

## THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIPS AND THE CHARISMATIZATION OF GHANAIAN CHRISTIANITY

Abamfo O. Atiemo

**Abstract:** Contemporary Christianity in Ghana is dominated by Pentecostal/Charismatic culture. This has attracted attention in several scholarly works and analyses have been made of the historical factors that have been responsible for this development. However, an important phase in the history of the development of the faith in Ghana - the phase of the evangelical Christian fellowships - seems to have been largely ignored. This article draws attention to the significance of that phase for Ghanaian Christianity in general and its importance as the watershed in the transition from the dominance of the old mission-instituted type of Christianity to the current dominance of the Pentecostal /Charismatic type.

### Introduction

The Charismatic movement in Ghana has attracted widespread attention in scholarly works. The various branches of the movement have been well studied. Dovlo,<sup>1</sup> Gifford,<sup>2</sup> Larbi,<sup>3</sup> Omenyo<sup>4</sup> and Asamoah-Gyadu<sup>5</sup> have all

---

<sup>1</sup> Elom Dovlo, 'Comparative Overview of Independent Churches and Charismatic ministries in Ghana' *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, 2:2 (December, 1992), pp. 55 – 73.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004).

<sup>3</sup> E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Centre for Charismatic and Pentecostal Studies, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Cephas Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the development of Charismatic renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2006); See also, Cephas Omenyo, 'From The Fringes to the Centre: Pentecostalisation of the Mainline Churches in Ghana' *Exchange*, 34, 1 (2005), pp.38 – 60.

<sup>5</sup> J. K. Asamoah – Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005)

Abamfo O. Atiemo

studied and documented various aspects of the movement. Its history, theology, impact, and so forth have been well discussed. However, the crucial phase of the evangelical fellowships, which formed the main link in the transition from the dominance of the old form orthodox/mainline Christianity to the current dominance of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, has been virtually neglected. Most scholars only mention that phase in passing. For example, Larbi,<sup>6</sup> Omenyo<sup>7</sup> and Asamoah-Gyadu<sup>8</sup> devote only small sections of a few paragraphs each to the evangelical fellowships. Yet the fellowships, more than any other factor, have been directly responsible for the fast and widespread growth and acceptance of the Pentecostal /Charismatic culture in Ghanaian Christianity. They afforded a smooth transition from the predominance of the old Western forms of Christianity to the general acceptance of the mainly Pentecostal forms by the Ghanaian Christian public.

Up till about the late 1960s the main renewal movements known in Ghanaian Christianity were the African Independent Churches (AICs), the Classical Pentecostal Churches and the Prayer Groups within the mainline Churches. The prayer groups within the mainline Churches had not gained any significant influence, and were found only in a few places. Most of them operated without official approval of their churches and often found themselves in conflict with the official church hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> The Classical Pentecostal and the African Independent Churches themselves were, at that time, generally regarded as 'strange sects' that intruded on the serene and established Christian culture of traditional Western denominations. Whole families, and in some cases, ethnic groups had come to be identified with one or other denomination,<sup>10</sup> and any member who converted to any of those 'strange sects' was regarded a renegade who disturbed family

---

<sup>6</sup>E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, p. 88

<sup>7</sup>Cephas Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*, p.95.

<sup>8</sup>Asamoah-Gyadu (*African Charismatics*, p.101ff) pays greater attention to the subject than the other scholars.

<sup>9</sup>Abamfo Atiemo, *The Rise of the Charismatic Movement in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1993), pp. 46 – 47.

<sup>10</sup>Abamfo Atiemo, 'Christian Denominations and Ethnic Identity: An Assessment of the Impact of the Missionary Movement on Aspects of Ghanaian Social Life,' Eddy A. J. G. Van der Borgh et. al. (eds.) *Faith and Ethnicity, Vol 1* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2002), pp.217 -229.

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

solidarity and identity. These churches were also regarded as churches for people of low socio-economic status. Of these Churches, Larbi writes,

Without despising the dedication, commitment, and achievement of the early leaders, it is not an Overstatement to indicate that their previous educational background did not prepare them for the elites of society....It is therefore no exaggeration to state that the impact the Church made upon the higher echelon of society was minimal.<sup>11</sup>

Many educated young people, who by birth, belonged to those churches, were not willing to identify with them. The mainline churches had remained very nominal and had lost the confidence of the young people. In fact, leaders of those churches had begun to express concern about the drift of their members to the 'Apostolic' (Pentecostal) and the 'Spiritual' (African Independent) churches.<sup>12</sup>

Then in the 1970s, through the influence of movements such as the Scripture Union (SU), the University Christian Fellowships or the Ghana Fellowship of Evangelical Students (GHAFES), and Campus Crusade for Christ, which had been operating mainly in second and third cycle Educational Institutions, non-denominational evangelical Christian Fellowships sprang up and started to spread in towns and cities Of the country.<sup>13</sup> These fellowships sprang up spontaneously and spread very fast. They could be found in almost every city, town and neighbourhood. There were also lunchtime fellowships in many workplaces, including the government ministries. Apart from the town and neighbourhood fellowships, many 'evangelistic' groups were also formed. They included the Youth Ambassadors for Christ Association (YAFCA), Christ Reminders, the Ghana Evangelical Society (GES), Hour of Visitation Choir and Evangelistic Association (HOVCEA) and the Volta Evangelistic Association. The most influential of them was the Ghana Evangelical Society (GES).

---

<sup>11</sup> E. Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, p. 179.

<sup>12</sup> See Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, pp. 102, 128.

<sup>13</sup> Some of these movements, e.g. the Scripture Union and the University Christian Fellowship, had been in the country for a long time but their activities were confined to educational institutions.

Abamfo O. Atiemo

### **Nature of the Fellowships**

These fellowships were non-denominational in nature and were careful not to align themselves with any denomination; though they had a clear bias towards churches they considered 'spiritually alive'.<sup>14</sup> They were all not the same. There were distinctions among them. They could be classified as follows:

- Town and neighbourhood fellowships
- Work place fellowships
- Evangelistic associations
- Fellowships with international connections

### **Town and Neighbourhood Fellowships**

These were found in most towns and neighbourhoods throughout Ghana. By 1980, only a few towns and villages in Ghana were without such fellowships. Many of these fellowships fell under the Scripture Union (SU), which until the emergence of the town fellowships restricted its activities to educational institutions. Aduborfour reports that the SU was initially reluctant to establish formal links with these fellowships.<sup>15</sup> Among the reasons for this reluctance was the fear of losing the goodwill it had built between itself and the churches over the years. The leadership of the SU feared that church leaders might misinterpret the fellowships as attempts to 'poach their members to establish rival churches.'<sup>16</sup> However, the SU eventually saw an opportunity in the emergence of the town fellowships and appointed a full-time secretary to serve them. It was the first time such appointment had been made by the SU anywhere in Africa.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Such churches were mostly evangelical ones like the various Baptist communities, Pentecostal Churches like the Assemblies of God, Church of Pentecost, and the various Apostolic Churches. They considered the Mission-instituted churches as officially sound in doctrine but mostly filled with 'church goers' rather than born-again believers. Members of such Churches needed to be evangelised but when they were converted they did not need to leave their churches since those Churches were already sound in doctrine and practice. The African Independent Churches were regarded by the fellowships as 'demonic' or 'false' churches and people in them needed to be rescued. On conversion they were made to leave their churches and join 'genuine' churches.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel B. Aduborfour, *Evangelical Para Church Movements in Ghanaian Christianity: c. 1950 – Early 1990s*, (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, July, 1994), p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> Aduborfour, *Evangelical Para Church Movements*, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> SU African Regional Council Newsletter, 4, 1981, p.3. Cited by Aduborfour, *Evangelical Para Church Movements*, p.86.

## *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

### **Work Place Fellowships**

Many work places became centres of vigorous Christian evangelistic and worship activity. Members of the fellowships went to work earlier than the official time of reporting so that they could spend some time together in prayer and reading of the Bible. Lunchtime on specific weekdays was a time for a more elaborate prayer and study meeting. Sometimes, top management personnel were involved in such meetings. At the Ministries area where most of the government ministries and departments were situated, fellowships in the various ministries occasionally converged at a central point for special programmes, such as to listen to a specially invited speaker or to pray for the experience of the Holy Spirit baptism. Professional or occupational fellowships such the Nurses Christian Fellowship and the Armed Forces Christian Fellowship were also established.

### **Evangelistic Associations**

Although all the various types of the fellowships were evangelistic in orientation, those designated as evangelistic associations emphasised evangelism and actively engaged in vigorous evangelistic activities, travelling across the length and breath of the nation. There were two kinds of evangelistic associations: those with an orientation to use many different methods, especially open-air mass preaching, street and market-square preaching, and house –to–house preaching; and those who aimed at evangelising mainly through music and preaching. Examples of the former are the Ghana Evangelical Society (GES), National Evangelistic Association (NEA), Christ Reminders, and Holy Power Evangelistic Fellowship (HOPEF). Others were the Volta Evangelistic Association (VEA) and the Christ is the Same Ministry. Among the latter were the Hour of Visitation Choir and Evangelistic Association (HOVCEA), Joyful Way Singers, and Calvary Road. These fellowships did not form their branches with the converts they made through their evangelistic activities. They directed converts to join any of the churches regarded as ‘genuine’ or ‘Bible believing.’<sup>18</sup>

### **Fellowships with International Connections**

Fellowships that originated from outside Ghana but were in close relationship with the evangelical fellowships also existed. Two most

---

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 14 above.

*Abamfo O. Atiemo*

prominent ones are the Youth for Christ (YFC) and later, the Full-Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI).

### **Unity**

Classifying the fellowships into types does not imply any marked distinctions between them with respect to beliefs and practices. There was a tremendous sense of Christian unity among them and members visited each other's fellowship without inhibition and there were great collaborations to organize evangelistic outreach programmes. Bible teachers and evangelists moved from one fellowship to another to minister.

Attempts were made to unite them into ecumenical bodies. For example, a Coordinating Committee of Christian Fellowships (CCCCF) was formed in the Greater Accra region, and a National Union of Christian Youth (NUCY) was formed by Rev Abraham De-Love who was the pastor of the Philadelphia Church in Accra and one of the most prominent leaders of the evangelical fellowships. In the countryside, many of the fellowships that had affiliated to the SU formed what they called, 'Area Committees of the Scripture Union.' Such bodies brought the fellowships together in a formal way to jointly organise evangelistic crusades, seminars, study and prayer camps, and rallies.

### **The Theology of the Fellowships**

The fellowships had no official set of articles of faith. Their attitude to dogma may be captured in the words of one of their most popular hymns.

Hymn numbered 291 of *Golden Bells*:

My faith has found a resting place  
Not in a form or creed  
I trust the ever-living one  
His wounds for me shall plead.

### **Chorus**

*I need no other argument  
I need no other plea  
It is enough that Jesus died  
And that he died for me.*

And also, in the words of the popular chorus,

*Only Jesus can save!*

---

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

*Only Jesus can save!  
Halleluiah!*

They emphasised scriptures and experience more than dogma. However, it is possible to outline their teachings and practices as follows:

#### **Centrality of the Scriptures**

The fellowships were virtual Biblicists. They focussed, almost entirely, on the Bible. Their meetings were marked by vigorous Bible study and emphasised the importance of committing Bible verses to memory. They promoted what has come to be known in Christian circles as 'Quiet time' by which is meant the setting aside of a period of the day for prayer and meditation on the Bible. Devotional materials produced by the Scripture Union(SU) and the International Bible Reading Association (IBRA) were, especially, recommended as guides to such meditation.

#### **The New Birth**

Fundamental to the theology of the fellowships was the doctrine of the 'new birth' attained by believing in, and confessing Jesus Christ as 'Lord and personal saviour'. They taught that there were two types of people in the Church: 'Church goers' and 'born-again' Christians. 'Church-goers' were not genuine Christians and needed to be re-evangelised. Many of the people that filled the pews of the traditional mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches were regarded as belonging to the former. The person who was not born-again but went to Church was a 'carnal Christian' and the religious services such a person engaged in did not please God. For without the 'new birth', all human efforts to be righteous 'are like filthy rags' (Isaiah 64:6).

#### **Jesus, the Only Saviour**

Their theology of God was the orthodox Trinitarian one. However, the focus was on Jesus because of their emphasis on 'salvation'. 'Only Jesus can save' was a recurring refrain in the preaching and admonitions of the fellowships. Jesus and the events surrounding his life and work was the reference point of their preaching. New Testament passages such as, 'I am the way, the truth and the life...' (John 14:6) and 'There is no other name under heaven, whereby we may be saved' (Acts 4:12) were cited in support of the teaching. This saving power of God through Jesus Christ was set in the context of the love of God which was deemed as

Abamfo O. Atiemo

unsurpassed by any kind of love known in human experience. This is illustrated in the words of the popular chorus,

*Your father may love you;  
Your mother may love you.  
But none can die for you.  
The love of Jesus surpasses all.*

### **The Holy Spirit**

Their view about the Holy Spirit was, originally, very orthodox. With the exception of the GES and a few others who started as Pentecostal movements from the very beginning, most of the fellowships did not have an explicit Pentecostal ethos from the start.<sup>19</sup> The Holy Spirit was considered the main agent of the 'new birth' and also the unfailing 'Companion and Teacher' of the believer on earth. The Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit was embraced much later. But when it was embraced it quickly became the main view in their teaching and practice. Speaking in tongues and prophecies were the most popular manifestations that believers sought after.

From that point on, the Pentecostal understanding of the Holy Spirit became the standard for measuring the soundness of a denomination's doctrines and spirituality. From the point of view of many fellowships, the GES for example, most of the existing Churches had the right doctrines and practices but what was lacking was an adequate understanding of, and the correct attitude to the palpable manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the believer. They organised special prayer meetings for what they termed, 'Holy spirit baptism'. At such meetings people who were believed to have received the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' manifested the gifts of speaking in tongues and prophecies. Healing and exorcisms (or what they call 'deliverance' in the contemporary Charismatic Movement), though not

---

<sup>19</sup> The Scripture Union, for example, initially, resisted the Charismatic influence. Pentecostal influences in the fellowships came indirectly from sources outside Ghana such as the ministries of American evangelists such as T. L. Osborn, Gordon Lindsay, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin and Morris Cerullo. However, the most direct vehicles of its spread in the fellowships were fellowships such as the GES and the University Christian fellowships at the University of Ghana and the University of Science and Technology and the existing classical Pentecostal Churches. Of these the most influential was the GES. (See Samuel B. Aduborfour, *Evangelical Para Church Movements in Ghanaian Christianity*, pp.192, 215 - 220).

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

unknown, were not prominent in the activities of most of the fellowships. They were so concerned about the spiritual status of the individual with respect to the 'new birth' that many, from the start, did not pay any significant attention to miracles, demon-possession and other themes that have now become central to the teaching of the Charismatic movement. These were to become predominant later.

#### **Salvation**

The *salvific* goals of the fellowships were more other-worldly than this-worldly. They therefore emphasised denial of self and the world as a means of pursuing salvation. They regarded life as temporary and therefore less important than 'eternal life' which was a central theme in their preaching. This was captured in the song,

*I have another world in view, in view;  
I have another world in view.  
My Saviour is gone to prepare me a place-  
I have another world in view.*

And also stanza four of *Golden Bells* numbered 31 which was one of the most liked songs of the fellowships:

Then let our songs abound;  
And every tear be dried.  
We are marching through Immanuel's ground  
To fairer worlds on high.

Chorus:

*We are marching to Zion  
Beautiful, beautiful Zion  
We are marching upward to Zion  
The beautiful city of God.*

#### **Every -Believer Ministry**

The fellowships were lay-movements. Their non-denominational status meant that they did not depend on ordained ministers to minister to them. Individual Christians were imbued with the sense of responsibility to do some service for God. The teaching was that every believer had been called to be a witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The 'Great Commission' was said to have been given to every believer. So one-on-one sharing of the gospel, street preaching at dawn which they called 'dawn

Abamfo O. Atiemo

broadcast', mass open air crusades and visits to schools by volunteers to preach the gospel became very common.

Teams that brought together people who believed they had identified their common spiritual gifts were formed in many of the fellowships. For example, there was the prayer team, which was variously referred to as, 'Power House', or 'Prayer Tower'. There were also personal or house to house evangelism teams, worship teams, choirs and hospital/prison visitation teams.

#### **The importance of private devotion as a means of growth**

They promoted the culture of 'Quiet Time'. Believers were encouraged to set aside a few minutes (usually between fifteen and thirty minutes) each day, especially in the morning, to pray and study the Bible. Devotional books prepared and distributed by the SU,<sup>20</sup> and the IBRA<sup>21</sup> and other bodies were usually recommended for use.

#### **The Importance of Prayer**

Prayer, like Bible study, was a central activity of the fellowships. Prayer meetings were unusually long. Corporate prayer took the form that has come to be described as 'chorus prayer'. In this kind of prayer, everybody prays aloud at the same time. This kind of prayer was until then associated with the AICs and the Pentecostal churches. Prayer vigils or 'all-night' became a major feature of the fellowships, with the GES and some others making it a regular weekly affair.

#### **Other Teachings**

Apart from the above there were many other teachings of the fellowships that give insight into the major religious concerns of this period of Christian renewal in Ghana. For example, the 'redeeming love of God' expressed in the atoning death of Jesus Christ the Son of God was at the centre of their theology. Everything else revolved around this core-theme. Consequently, related themes such as holiness, forgiveness, healing and the 'new birth' came to be stressed.

---

<sup>20</sup> The S. U. provided two books – *The Daily Guide* for adults and *Daily Power* for juniors. Both were in English.

<sup>21</sup> The IBRA provided *Light for our Path* in both English and the leading mother-tongues of the country.

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

A life of practical holiness and sanctification was taught as a necessary proof of the spiritual good standing of the believer. It was taught that the uncompromising holiness of God that led him to give up his own Son to suffering and death on the cross ought to evoke in the believer a sense of repentance and a desire for holy living. Such teachings generated a general sense of other-worldliness in Ghanaian Christians. For the fellowships, Conversion to Christianity meant a total break with the standards of the world. It was maintained that the changed inner life of the believer ought to be reflected in outward behaviours. Fellowship members were therefore marked by modesty in dressing, their staying away from secular entertainment programmes, and turning away from anything that they considered this-worldly.

But such expression of other-worldly piety was combined with a rather unusual sense of social responsibility and practical involvement in society with the aim of transforming it. This was expressed in several ways, including prayers, preaching, and forms of social action. For example, the GES had as its motto, 'Service to God, Service to man' and saw its mission as 'rebuilding the broken walls of Ghana'. The intense prayer sessions held for the country sometimes produced prophecies about the political future of the country. For example, there were prophecies that were interpreted as predicting the various political upheavals that occurred in the country, in 1972, 1979, and 1981 as well as events in other parts of Africa.<sup>22</sup>

There was a strong belief that it was only the gospel of Jesus Christ that could save Ghana from the political, economic and social crisis of the period. The conviction that conversion to Christ and prayer held the only hope of salvation for the nation, partly inspired enthusiastic evangelistic activities, including mass open-air crusades dubbed with nationalistic descriptions, for example, 'Ghana for Christ Crusade.' Among the leading

---

<sup>22</sup> Aduborfuor quotes from a Memorandum on Charismatic Christianity in Ghana in which the author, a former student Christian leader, shares his experiences of prophecies. In the document the author claims to have foretold the overthrow of the civilian government of Ghana's first republic as well as later developments. (See Aduborfuor, *Evangelical Para Church Movements*, p. 209. In a written response to enquiries I made, the Rev Enoch Agbozo, founder and leader of the GES, claimed that there were prophecies predicting the election victory of President Limann, the fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, and the fall of Communist Russia. Other prophecies concerned the Rawlings' revolution of 1979, and the Liberian war.

*Abamfo O. Atiemo*

Inspirational songs at such crusades was what came to be regarded as a national prayer for revival: the Ghanaian classical Pentecostal hymn,

If you believe and I believe and we together pray;  
The Holy Spirit will come down and Ghana shall be saved.  
And Ghana shall be saved! And Ghana shall be saved!  
The Holy Spirit will come down and Ghana shall be saved.

The belief that the hope of national salvation lay in the hand of God seemed to have been shared by many. The Ghana Evangelical Society preached the message of surrendering the nation to the reign of God and discarding elements of traditional religious spirituality such as pouring of libation at state functions. The society used to organise, on its own initiative, an annual 'national week of repentance and prayer.' In June 1977, through the influence of some religious leaders, an official 'National Week of Repentance and Prayer' was organised by the government of General Ignatius K. Acheampong. The speaker at the ecumenical Church service that crowned the activities of the week was the Rev. Abraham De-Love of the Philadelphia Mission and one of the frontline players in the evangelical movement. Though he was the pastor of a church, he preferred to describe himself as an 'international evangelist' since the title 'evangelist' was the most respected title in that era of Christian renewal in Ghana. Established ecclesiastical titles such as, bishop, archbishop, minister or pastor were not fancied since a major criticism against the established churches by the fellowships was that they had become more concerned about formalisms and worldly glory than the eternal salvation of people. Then also, there was the general belief that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent and the conviction that the conversion of many Ghanaians to Christ would lead to God's blessing for the nation, raised the work of the evangelist above all others.

The selection of the Rev. De-Love to preach at a state function was significant. It was the first time a preacher outside the mainline Christian community had been featured at such function. Previous governments had used, mainly, ministers of the mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>23</sup> But the use of De-Love, a prominent leader of the evangelical movement on that occasion, did not indicate the acceptance of

<sup>23</sup> J. S. Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana: A Case Study of the Acheampong Era* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1992) p.8.

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

evangelical values by the General Acheampong's government. It appears he was the one with the strongest pretensions to intellectualism among the assorted cohorts of religious advisors that the general had gathered around himself. Most of these advisors belonged neither to the mainstream mission-instituted churches nor the classical Pentecostal traditions but to 'fringe groups'<sup>24</sup> that did not also quite fit into the then fast proliferating African Independent Churches (AICs).

Most of such pastors claimed to have been trained in Europe or the United States of America (USA) and adopted forms of spirituality that could be placed between classical Pentecostalism and the AICs. They included Bishop Blackson of Bethany Church, who was made the Chairman of the Council of the University of Science and Technology, Rev. S. T. Afutu, Rev. Yeboah-Koree of the F'Eden Mission. Some of these pastors were also the first to preach the American version of what has come to be called the 'prosperity gospel', which is now associated with the Charismatic churches. In those days, the pietistic message of the fellowships did not allow the admittance of such teaching as authentic.<sup>25</sup> What De-Love had in common with these pastors was not evangelicalism but their support for a regime that had serious deficits of credibility<sup>26</sup> and Americanisms in language and fashion. The credibility of De-Love himself as a Christian leader was swept away together with the general with the fall of his regime.

Nowhere was the belief that the transformation of the country could be effected best by mass conversion to Christ more strongly felt than on university campuses where two main routes to national salvation were being advertised to the youth. Young intellectuals were generally divided between 'scientific socialism' and evangelical Christianity; though some of them tried to combine the two views and preferred to think about Jesus Christ as a revolutionary.<sup>27</sup> It appears the general disenchantment that followed the failed attempts to transform the society through violent revolutions in 1979 and 1981 left evangelical Christianity in its dominant

<sup>24</sup> J. S. Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana*, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> When later, Bishop B. A. Idahosah of Nigeria visited Ghana and preached a message in the vein of the prosperity gospel several sections of the evangelical movement rebuked him and disassociated themselves from that aspect of his teaching.

<sup>26</sup> See Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana*, p.9.

<sup>27</sup> Abamfo Atiemo, 'Singing with Understanding: The Story Gospel Music In Ghana', *Studies in World Christianity* Vol. 12, Part 2, 2006, p. 153.

*Abamfo O. Atiemo*

Charismatic version as the only real option open to most young people concerned about the socio-economic transformation of the country.<sup>28</sup>

Evangelical Christians were also involved in various social services. The best organised of social service activities was 'Operation Help Nima' (O.H.N), which was started in the 1960s by evangelical students of the University of Ghana, Legon. The project was devoted to improving environmental conditions in the twin-slum suburb of Nima-Maamobi near Accra, the capital city. This project included student volunteers devoting some time to clear heaps of refuse, providing technical services in the building of places of convenience as well as education and advocacy through the publication and distribution of literature, documentary films, and discussions on radio. With time it became a national programme of the evangelical Christian movement, with support from government and international partners.

#### **The Scripture Union Prayer Warriors Ministry and 'Deliverance'**

The spread of evangelicalism to towns and neighbourhoods meant that the middle and lower level artisans and other people of low formal educational background became targets of the evangelistic efforts of the fellowships. This development presented challenges of its own. In the first place, the rather abstract and intellectual message of evangelical Christianity had to be presented in the various mother-tongues in a way that would be understood by everybody, despite the level of their formal educational training. Initially, the SU was reluctant to take up the challenge. As a result, some former members of the SU formed the Coordinating Committee of Christian Fellowships (CCCF) in Accra to give direction to the town and neighbourhood fellowships.<sup>29</sup>

But the most dramatic developments in this direction occurred in the inland regions of Ashanti and Brong Ahafo. A movement, dominated by members of town and neighbourhood fellowships, dedicated to prayer as means of fighting against spiritual powers that are believed to be responsible for most of the suffering in the world emerged. This movement came to be known as the 'Prayer Warriors Ministry' and was a movement within the SU. This movement was one of the movements responsible for the spread of the 'deliverance' ministry in Ghanaian Christianity. Later on,

---

<sup>28</sup> It is mostly that generation that supplied the initial leadership and membership of the Charismatic Churches.

<sup>29</sup> Aduborfour, *Evangelical Para Church Movements*, p. 85.

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

Emmanuel Eni's book, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness*<sup>30</sup> which was a best seller in Anglophone West Africa, and seminars organised by Derek Prince,<sup>31</sup> served to make deliverance more widely acceptable to the elite evangelical Christians in Ghana, who are currently mostly found in the Charismatic movement.<sup>32</sup>

Evangelists appeared whose speciality was 'deliverance.' They organised mass deliverance sessions at which they openly preached against the practice of witchcraft and the use of juju and invited their hearers who thought themselves witches or wizards to come forward for exorcism. They taught about how such things as ancestral curses, worship of idols, and involvement with the occult could affect people's fortunes in life, materially and spiritually and urged people to seek 'deliverance' from them. The foremost of such evangelists was Evangelist Akwasi Amoako.<sup>33</sup>

Such teachings accorded well with the temperament and world-view of the less educated, in particular, and Ghanaians in general. They squared with the general tendency to attribute events and occurrences in life to supernatural agency.<sup>34</sup> 'Deliverance' is an important feature of what Paul Gifford identifies as 'Ghana's new Christianity.'<sup>35</sup>

#### **The Fellowships and the Churches**

The fellowships discouraged the starting of new churches and insisted that their members remained with their original churches and serve as a 'leavening influence'. Their central concern was evangelism and renewal of the existing churches, especially, the mainline churches established through the activities of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century missionary movement. They considered these churches lifeless and in need of revival. Their main

---

<sup>30</sup> See Abamfo Atiemo, 'Deliverance in the Charismatic Churches in Ghana,' *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. IV, December/January, 1994-95, p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> Abamfo Atiemo, 'Deliverance in the Charismatic Churches in Ghana,' p.43.

<sup>32</sup> When the 'deliverance' teaching began to spread many mainstream evangelicals opposed it. The SU, especially, resisted it and opposed the formation of the Prayer Warriors Ministry which was dedicated almost entirely to 'deliverance.'

<sup>33</sup> Cephas Omenyo & Abamfo Atiemo, 'Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana,' *Ghana bulletin of Theology*, (New series, Vol.1, No.1, July, 2006), p.59. Aduborfour, *Evangelical Para Church Movements*, p. 362.

<sup>34</sup> J. M. Assimeng, *Salvation, Social Crisis and the Human Condition* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1995), p. 33. See also, Stephen Ellis & Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004), pp.25, 26.

<sup>35</sup> Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, pp. 83 -102.

Abamfo O. Atiemo

message was that the 'new birth' was a must for all who would be saved. A recurrent theme in their teaching and preaching was, 'no church, no pastor, no rite, can save you. Only Jesus can save'.

There was also a deep mistrust of the ministers of the mainline churches. The liberal theology most of them subscribed to, the formalisms of their liturgical traditions, and their general opposition to evangelical revivalist and Pentecostal ethos caused members of the fellowships to regard them as neither 'born-again' nor 'spirit-filled'.<sup>36</sup> Members of the fellowships, for such reasons, also became suspicious of theological education in general and the major Protestant theological seminary, the Trinity College in Legon, became a virtual 'no-go' area for them.

The churches, in most cases, also viewed the fellowships with suspicion. In certain cases conflicts ensued between congregations and the fellowships. Initially, such conflicts occurred mainly between the fellowships and the mission-instituted churches, which seemed uncomfortable with the 'born again' message, and later their charismatic ethos which seemed to question the effectiveness and the authenticity of their work and tradition.

With time, friendship was lost also between the fellowships and the Pentecostals, especially some congregations of the Church of Pentecost. It is not very clear the issue that sparked off the conflict between them; especially, since those churches benefited most from the activities of the fellowships. The fellowships viewed the Pentecostal churches, especially the Church of Pentecost and the Assemblies of God as their natural allies. Therefore, they normally directed converts made in their evangelistic efforts to these churches. And in most cases, such converts were nominal members of the mission-instituted churches or belonged one of the AICs. Sometimes, if they were sure the pastor of the particular mission-instituted protestant congregation was 'born-again,' they counselled the converts not to leave but stay and serve as agents of revival.

It seems that the Pentecostal churches felt a sense of competition between them and the fellowships, especially as the latter turned more Pentecostal in ethos and grew in influence over Christian young people. The

---

<sup>36</sup> Abamfo Atiemo, *The Rise of the Charismatic Movement*, p. 47. See also Abamfo Atiemo, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections* (Accra: Presbel Printing Press, 1997), pp. 28-41.

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

Pentecostals wanted to exploit the new situation of increased respect and wider acceptance of Pentecostal culture, which had begun to emerge, especially among the young and educated, by attracting their youth back and integrating them properly into their churches. This desire led to the strengthening of existing youth and student groups and the formation of new ones, organised along the lines of the fellowships, in congregations and on school campuses.

#### **The Fellowships and Spread of Pentecostal /Charismatic Culture**

The importance of the fellowships in the Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal of Christianity in Ghana has not been given sufficient attention in the discussion of the subject. Yet, it was the fellowships, which more than any other factor, helped remove the image of 'Pentecostalism' as an expression of Christian spirituality, belonging mostly to people of low socio-economic status.<sup>37</sup> Most of the leaders of the fellowships, especially the type referred to in this work as 'evangelistic associations,' and majority of the members were well educated: university graduates, graduates of teacher training colleges or, at least, products of second cycle institutions. Initially, they used mostly English as the medium of expression at their meetings. Messages were translated into the local languages when necessary. Students on holidays and those who had completed their studies found the fellowships their natural places of worship.

With this development, Pentecostalism increased in stature as a genuine and respectable expression of Christianity, and educated young Pentecostals, who previously had felt not very confident to identify with their own denominations and of whom the denominations were suspicious, became bolder and began to identify with the tradition.<sup>38</sup> This was natural since the fellowships normally regarded the Pentecostal churches as their natural allies.<sup>39</sup> The Pentecostal and some Baptist

---

<sup>37</sup> According to Larbi, the Church of Pentecost, for example, was up to 1970, 'basically, a grassroot movement....The movement as a whole was basically effective in reaching one group of people – the illiterate segments of society.' (E. K. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, p.197).

<sup>38</sup> *The Ghana Evangelical Society Story: building a Nation for God and Christ* (Accra: Ghana Evangelical Society, 1998), p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> Although the fellowships accepted the mainline churches as churches with sound doctrinal heritage, the general view was that such churches had too many nominal members who were actually, not 'born-again'. They categorised church people into 'church-goers' and 'Christians'.

*Abamfo O. Atiemo*

churches were regarded as churches that were 'alive'. During this period, youth and students movements in the existing Pentecostal churches were established or strengthened and their influence extended to campuses of educational institutions.<sup>40</sup> The Bible study and prayer groups in the mainline churches also benefited greatly from this respectability gained by the Pentecostal/charismatic culture.<sup>41</sup>

Through the influence of the Ghana Evangelical Society (GES) and others, most of the fellowships came to emphasise the importance of the 'Holy Spirit baptism', stressing on speaking in tongues and prophecy. The weekly Friday 'all-night' prayer meetings organised by the GES, for example, were patronised by people from all over the country, and from different fellowship and denominational backgrounds. They also came to emphasise the doctrine of charismatic gifts and ministries, and encouraged Christians to identify and develop them through prayer. Opportunities were created by the formation of various ministries to enable those who had identified their gifts and ministries to use them to serve. In that sense the fellowships became virtual Bible schools that trained the youth for church-life and the spread of the gospel.

This approach of the fellowships produced an army of young, enthusiastic, and gifted Christians. Some of these people became itinerant teachers and evangelists. They were well educated. They earned the descriptive title, 'free-lance evangelist'. Since the emphasis at this point was on evangelism, other titles such as 'pastor', 'bishop', 'reverend' and the rest were not attractive. They were actually derided, in some cases. It was,

---

<sup>40</sup> It appears, at a point, some classical Pentecostal churches began to resent the influence of the fellowships on their young people and designed strategies, such as forming students and youth movements to counter it. Some of these movements were the Pentecost Students and Associates (PENSA), which later became Pentecost youth Evangelistic Movement (PENTYEM) and The Apostolic Students Association (APOSA). There were occasional reports of conflicts between the fellowships and Pentecostal churches in several parts of the country. Reports from former members of the fellowships in the Central Region, for example, indicate that members of the Church of Pentecost who belonged to the fellowships were at a point given the option to choose between the fellowship and the Church. But this was difficult for most of such members since they actually joined the Church after they had become converted through the work of the fellowships.

<sup>41</sup> Such groups experienced steady growth beginning from the early 1970s and born-again members of their congregations found comfortable company with them. (See Atiemo, *The Rise of the Charismatic Movement*, p. 29).

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

mainly, these people that became the founders and leaders of the contemporary Charismatic churches.<sup>42</sup>

The independent charismatic churches were the direct offspring of the fellowships. Due to their non-denominational nature, many of the members of the fellowships were not seriously committed to their own church denominations. The denominations themselves were suspicious of them and were not ready to give them space.<sup>43</sup> Many of the young people with fellowship background, who felt called to be full-time church workers, were not easily accepted into the ordained ministry of the mainline churches. So such members of the fellowships became the natural source of the initial leadership and membership of the then emerging 'charismatic ministries.'<sup>44</sup> Several of such people eventually found their ways into the ordained ministries of the existing mainline or mission-instituted churches.<sup>45</sup>

This development has been significant for the unprecedented sense of unity among the various Christian traditions in contemporary Ghana. The

---

<sup>42</sup> Among such people who have become influential leaders of the Charismatic Churches are, Rev. Tackie-Yarboi of Victory Bible Church, Pastor Ben Coleman of All People for Jesus Mission, Bishop Agyin-Asare of Word Miracle Church International, Revs. Steve and Stanley Mensah of Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry, and Rev. Ransford Obeng of the Calvary Charismatic Centre in Kumasi. These either belonged to the GES or, at least, occasionally visited its weekly 'All-night Prayer' meetings. Others are Pastor Mensah- Otabil, of International Central Gospel Church, who belonged to the Kanda Fellowship and Archbishop Duncan Williams of Action-Faith Ministries, who announced the launching of his ministry at the GES all-night on the Friday preceding the Sunday of the event.

<sup>43</sup> Omenyo & Atiemo, 'Claiming Religious Space', p.67.

<sup>44</sup> Initially, the churches that are now referred to as the Independent Charismatic Ministries preferred to be called, 'Ministries'.

<sup>45</sup> Among contemporary leaders of the mission-instituted churches that belonged to the evangelical fellowships are, the Most Rev Dr. Robert Aboagye-Mensah, 'Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church p- Ghana, Rt. Rev. Yaw Frimpong – Manso, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Rt. Rev Akrofi, Accra Bishop of the Anglican Church, and Rev Steve Asante of the Ghana Baptist Convention. Others are Rev. Herbert Opong, Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Rt. Rev Fred Nnuro, Bishop of the Koforidua Diocese of the Methodist Church, Rev. Godfred Bamfo, Director of Evangelism and Missions of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Asante, former President of the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon. There are countless others in the ordained ministries of these Churches.

*Abamfo O. Atiemo*

presence of former 'brothers and sisters in Christ' in the various confessional traditions, bound together not only by history but by common evangelical convictions and commitment to Charismatic/Pentecostal spirituality, has served to further boost Christian unity in Ghana. The previous mutual suspicions, which in some cases bred mutual contempt because, denominations regarded each other as either 'non-spiritual' or given to 'ridiculous or false expressions' of spirituality have faded away.

Another contribution of the fellowships was the strengthening of the existing prayer groups or charismatic movement in the mainline churches. Some of their members, as well as people with sympathies toward them, who had gained some influence in church and society lobbied church leaders and influenced decisions that contributed to the gradual acceptance of the evangelical message of the fellowships, and the eventual sympathetic appreciation of Pentecostal/Charismatic culture within those churches. Rev. Peter Barker, an English minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Mr William Ofori-Atta, a prominent statesman and a Presbyterian lay-person, and Rear Admiral P. F. Quaye, a respected naval officer and a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church are a few of such people. Mr Ofori-Atta became the chairman of the Ghana Evangelism Committee (GEC), which was tasked by the Christian Council of Ghana to promote evangelism through its member churches. Mr Enoch Agbozo, a former senior civil servant and founder and leader of the GES, was the secretary.

A laity-based evangelistic programme designed and run by this committee, the 'New Life for All' (NLFA) became an effective vehicle for renewal and church growth. Although the GEC did not deliberately promote Charismatic spirituality, its message of 'new life' was so similar to the 'born-again' message of the fellowships that its programmes became the natural favourite of members of the fellowships which belonged to the mainline churches. Eventually, such members also came to be counted among the main agents for the spread of Pentecostal culture within the mainline churches.<sup>46</sup>

The evangelical fellowships, with their non-denominational orientation and their message of the new birth, which required faith in Jesus Christ alone and not the membership of any church, helped slow down the drift of the

---

<sup>46</sup> Atiemo, *The Rise of the Charismatic Movement*, p. 30. See also, Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, p.277.

---

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

membership of the mainline churches to the Pentecostal churches. Their stand that it was more prudent to stay in your own church and help revive it than to leave for another one created a sense of mission in many young members of the mainline churches who decided to stay and work towards renewal.

#### **Ascendancy of Charismatic Spirituality**

The late 1980s saw the beginning of the gradual fading away of the evangelical fellowships, the reinvigoration and spread of the charismatic movement within the mainline churches, and the emergence and growth of the neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic ministries. These developments provided the context for the crystallisation of elements drawn from different eras of renewal and traditions in the historical evolution of Ghanaian Christian faith-expressions in the Pentecostal/Charismatic form. They also led to the fading away of the doctrinal, liturgical and other distinctions that previously characterised Christian denominationalism in Ghana.<sup>47</sup>

The development represented the culmination of a long series of waves and strands of renewal in the history of Christianity in Ghana. The evangelical fellowships constituted the watershed in the process toward the *charismatisation* of Ghanaian Christianity. The fellowships' acceptance and promotion of the Pentecostal /Charismatic ethos led to the effective '*de-denominationalisation*' of what Pentecostals call 'the Holy Spirit baptism.' A major characteristic of the evangelical fellowships was their insistence on a personal relationship of every believer with Jesus Christ rather than the membership of any denomination as a necessary condition for salvation; and the Holy Spirit baptism which was said to be a distinct second experience subsequent to conversion was said to be available to every believer, irrespective of one's denominational background.

The ethos of the evangelical fellowships had four significant results, which had special implications for the Charismatic movement in particular and Ghanaian Christianity in general. First, most of the young people who belonged to those fellowships did not have any serious commitment to their own denominations and were more ready to accept other viewpoints on the primary basis that those viewpoints were biblical, than to hold on to

---

<sup>47</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: the Renewal of Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 66.

*Abamfo O. Atiemo*

the traditional creeds of their denominations, which were mostly couched in phrases that were difficult to relate to their contemporary situation, and which they also viewed with suspicion.

Secondly, many young Christians became equipped in preaching, witnessing and counselling. They grew enthusiastic and were searching for opportunities to use their spiritual gifts. This created a widespread culture of voluntarism among the youth with respect to evangelism and other forms of Church work. Young people, at their own financial expense, embarked on evangelistic activities without expecting any immediate material or financial reward. They did not even seek to be recognised by the official church. The converts made through such evangelistic efforts were directed to join any mainline Protestant church or one of the classical Pentecostal churches.

Thirdly, the relish for charismatic gifts in the fellowships marked the beginning of the wide acceptance of the Pentecostal ethos by young educated Christians, thus leading to the speedy removal of the prejudices generally held against that type of Christian faith-expression. Fourthly, though due to the links between the SU and the GHAFES, many sections of the evangelical fellowships were regarded as movements for the highly educated, the neighbourhood and workplace fellowships served as the channels through which evangelical Christianity was made accessible to rural communities and lower and middle level artisans and workers such as 'auto-mechanics, dressmakers, petty-traders, taxi-drivers, untrained school teachers, office messengers, and factory workers.'<sup>48</sup> This was the case especially in Ashanti and Brong Ahafo. Many of such people were not of any high level educational background, yet, the combined influence of evangelicalism and Pentecostalism generated sufficient enthusiasm in some of them and they became involved in the founding and growth of the *neo-prophetic* movement,<sup>49</sup> which they currently dominate.<sup>50</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The fellowships were the melting pot in which the differences between the various traditions were removed. Certain factors, all linked to the fellowships, made this possible. In the first place, worship forms of the

---

<sup>48</sup> Aduborfour, *Para Church Movements*, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Omenyo & Atiemo, 'Claiming Religious Space', p.58.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, p. 89.

### *The Evangelical Christian Fellowships*

fellowships, which later became mainly charismatic, but included aspects associated with the mainline Protestant churches, such as their hymns, came to be seen as neutral and gradually came to be accepted as normal in the various churches.

Most of the elements of contemporary Ghanaian Charismatic liturgy and other practices, such as 'praises and worship', 'testimonies', 'healing and deliverance' were nurtured and made widely acceptable through the fellowships. Even though some of these and practices such as everybody praying aloud at the same time at public worship, the use of drums, rhythmic clapping of hands and dancing at worship already existed in the prayer groups, they were deemed as practices mainly associated with the Pentecostal and African Independent Churches. Such practices came to be accepted in almost all churches, including the Roman Catholic Church.

The practice of creating 'teams' for various ministries, which is now so popular in Ghanaian churches, is also a legacy of the fellowships. Teams for special ministries such as 'praise and worship,' 'prayer,' 'personal evangelism,' and others became popular with the spread of the fellowships. These have been inherited by the charismatic movement and have gradually spread within the various denominations as special lay-ministries.