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(65) CHRISTIANITY IN GHANA

Sylvia Owusu-Ansah

Religion	Pop 2010	Pct 2010	Pop 2025	Pct 2025	Gr Pct 1970 2025
Christians	15,573,000	64.0%	22,518,000	66.9%	2.5%
Independents	5,106,000	21.0%	7,630,000	22.7%	2.7%
African initiated	4,194,000	17.2%			
Orthodox	4,000	0.0%	6,000	0.0%	2.7%
Protestants	6,384,000	26.3%	8,900,000	26.4%	2.2%
Pentecostal	3,621,000	14.9%			
Methodist	900,000	3.7%			
Reformed, Presbyterian	825,000	3.4%			
Adventist	515,000	2.1%			
Anglicans	269,000	1.1%			
Baptist	132,000	0.5%			
Roman Catholics	3,053,000	12.6%	4,640,000	13.8%	2.8%
<i>Pentecostals/Charismatics</i>	8,931,000	36.7%	12,400,000	36.8%	2.2%
<i>Evangelicals</i>	4,787,000	19.7%	6,585,000	19.6%	2.1%
Muslims	4,817,000	19.8%	6,680,000	19.8%	2.2%
adherents of traditional African religions	3,804,000	15.6%	4,300,000	12.8%	0.8%
adherents of new religious movements	26,500	0.1%	35,000	0.1%	1.9%
Baha'is	14,000	0.1%	20,000	0.1%	2.4%
Hindus	4,900	0.0%	7,000	0.0%	2.5%
Chinese folk-religionists	700	0.0%	1,000	0.0%	2.4%
Buddhists	490	0.0%	700	0.0%	2.5%
Jews	440	0.0%	400	0.0%	-0.6%
people professing no religion	76,500	0.3%	116,000	0.3%	2.8%
Total population	24,318,000	100.0%	33,678,000	100.0%	2.2%

Source: Centre for the Study of World Christianity (CSGC), Boston, Gordon-Conwell TS

Introduction

Records have established that Christianity was first introduced to the then Gold Coast on 20th January, 1482, by a team of 600 men from Portugal led by Don Diogo d'Azambuja who first arrived in Elmina, near Cape Coast.¹ Upon arrival, he introduced the chiefs to the Christian faith with the promise of establishing

¹ Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), 4.

trade relationships between them. As a positive response to this offer, the chiefs 'granted the Portuguese a site on which a fort and a chapel were built'.² By the end of 1617, the Roman Catholics were the dominant Christian missionaries in the Gold Coast, even though their evangelisation did not yield enduring results. In 1637, the Dutch arrived on the Gold Coast and laid siege to and captured the Portuguese fort at Elmina, and also took over Fort St Anthony at Axim in 1642.³ Other Europeans including the Danes, Swedes and Branden-Burgers settled on the coast and built forts such as the Danes' fort at Christiansburg near Accra, which later became the 'Government house of Ghana', now known as The Castle. Even though the main purpose of building these forts was commercial, chaplains were provided to administer spiritual succour to the inmates of the fort and some 'local Africans'.⁴

The Establishment of the Mission Churches

Substantial missionary activities began in the Gold Coast from December 1828 by four missionaries from the Basel Mission, namely, Karl F. Salbach, Gottlieb Holzwarth and Johannes Henke, all of German origin, and Johannes Gottlieb Schmidt, a Swiss.⁵ They settled in Christiansburg but later relocated to the Akwapim ridge because of the favourable weather conditions there. The Rev. Joseph Rhodes Dunwell, the first Methodist missionary to the Gold Coast, arrived in 1835 and settled at Cape Coast in the Central Region. Dunwell's missionary trip to Ghana resulted from 'the indigenous Ghanaian request for Bibles for Christian Development'.⁶ F.L. Bartels establishes that, 'together with the local Christian pioneers, although he lived among them for only six months, Dunwell sowed the seed which has grown into the mature plant of the Methodist Church, Ghana'.⁷ Dunwell's contribution is very significant for the start of the Methodist Church in Ghana. However, the success story of the Wesleyans cannot be completely told without mentioning the selfless services rendered by the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, 'son of a black father and a white mother', towards the expansion of the Methodist Church.⁸ In his time, missionary work spread to Kumasi, the second largest city of Ghana, popularly known as the Garden City. After it had gained autonomy from its western roots on 28th July 1961, the Methodist Church in Ghana experienced tremendous growth as it continued the tradition of its founder John Wesley in the winning and discipling of converts.

A little while after Dunwell had introduced Methodism to the eastern half of the Gold Coast, 'Andreas Riis went on a missionary journey from Christiansburg to Akropong to plan the foundations of the Basel Mission Church in the eastern half'.⁹ Andreas moved to settle permanently in Akropong on 21st March 1831, which could be termed as the start of the work of the Basel Mission in Akropong.¹⁰ Earlier, in 1828, the Basel Mission had started work at Osu and Nimgo at the Danish fort of Christiansburg in Accra.¹¹ Clarke notes that, in spite of the favourable weather in the Akropong in the Akwupim Mountains, for various reasons, the Basel Mission had accomplished very little by 1840, while the death rate of missionaries and the rivalry between the Danish and British had not abated.¹² He explains:

² Agbeti, *West African Church History*, 4.

³ Abgeti, *West African Church History*, 5.

⁴ Agbeti, *West African Church History*, 6. "Fanti" is traditionally and popularly known by the indigenes as "Mfanste".

⁵ Kingsley E Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Blessed Publications, 2001), 16.

⁶ "The Methodist Church Ghana, from Autonomy to the Present", accessed 2 May 2015, www.methodistchurch-gh.org/index.php/the-church/autonomy-of-the-methodist-church-ghana

⁷ F. L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1965), 1.

⁸ "The Methodist Church Ghana, from Autonomy to the Present".

⁹ Bartels, *Ghana Methodism*, 1965, 6.

¹⁰ Bartels, *Ghana Methodism*, 1965, 6.

¹¹ Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1986), 41.

¹² Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity*, 41.

While the Basel Mission Committee had sent missionaries to the Gold Coast to 'open schools and in general live in brotherly love with the Africans', the Danish administration, on the other hand, demanded that the missionaries devote themselves exclusively to work among the Danish congregations at Christiansburg.¹³

Clarke maintains that the Danish authorities' decision to move the headquarters of the Basel Mission to Akropong in the Akwupim Hills was favourable to the health of the missionaries but it also exposed them to 'political infighting'.¹⁴ Gradually, the Basel Missionary committee gained roots in Akropong and its environs despite the death of its missionaries and political rivalries. Between 1828 and 1918, the Presbyterian Church had recorded the remarkable growth of 'a total Christian community of 30,000'.¹⁵

The German Bremen Society arrived in 1847 in the Trans-Volta Region. Roman Catholic missionaries came to the Gold Coast in 1881 and settled at Elmina. The first Fanti Roman Catholic priests ordained by Bishop Porter of Cape Coast were George Ansah from Elmina and Francis Menya from Pedu near Cape Coast. The African Methodist Episcopal Church came in 1898, followed by the Anglican Church in 1906. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion was formed (from the American Methodist Episcopal Zion Church) in 1720 in New York when the 'coloured' people separated from the Whites to form a Methodist Episcopal church in New York. The purpose of this separation was to allow the coloured people the freedom and liberty to 'exercise their spiritual gifts among themselves'.¹⁶ After a while, there were similar separations between the Whites and the Coloureds in all mixed congregations, while in 1820, the separatist groups came together to form the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.¹⁷ The missionary work of the church began in Liberia in 1876 by the Rev. Andrew Cartwright, who worked assiduously and sacrificially amidst financial constraints.¹⁸ A more extensive and profound work was done by the AME Zion church in Ghana, supervised by two retired Wesleyan Methodist ministers, the Rev. Egyin-Asaam and Thomas Birch Freeman, the son of the veteran missionary of the Methodist Church in Ghana. Freeman opened the first AME Zion church in Ghana at Keta and later another at Cape Coast.¹⁹ 'Suitable African young men were recruited for training in the United States.' The first to be recruited was Emmanuel Kwegyir-Aggrey who never returned after his studies, defeating the whole purpose of the offer of establishing trade relationships. Afterwards, Frank Arthur, formerly known as Frank Ata Osarn-Pinanko, was sent to America for training. Upon his return to the Cape Coast, the AME Zion church flourished. He was able to open churches at Winneba and Twifo.²⁰ Primary and secondary schools attached to the churches that had been opened were also established. Prominent among them was the Aggrey Memorial Secondary School, 'a co-educational unit at Cape Coast'.²¹

Another mission church worth noting is the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Seventh Day Adventist Church was established in the Gold Coast in 1888 through the efforts of Francis I.U. Dolphijn, a Ghanaian staying at Apam.²² The first missionaries, namely, Karl G. Rudolph and E.L. Sanford, were sent to Apam in the Central Region in 1893. The Gold Coast Mission of the Seventh Day Adventists was established in 1894 with its headquarters at Cape Coast. In 1914, W.H. Lewis, the first President of the Gold Coast Mission, chose Agona Asante as the missionary headquarters, 'after he had been heartily accepted by Nana Kwame Boakye I, chief of Agona'. In 1915, the pioneering work of the Asante region was begun by Lewis

¹³ Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity*, 41.

¹⁴ Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity*, 41.

¹⁵ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 17.

¹⁶ Agbeti, *West Africa Church History*, 143.

¹⁷ Agbeti, *West Africa Church History*, 143.

¹⁸ Agbeti, *West Africa Church History*, 143.

¹⁹ Agbeti, *West Africa Church History*, 147.

²⁰ Agbeti, *West Africa Church History*, 150.

²¹ Agbeti, *West Africa Church History*, 150.

²² Seventh Day Adventist, "Central Ghana Conference," www.cgcsda.org/our-history (accessed 30 April, 2015).

and his team, and the work expanded to Ntonso, Wiemoase and Asamang. Pastor Clifford arrived at Agona in 1931, and in 1932 he assisted in establishing the Bekwai Training School.²³ The first black president of the Ghana Mission, Pastor C.B. Mensah, was elected in 1959. The church engages in a number of activities, like evangelism, constituency meetings, camp meetings, youth camps, church planting and establishing institutions.²⁴

Evangelism through Educational and Medical Work

Medical Outreach Endeavours

The mission churches embarked on medical service as part of their evangelistic endeavours. World War I and the deportation of the Basel missionaries in 1917 led to a temporary closure of the hospital until Scottish missionaries arrived to continue the medical work and also provide health services for women and children at Abetifi.²⁵ Several other clinics were established in different parts of the country. Prominent among them was a '60-bed clinic at Agogo, Ashanti Region, in 1929'. Other clinics were opened by the Basel Mission at Dormaa Ahenkro in 1951 and Bechem in 1952. F.D. Harker and Mrs Margaret Benzies (Scottish missionaries) established the Akropong School for the blind in 1943 which was initially overseen by the Scottish Mission but later on handed over to a committee made up of representatives from the Presbyterian and Methodist churches and the Ministry of Education. All kinds of handiwork were taught in the school, such as basket and mat weaving, cane work and training in shorthand and typing. There was collaboration between the government and the mission churches in producing health facilities and services for Ghanaians. The major contribution made by mission churches towards medical work in Ghana is in providing a large number of Christian doctors and nurses, and providing training for African staff.²⁶

Evangelism through Education

The western European Christian missions embarked on a number of projects as a catalyst for evangelism. One of the major ones was providing western education. Till the nineteenth century, the mission churches were the main providers of this through the schools they established. Education through the mission schools played a major role in the process of gaining independence in Ghana.²⁷

African Initiated Christianity

Ghanaian Pentecostalism began with the ministries of three prophetic figures, namely, Prophet Wade Harris, Prophet Samson Oppong and Prophet John Swatson.²⁸ The Pentecostal experiences of *peaking in other tongues*, healing and miracles, casting out devils, and deliverance from fetishism and paganism were first introduced into Ghanaian Christianity by these prophets in the early 1900s. Before the appearance of these prophets, the only form of Christianity known to the people of Ghana was the one brought by the western mission churches. The ministries of these three prophetic figures marked the beginning of the 'spiritual' churches in Ghana.

²³ Evangelistic Training School and Seminary, www.cgcsda.org/our-history/ (accessed 30 April 2015).

²⁴ Seventh Day Adventist: Central Ghana Conference, www.cgcsda.org/our-history/ (accessed 30 April 2015).

²⁵ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 21.

²⁶ Hans W. Debrunner, *History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967), 344.

²⁷ Debrunner, *Christianity in Africa*, 340.

²⁸ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 61.

Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana

Peter Newman Anim began the Faith Tabernacle Church in 1917. Anim's church was affiliated to the Apostolic Church in the UK in 1935 and, as a result, James McKeon was sent by the British church to assist him in 1937.²⁹ Anim's strict adherence to the doctrine of divine healing without compromise brought division between them when McKeon was attacked by sickness and had to resort to medication. When Anim parted ways with McKeon, he named his church Christ Apostolic. McKeon, however, continued to work for the UK Apostolic Church until he resigned in 1935 and began his own Gold Coast Apostolic Church. The three Pentecostal churches, Anim's Christ Apostolic Church, McKeon's Gold Coast Apostolic Church and the Apostolic Church of Gold Coast, affiliated to the UK Apostolic Church, were the three Pentecostal churches in Ghana during this period. The Apostolic Church of Gold Coast became the Apostolic Church of Ghana when they later gained autonomy from the UK church. McKeon's Gold Coast Apostolic Church later on became the Church of Pentecost. The last of the four main Classical Pentecostal churches in Ghana is the Assemblies of God Church.

The Assemblies of God was the first foreign Pentecostal body to begin in Northern Ghana. The church's first missionaries from America, the Rev. Lloyd and Margaret Shirer came to the northern region of the Gold Coast in 1931 and started work in Wagadugu. They returned to the USA and brought more missionaries to support this work. Some of them had health challenges and returned. Others died but Lloyd and Margaret continued to work for quite a long time until they finally decided to work under the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development. The Assemblies of God Church concentrated more on providing health facilities and in the development of literature, rather than on church planting, compared with the other Pentecostal churches.

The Rise of Charismatic Churches in Ghana

A great evangelical Pentecostal revival began in Ghana in the 1960s and early 1970s that resulted in the proliferation of several non-denominational groups known as 'fellowships' all over the country.³⁰ Examples of such non-denominational Bible study groups, prayer associations and fellowships are the Ghana Evangelical Society (GES), founded by Evangelist Enoch Agbozo, the Hour of Visitation Choir and Evangelistic Association (HOVCEA), founded by Evangelist Isaac Ababio, the Youth Ambassadors for Christ Association (YAFCA), founded by the Rev. Owusu Afriyie, and the National Evangelistic Association (NEA). Most of the members of these para-church organizations were drawn from the mission and classical Pentecostal churches. Some of these fellowships became the bedrock of the new independent or neo-Pentecostal churches.

Scripture Union is one of the oldest para-church groups training leaders, many of whom later joined the charismatic ministries, either as founders or as leading members. The leading charismatic churches in Ghana now are the Christian Action Faith Chapel founded by Bishop Duncan Williams, ICGC by Dr Mensah Otabil, Perez Chapel International by Bishop Charles Agyinasare, the Light House Chapel International by Bishop Dag Hayward Mills, and Gospel Light by Bishop Addae Mensah. There are several other charismatic churches in Ghana. Research by Kweku Okyerefo into the reasons for the astronomical growth of some Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches in Accra shows that members are attracted to these newer churches because of the 'spiritual and material benefits individuals derive from Pentecostalism'.³¹ Members of the Lighthouse and Royal House Chapels, the targeted churches for the

²⁹ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 107.

³⁰ Para-church groups refer to non-denominational fellowships, which trained a lot of leaders who later became head of some Charismatic Churches.

³¹ Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "Pentecostalism in the City of Accra: a Blossom on Functional Appeal and Urban Fecundity," *American Journal of Sociological Research* 1, no.1 (2011): (27-34) 30.

study, declared, among other things, that their reasons for joining the churches included ‘being impressed by the lively church services, the feeling that one’s spiritual needs are satisfied, experiencing God’s presence in these churches, receiving the Holy Spirit, and the church’s material assistance to members in time of need’.³²

Apart from the charismatic experience within Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches there are also the charismata within the western mission, or older, churches in Ghana. Members of the mainline – Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Evangelical Presbyterian, Baptist Convention and other churches – who have had an encounter or association with Pentecostal or Charismatic groups have transferred their experience to the mainline churches. Within the mainline churches are prayer groups and associations with a charismatic orientation referred to as charismatic renewal.

Conclusion

In the early nineteenth century, the mission churches started settling and gaining ground in the coastal areas. Notable among them were the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Evangelical Presbyterian, Methodist Church, Anglican Church, and Roman Catholic Church. These churches combined evangelism with education and medical services. From the 1900s, what has come to be known as the Pentecostal/Charismatic experience started in the country. Such ministries were marked by the supernatural, healing and deliverance from fetishism and demon possession.

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³² Okyerefo, “Pentecostalism in the City of Accra”, 30-31.