reality with eschatological implications. Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity is important in the understanding of world Christianity because even in most Western contexts where it is believed that Christian presence is on the decline, churches of Pentecostal and charismatic persuasion including many immigrant churches that possess the charismatic culture are doing well. Thus Sociologist of Religion David Martin describes ‘the astonishing rise of Pentecostalism and its associated penumbra of charismatic Christianity’ as ‘the largest global shift in the religious marketplace’ over the last half century.<sup>3</sup> Wherever it has appeared, Pentecostalism as my main title suggests, appeals to a biblical promise at the end of the Gospel of Luke...

- i. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49)

...and its fulfillment in the Acts of the Apostles in terms of experiential legitimacy:

- ii. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

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<sup>2</sup> Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 13.

<sup>3</sup> David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), xvii.

This 'clothing with power', Macchia further explains, was a divine act not dependent on human standards of experience but on divine standards. He describes being clothed with power as essentially of self-transcendence motivated by the love of God so that one feels especially inspired to give himself or herself to others in whatever gifting God has created within.<sup>4</sup> Being clothed with power means being empowered for service among God's people: 'The church is empowered for living witness in its community life, its inspired proclamation, and its multiple ministries in the Spirit.'

## Pentecost and the Charismatic Experience

Pentecost aims at revivalism and the renewal of world Christianity. Its emphasis in the modern world is on revivalism in Christian life as a lived experience of the Spirit that must be renewed time and again. It is because of that, that contemporary manifestations of Pentecostalism are generally classified in terms of 'charismatic renewal'. This is on account of their general orientation towards the restoration of the gifts of the Spirit including speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, visions and revelations, to the heart of dry denominationalism and moribund churches. One of the key texts inspiring charismatic renewal worldwide is the vision of dry bones encountered in the prophecies of Ezekiel. In most popular Pentecostal interpretations of that passage, the 'valley of dry bones' refers to moribund Christianity or dead churches 'paralyzed' by neglect of the fundamental biblical truths of regeneration by water and the Spirit, moral permissiveness and relativism through the reduction of the Bible into mere text rather than an active and living truth of divine inspiration. Thus for most believers in charismatic renewal, what God said to the valley of dry bones, he says to the contemporary church that has not been touched by his Spirit as articulated by Ezekiel:

This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life (Ezekiel 37:5-6).

In this passage, 'breath' is a metaphor for the Spirit of God. Thus in the charismatic experience, as Jürgen Moltmann notes, "God's Spirit is felt as *vitalizing energy*...In the Holy Spirit the eternal God participates in our transitory life, and we participate in the eternal life of God. This reciprocal community is an immense outflowing source of energy. We have called the energies of the Spirit which we charismatically experience, *vitalizing energies*, because they bring us to life."<sup>5</sup> The reference to the experience of the Holy Spirit as the source of 'vitalizing energy' explains why in addition to the traditional symbol of the *Dove*, Pentecostal/Charismatic communities greatly cherish the

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<sup>4</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Moltman, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 195-196.

Spirit in terms of *Fire* and the *Eagle*. Pentecostalism is a movement that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. It differs from other streams of Christianity by its affirmation and conscious promotion of the experiences of the Holy Spirit in church life. The Bible does not directly use the eagle as a symbol of the Spirit but that image has been incorporated in contemporary charismatic discourse because it represents the aspirations of contemporary Pentecostalism as a movement seeking to trade-in its depths for heights as one church in Ghana advertised its revival program. The Spirit as fire not only burns chaff and purifies to make holy but he also provides the inspiration needed to revive and renew the church. The dove may be gentle but fire is a source of energy and the eagle is depicted as a bird with super-energy and able to soar to unimaginable heights.

The expression 'charismatic' comes from *charismata*, meaning 'gifts of grace'. 'Charismatic' is thus used to refer to "renewal prayer fellowships" and analogous movements operating within and without historic mission denominations. Their aim is the revitalization of church life through the restoration of the *charismata pneumatika*, 'spiritual gifts' to its worship life (I Corinthians 12-14). Thus Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity has developed as a religion with a global culture that values, affirms, and *actively* promotes the experiential presence of the Holy Spirit as part of *normal* Christian life. There are three main reasons why charismatic Christianity has become the religion of choice in contemporary non-Western Christianity including in Africa and the African Diapora:

- i. The emphasis on personal transformation wrought by the Holy Spirit
- ii. The emphasis on the experience of the Holy Spirit with specific manifestations which makes worship both a heartfelt and body-felt experience
- iii. The interventionist nature of charismatic theology which is seen in healing, deliverance and prayer for breakthroughs in life

The bottom-line in all three factors identified above is the critical importance of religious experience as being of both personal and corporate value for religious people. In his book *Reinventing American Protestantism* Donald E. Miller refers to the contemporary churches that articulate a charismatic culture as 'new paradigm churches'. What he means by new paradigm churches is evident in the sort of experiential religious culture that they represent:

These new paradigm churches...are changing the way Christianity is looks and is experienced. ...Appropriating contemporary cultural forms, these churches are creating a new genre of worship music; they are restructuring the organizational character of institutional religion; they are democratizing

access to the sacred by radicalizing the Protestant principle of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>6</sup>

The heart of the distinctive appeal that Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity has for people 'lies in its empowerment through spiritual gifts offered to all'<sup>7</sup> and that can be experienced even today. This is what Miller means by the democratization of access to the sacred. To that end, one could even say that Pentecostalism must be understood as an *ecclesiological experience* rather than just a denominational movement because it brings together people with shared experiences of the Holy Spirit. Thus a major strength of charismatic renewal is its lay-orientation, which means, the Holy Spirit democratizes access to charisma and ministry comes to belong to all rather than just the ordained. The implications of the democratization of spiritual gifts are outlined by Allan H. Anderson:

This mass involvement of the 'laity' in the Pentecostal movement was undoubtedly one of the main reasons for its success. There was no need for a theologically articulate clergy, because cerebral and clerical Christianity had, in the minds of many people, already failed them. What was needed was a demonstration of power by indigenous people to whom ordinary people could easily relate. This was the democratization of Christianity, for henceforth the mystery of the gospel would no longer be reserved for a select privileged and educated few, but would be revealed to whoever was willing to receive it.<sup>8</sup>

Frank D. Macchia, along with Anderson's thinking here does recognize that there is globally a shift occurring today toward a 'new Christendom' with its greatest strength in the non-Western world. This new Christendom, he notes, tends to 'encourage charismatic, widely participatory, and missions-minded congregations.' The strength of this renewed Christendom, Macchia points out, is not in its sense of tradition or theological brilliance 'but in a powerful experience of communal praise, liberation, and mission. 'This renewal' in his words, 'tends towards an energized laity active in the realm of the Spirit in diverse and unique ways to build up the body of Christ and to function as witnesses for Christ to the world.'<sup>9</sup>

Thus Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian Donald L. Gelpi also writes that "the charismatic experience finds expression in a variety of spiritual gifts which are granted by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the entire community."<sup>10</sup> Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians believe that "pentecost", wherever it occurs, does so in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (2:28f.), and that signs and wonders must accompa-

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<sup>6</sup> Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, *Pentecostalism*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Allan H. Anderson, 'Global Pentecostalism in the New Millennium', in Allan H. Anderson and Walter J. Hollenweger ed., *Pentecostals after a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 214.

<sup>9</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 158.

<sup>10</sup> Donald L. Gelpi, *Pentecostalism: A Theological Viewpoint* (NY: Paulist Press, 1971), 83.



ny the ministry of today's church as they did in the ministry of the Apostles in Acts. Pentecostals/charismatic Christians "like to feel that they are alert to God's signs and wonders of whatever kind, wherever they have occurred, are occurring now, and will occur in the future."<sup>11</sup> We cannot explain the rise of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity and its attraction for young people in particular without reference to the activity of the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit is a Spirit of renewal (Titus 2) and so when the church becomes too bureaucratized, set in its ways and fails to confront new challenges with a more relevant message, God does raise up prophets to speak His word afresh and groups in whom His Spirit brings forth afresh His authentic fruits. Miller's words are very apt here:

[Not] only are the new paradigm churches doing a better job of responding to the needs of their clientele than are many mainline churches, but—more important—they are successfully mediating the sacred, bringing God to people and conveying the self-transcending and life-changing core of all true religion. They offer worship in a musical idiom that connects with the experience of broad sectors of the middle class; they have jettisoned aspects of organized religion that alienate many teenagers and young adults; and they provide programming that emphasizes well-defined moral values and is not otherwise available in the culture. In short, they offer people hope and meaning that is grounded in a transcendent experience of the sacred.<sup>12</sup>

This is the understanding with which I wish to approach the Christian new religious movements that we examine in this study. These pneumatic reforms have taken almost a century to take root in African historic mission Christianity. Adherents of charismatic renewal groups who approve the Holy Spirit inspired experiences described above refer to it in such terms and expressions as: "refreshment of the Spirit", "charismatic renewal", "revival", "the movement of the Spirit", or "restoration of the church" On the other hand those who dislike it call it "emotionalism", "enthusiasm", or even "occult".<sup>13</sup> What is new in Pentecostalism, as Simon Tugwell and others explain, is not necessarily the occurrence of particular pneumatic phenomena but rather 'the articulation and organization in corporate Church life of what has over the centuries been known only spasmodically in isolated instance.'<sup>14</sup>

### **Africa and the Renewal of Christianity as a Non-Western Religion**

Africa, true to the predictions of writers on Christian history and mission including David B. Barrett, Andrew F. Walls, Lamin O. Sanneh, Kwame Bediako and Ogbu U. Kalu, has developed as a major heartland of world Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this vein, Walls argues that it is impossible to know about Christianity without knowing about Africa or to know about Africa without knowing about Christian-

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<sup>11</sup> David B. Barrett, "Signs, Wonders, and Statistics in the World of Today," in Jan A.B. Jongeneel (ed.), *Pentecost, Mission, and Ecumenism: Essays in Intercultural Theology* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 188.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> David Middlemiss, *Interpreting Charismatic Experience* (London: SCM, 1996), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Simon Tugwell, Peter Hocken, George Every and John O. Mills, *New Heaven? New Earth? An Encounter with Pentecostalism* (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers, 1976), 22.

ity. This transition from the margins to the center of world Christianity is a privilege that Africa shares with the other non-Western contexts of Asia and Latin America. The accession of non-Western Christianity has coincided with the recession of the faith in the modern West for, at a time when church infrastructure are being sold for non-Christian purposes, warehouses and cinema houses in Africa are metamorphosing into meeting places for churches. Churches of Pentecostal/Charismatic persuasion are leading the way in the renewal of Christianity as a non-Western religion.

Africa has become a hotbed of Pentecostal/Charismatic activity and it would not be a contradiction in terms to say that although Christian evangelization took place under the activities of historic mission denominations Pentecostalism in both its older classical and newer charismatic forms has now taken over as the representative face of Christianity in Africa. In the following quotation, John V. Taylor very aptly summarizes the role of God the Spirit in the growth of Christianity in Africa:

In Africa today it seems the incalculable Spirit has chosen to use the Independent Church Movement for another spectacular advance. This does not prove that their teaching is necessarily true but it shows they have the raw materials out of which a missionary church is made—spontaneity, total commitment, and the primitive responses that arise from the depths of life.<sup>15</sup>

The type of Christianity that inspired this observation by Taylor was the one represented by the older African Independent Churches (AICs). Their characteristics of ‘spontaneity, total commitment and the primitive responses that arise from the depths of life’ have remained important parts of Pentecostal spirituality in modern Africa. The AICs are no longer paradigmatic of African Christianity and I have discussed the reasons for their decline elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> However, their religious and theological emphases of practical salvation, charismatic renewal, innovative gender ideology, and oral and interventionist theologies, have found new leases of life among contemporary Pentecostals on the continent. Their emergence led to the renewal of Christianity in Africa and inspired the process of ‘pentecostalization’ currently underway in contemporary African Christianity.

### **Charismatic Renewal and the Church Today**

The restoration of *charismata pneumatika*, gifts of the Spirit, as part of normal Church life can be understood theologically as ‘the reactivation in Christian community of levels and capacities of the human spirit that have long lain dormant in Christian life.’<sup>17</sup> Whether we refer to them as renewal, restoration or revival movements, the single most important characteristic of the charismatic renewal is the experience of the Holy Spirit. That is how the renewal is explained by insiders and

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<sup>15</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972), 54.

<sup>16</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: A Study of Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Tugwell et al., *Encounter with Pentecostalism*, 22-23.



Arnold Bittlinger very accurately represents what this is about by pointing to how charismatic renewal must be understood in terms of a response to the staid, silent, orderly and overly rational approach to the faith as inherited through the Western mission enterprise of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also interesting that most of the immigrant churches emerging in Europe have a charismatic culture. The works of Gerrie ter Haar and Claudia Währisch-Oblau attest to this fact.<sup>18</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the source of renewal, change and empowerment. Charismatic renewal movements thus belong to the larger neo-Pentecostal traditions which have manifested in three main forms across the world. They are:

- i. New Pentecostal Churches (NPCs): Many of these have developed mega-size congregations; they are led by charismatic personalities who preach motivational messages and take very contemporary approaches to worship; they appeal greatly to upwardly mobile young Christians who are disenchanted with the denominationalism and clericalism of the past
- ii. Trans-denominational Pentecostal fellowships like the Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International and Women Aglow movements. These are lay movements which also encourage 'responsible church membership', a policy that has helped to facilitate renewal within historic mission
- iii. Renewal Movements within non-Pentecostal historic mission denominations.

The unifying factor among all three relates to the fact of the experience of the Holy Spirit as God's agent of renewal and source of those graces that St. Paul very aptly describes as *charismata pneumatika*, gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians chapters 12 and 14). One of the earliest books to be published on neo-Pentecostalism as I collectively refer to the different streams of renewal movements is Richard Quebedeaux's *The New Charismatics: The Origins, Development, and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism*. In that publication he defines neo-Pentecostalism as follows:

Neo-Pentecostalism, though grounded in the same religious experience (variously interpreted), differs markedly from its Classical forerunner and counterpart. In principle, Charismatic Renewal is a 'trans-denominational' movement of enthusiastic Christianity that emerged and became recognizable in the 'historic' denominations...It is theologically diverse but generally orthodox, and is unified by a common experience—the baptism of the Holy Spirit—with accompanying *charismata*...to be used personally and corpo-

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<sup>18</sup> Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998); Claudia Währisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South: Bringing Back the Gospel* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009).

rately in the life of the church. Evangelistic in nature, the movement is genuinely reformist in character...<sup>19</sup>

Classical Pentecostalism developed into denominations very quickly. The rise of neo-Pentecostalism marked the beginning of disenchantment with religious traditions and conservatism within Christianity and the erosion of denominational loyalties within people. Thus the essential nature of neo-Pentecostalism is 'trans-denominational' because the experience of the Holy Spirit is understood 'to transcend denominational walls, while it clarifies and underscores what is authentically Christian in each tradition without demanding structural or even doctrinal changes in any given church body.'<sup>20</sup>

In a study of charismatic renewal movements in Ghana Cephas Omenyo points out that "whilst these groups have become catalysts for renewal in some denominations, they have also been the cause of conflict and misunderstanding in others."<sup>21</sup> With the gradual integration of charismatic renewal phenomena into historic mission church life, a 'charismaticization' of Christianity is currently underway in African Christianity. This is evident not only in the adoption of Pentecostal/charismatic media cultures, but also in the programs and liturgical reforms occurring in historic mission Christianity. In the words of Omenyo, "... members of the various charismatic renewal groups are determined to remain in their 'impoverished' churches and to revitalize them with the introduction of Charismatic/Pentecostal spirituality."<sup>22</sup>

### **Historic Mission Churches and the Challenge of Renewal**

The reference to charismatic renewal phenomena as belonging to the occult by its critics, recalls how the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) started in Ghana. The MDCC is one of the biggest and oldest African instituted churches (AICs) in the then Gold Coast, now the Republic of Ghana. Its name means "Church of the Army of the Cross of Christ". Around 1923, when Ghanaian Methodist catechist, William Egyanka Appiah, started speaking in tongues, seeing visions, prophesying, and healing the sick through prayer, he and his sympathizers were "firmly ordered" by the Methodist Church authority to stop what was described as their "occult activities" because "the Methodists were not like that."<sup>23</sup> Almost a century later, most historic mission churches have started to accommodate charismatic renewal groups and phenomena within their ranks because their very survival has come to depend on how open they are to a charismatic ecclesiology and culture.

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics: The Origins, Development, and Significance of Neo-Pentecostalism* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 5.

<sup>20</sup> Quebedeaux, *New Charismatics*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Amsterdam: Boekencentrum, 2002), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Omenyo, *Pentecost*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Christian G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana* (London: SCM, 1962), 35.

The success of independent churches like Egyanka Appiah's MDCC in the early years, is seen in the fact that historic mission churches in Africa were pressured into renewal as a result of the drift of their members into Spiritual or Aladura churches. In the words of the 1965 Presbyterian Church of Ghana Synod, "it must be of interest to us that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) is proportionally best represented [in the Spiritual churches] including even some Church agents."<sup>24</sup> Ironically, the Methodist Church Ghana, studying the same Spiritual and Aladura church phenomenon, had also concluded in a 1968 Conference report that the Methodists "had become the principal patrons" of these independent churches. Whether they were patronized mainly by Methodists, Roman Catholics or by Presbyterians, the bottom line was that, considerable numbers of the membership of historic mission denominations maintained allegiance to their mother churches for Sundays.

In the rest of the week, however, the same members went in search of Christian spirituality that made sense in a precarious African environment with its belief in malevolent forces believed to impede human health and progress. The panic that followed the success of Ghana's Spiritual churches is evident in the Synod Proceedings and the Conference Reports of the Presbyterian and the Methodist churches on what to do about their own Christianity. The PCG Synod was quite honest in her assessment of the situation and responded by setting up a committee in 1965 to study the phenomenon of charismatic renewal and advise the Church on what steps to take. The PCG Synod Committee clarified its mandate as "an expression of the concern of the Church about the large numbers of people who leave the Presbyterian Church in order to join a Spiritual Church or to attend meetings of healers and prophets, and secondly, about groups forming themselves within the Church which often adopted similar practices usually unfamiliar to Presbyterian Church life."<sup>25</sup>

In the PCG, "practices unfamiliar to our church" referred basically to speaking in tongues, healing and deliverance sessions, holding of all-night vigils characterized by loud mass extemporaneous prayers, the use of choruses (instead of hymns), prophecies, visions, revelations, and other pneumatic phenomena associated with Pentecostal/charismatic worship services. People joined the spiritual churches because these churches provided the indigenous ecclesial contexts where the pneumatic phenomena facing resistance within the PCG enjoyed freer expression. One of the conclusions of the PCG Synod Committee is thus very instructive for our purposes:

A large number of Christians join them because they are disappointed with their former churches. They complain that the worship there is dull and that there is no 'spiritual power'...and that there is not sufficient prayer in the old

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<sup>24</sup> Presbyterian Church of Ghana, *Minutes of 37<sup>th</sup> Synod Report* (29<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1966), 44.

<sup>25</sup> Presbyterian Synod Report, 41.

churches. They therefore seek a younger, more zealous and more 'spiritual' fellowship.<sup>26</sup>

A number of people in the mainline churches adopted a system of plural belonging by maintaining membership of their mother churches but worshipped with one of the many Spiritual churches around at the time. Certain conclusions arise out of the responses of Ghana's historic mission churches to the phenomenon of charismatic renewal that are revealing for our discussion.

1. The acknowledgement by the Synod Committee of the PCG of the veracity of the complaint that Presbyterian worship is "dull and lacked vitality", and that as a result, members were filling the vacuum in their liturgical lives elsewhere.
2. The reference to groups "forming themselves within our Church" which shows that the groups concerned were grass-roots movements through which ordinary lay people had taken their spiritual destiny into their own hands. This development has deeper implications for lay involvement and ecumenism.
3. The PCG Synod Committee and the MCG Conference both submitted that their churches should recognize the internal renewal groups in order to curb the loss of members to independent Spiritual churches.

The result of these observations is that from the 1970s, charismatic renewal prayer groups started enjoying more tolerant responses from historic mission churches in which they operated.

#### **'No Longer Orphans': Holy Spirit and Presence of Christ**

To encounter the Spirit, I argue here, is to encounter Jesus Christ and this calls for what I sometimes refer to in my Pentecostal Studies lectures as a 'pneumatological Christology'. 'Pneumatology' is the theology of the Holy Spirit and 'Christology' is the theology of the life and work of Jesus Christ. 'Pneumatological Christology' therefore means an understanding of the work of Christ that is informed by an appreciation of the person and work of Jesus Christ. One of the clearest statements on the personality of the Holy Spirit is found in John 14:18 where Jesus says:

I will not leave you as orphans but I will come to you.

The dictionary definition of an 'orphan' is one who has been left without support usually through the death of parents. In other words, Jesus was telling his disciples, 'I will not leave you without support'. Jesus was speaking in the run up to his Passion which culminated in the withdrawal of his physical presence from the world. This meant the disciples were not going to have the benefit of this physical presence any longer. 'In a little while you will see me; and in a little while you will not see me', was how he put it to the disciples. In effect, that phase of God's self-disclosure in which the 'word became flesh' that the disciples could physically touch, see, communicate and engage with Jesus Christ, was virtually coming to an end with his death on the

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<sup>26</sup> Presbyterian Synod Report, 42.

Cross. That withdrawal of physical presence was however, according to Jesus, not going to mark an end to his presence in the world. This explains his statement: 'I will not leave you as orphans but I will come to you'. But how did Jesus Christ return to the disciples?

Jesus Christ fulfilled the promise to 'return' to the disciples in the *Presence* of the Holy Spirit. In other words, a proper understanding of the Spirit must see him in terms of "God's continuing *Presence* in the world." He remains among those who believe in him to continue the ministry of God as revealed in Jesus Christ in very specific ways. These are:

- i. As Comforter/Counselor: Encapsulated in this understanding is the Holy Spirit as 'God's empowering presence'. A classic illustration of this is found in Exodus 33:12ff., where Moses tells God that unless he had company, he would not continue the journey with Israel as leader. In the end, God gave Moses company but not in the form of another human being. It was God's own *Presence*. That *Presence* was none other than the Holy Spirit.
- ii. Teacher: Jesus was recognized as one who taught with authority. If the Holy Spirit was going to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ then it was logical to expect that he would take that which was of Christ and make it clearer to the people of Jesus. What the Holy Spirit makes clear is that which is true of Jesus Christ because he is 'the Spirit of truth'. In other words the Holy Spirit, when he is present, never contradicts anything that Jesus has said or represents. Jesus represents God, for as he noted: 'I am here not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me'. The Holy Spirit is therefore among us to exercise the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.
- iii. Reminder: This means that the Holy Spirit serves to remind us of what Jesus has taught and represents. Anybody who needs a 'reminder' is somebody who has limitations. The fact that the Spirit of God is supposed to remind his disciples of what Christ had taught was an indication that human beings have limitations. That explains why in Isaiah 49, the prophet asked, 'Can a woman's tender care cease towards the child she bear?' The answer was 'yes' she may forgetful be'; but God is different and so he says through the prophet, 'I will not forget you.' Human beings forget but God is beyond the logic of forgetfulness and that is why one of the works of the Spirit is to remind us of the truths of God.

This is why it is only in the Spirit that the lordship of Jesus Christ may be recognized (I Corinthians 12:13). It is only by the Spirit that we can confess Jesus as Lord because the Spirit who inspires the confession is the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. How does the Holy Spirit continue the work of Jesus Christ among his people? This may be summed up in what we refer to as ‘ministry’. Jesus called it ‘greater works’. Greater works does not necessarily mean that what Christians will accomplish would be bigger than what Jesus did. ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends’, Jesus said. Jesus was God who lay down his life for us, so what greater things can we do that Christ has not already done? Jesus worked as God in human form but we work as human beings with all the accompanying limitations of the human person. No matter how much a person is filled with the Holy Spirit, he does not become divine; he or she remains human.

But if a human being can be so filled with the Holy Spirit of God, that by the enabling strength of the Spirit he or she can accomplish things that only God can accomplish in Christ, then that would amount to greater works. To perform greater works is to perform above human limitations—and that is possible only through the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, who by the way, is the continuing *Presence* of Jesus Christ among those he has called.

#### **Conclusion: Spirit Renewal and Ministry**

I started these reflections by noting that the Pentecostal movement draws our attention to the importance of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church today. I am aware that there are all sorts of criticisms against the movement but on the whole, I take a very positive view Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity today. The impressive congregations some of them have built, the attraction they have for our upwardly mobile youth, the kinds of media ministries they have developed, and the religious menu they constantly roll out for the public tells me, that unless the historic mission denominations such as the Methodist Church raise their game, our future would not be that bright. In conclusion, Africa has learnt a lot from European theology and Europe in turn may need to learn a few things from the types of immigrant charismatic communions working in their midst. In the words of Währisch-Oblau, instead of feeling threatened by the New Mission Churches and rejecting their criticism of ‘mainline’ Protestantism as fundamentalist and culturally irrelevant, the Protestant churches...could in grateful joy, perceive the work of the Holy Spirit outside the confines of their own organized pastoral activities, and recognize the genesis of new churches and congregations on European soil as “the grace of God”.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Claudia Währisch-Oblau, ‘We Shall be Fruitful in the Land: Pentecostal and Charismatic New Mission Churches in Europe’, in André Droogers, Cornelius van der Laan, and Wout van Laar (eds.), *Fruitful in this Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2006), 46.