

## PAA WILLIE

### A MISSIONARY STATESMAN PAR EXCELLENCE

**Abraham Debrah Narh**

**O**ne name stands out tall in both the history of Ghana and the history of indigenous missions in Ghana – William Ofori-Atta. William Ofori Atta generally called Paa Willie was a well-known son of Nana Sir Ofori Atta, the Paramount Chief of Akim Abuakwa. He was also the nephew of Dr. J. B. Danquah, a man accorded the title, the doyen of Gold Coast politics.

Paa Willie was an economist, teacher, politician and lawyer in professional life. He was a man with many parts. He was a founding member of the United Gold Coast Convention. He is memorialized as one of the illustrious and eminent Big Six that Ghana prides herself of.

If there ever was a courageous Ghanaian, then, it was Paa Willie. He made a unique impact as a professional politician during the most tempestuous periods of Ghana's modern history. He was detained five terms as a political prisoner because he was a resolute democrat. This made him clash with autocratic and military regimes. It is said by the famous Kwame Bediako that, "He brought to politics a new breath of sincerity, modesty, and honesty...He did not use his talents or office for the acquisition of personal wealth, and he worked, lived, and died a simple and devoted patriot."

We could read volumes of writings concerning the life of Paa Willie but most important is his life as a missionary. He started off as a politician but lived his later years as a missionary par excellence. His memories and deeds still live on.

The missionary life of this great man started off in prison. For him, this was a breathtaking period of coming into contact with Truth. It was during one of his jail terms in 1964 that he was sent a cake and a Bible by his wife Auntie Mary. It was this Bible that will turn his zeal and passion into a very fulfilling call. The cake was rejected but the Bible passed inspection. His only reading material in prison was a Bible.



he had gone astray with a focus on his desires and asked for forgiveness, accepting Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord.

**'It is inescapable that the Christian has been placed where he is to influence his society for good.'**

Reading the Bible with his legal eyes critically, he came to the conclusion that, the Bible was the absolute truth and all others faded by comparison to it. This conviction and his late conversion transformed him into a twentieth century Paul. His freedom from jail after the coup d'état in 1966 marked the beginning of a significant profession as an evangelist and Christian.

At age sixty-four, Paa Willie was at the Scripture Union Easter House Party. He was with men and women who could be his children. This was when the vision to form an indigenous missionary organization was born. Paa Willie's humility and passion for evangelism and for that matter the C.O.F. vision informed his decision to step in to accept the position of Field Director when others were reluctant to assume that responsibility. He worked tirelessly creating mission awareness, surveying the mission field and mobilizing prayer support by forming C.O.F.

core Groups until his retirement in 1987 at the age of 77. Paa Willie died the following year. He was 54 years when he was born again and died in 1988. A solid 24 years of impact as a missionary for the Lord Jesus Christ. Though he is dead, his life marks keep ticking.

It was written of him by his son, Bernard Ofori-Atta that, “at various stages of his life, he was an economist, a teacher, a lawyer, a politician and an evangelist and he excelled at all of these callings.”

It is recorded that, the motivating force of his life was service – service to his neighbours and to the nation. He often did this at great personal discomfort and detriment to himself. He devoted the evening of his life to evangelism and died in peace and contentment knowing that he had performed his duties to the best of his ability.

“He took the words of John 20:21 seriously and personally, and they became the dominating factors in his life: ‘As the Father sent me, even so I send you.’ It became the ruling passion of his life to take the good news of man’s salvation to everybody. His method of approach was to make disciples who would in turn take the Word to others.”

His life practice as a Christian is characterized by some achievements of co-founding the Maranatha Bible College with the Reverend John Bergen and being an active member of the Board. He also conceived the idea of a missionary society, an indigenous Missionary Society taking the Gospel to Ghanaians, Africans and eventually even to other continents and it was through this vision that, the Christian Outreach Fellowship was born. Paa Willie nursed it into a full-fledged mission society as Chairman and Director. He was also Vice-Chairman of the National Council of the Bible Society for five years and a member of the Distribution Committee.

He was chairman for the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation, (GILLBT), Challenge Enterprises and the Ghana Evangelism Committee; and he was a member and mentor of many other evangelical societies. He was an Honorary Patron of the Scripture Union.

The impact of Paa Willie was summed up succinctly by a military officer at the time of his funeral when he said; “Paa Willie belonged to all of us!” – the clergy, and society and the politician.

Paa Willie was a man for all. He defended the Chris-

tian faith in all angles. He was one person who made clear his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ in word and action whether at home, on the move or abroad.

In the preface of Remembering “PAA WILLIE”, K. Y. Boafo wrote, when he was addressing him as evangelist, “Not for him the Christianity emasculated by culture, sectarianism or careerism. Paa Willie stripped it of all these, and let it stand as it really is – a great commission, a commandment, a serious assignment to spread the good news of mankind’s salvation through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to live by the word of God. And, in so doing, in laying bare the essence and endeavouring to live it, many were those who were drawn by the power of that word into the fold of the Christian community of this nation.”

Captions of the tributes on his life as a missionary are emboldened as an inspiration for the reader to do more, to pray, to go, to give and to send.

### **Christian Outreach Fellowship (COF)**

Paa was not just one of the founding members of COF, he was one of two people who dreamed and were convinced that there were many people in Ghana who had never been reached by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and who were urged to form an indigenous Missionary Society (COF) to reach out to such people.

He was not just an Executive/Council member of COF, but he was the one who held the core groups, the COF Council, the Missionaries in the field, the office staff and the entire organization together like a centripetal magnetic force. He also accepted appointment as a COF missionary and raised his own support to carry out the work of COF.

He singlehandedly travelled to places in the Northern, Upper, Western, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo and Volta regions to survey the mission field and the unreached peoples of Ghana.

### **The Bible Society**

“We shall always cherish his memory in our midst, for he was indeed a Man of God”.

Paa Willie was associated with the Bible Society of Ghana, right from its very beginning in the mid-sixties. Unlike many leaders, Paa was not an empire

builder. He was a Kingdom seeker and sought to promote the interest of the Kingdom of Christ in a definite way.

### Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT)

Paa Willie's commitment and dedication to the cause of Jesus Christ was so refreshing that he was in demand in every evangelical circle as a Board Member, or a speaker, a counsellor or simply as a brother in fellowship.

During his Chairmanship, the work of GILLBT expanded and prospered. By 1987, GILLBT was working in 23 of the 60 indigenous Ghanaian languages.

Under the loving and fatherly counsel of Paa Willie, GILLBT also carried on its translation of the Bible. Paa Willie recognized that the message of Jesus Christ was best understood in the language of one's native tongue. The completion of every single translation of the Bible was for him a special occasion for rejoicing.

He was a great source of encouragement.

### Maranatha Bible College

Paa's zeal and passion for evangelism knew no bounds and he sought in his Christian ministry to train men and women who would carry on the same ministry to the remotest parts of the country.

His goal was to reach the unreached people by any means in any part of Ghana during his lifetime.

### NOTABLE QUOTES OF PAA WILLIE

*'We are too enslaved to materialistic considerations and to social ties to obey the dictates of the Spirit of Christ.'*

*'I should think that we should consider it the greatest abomination to see a child who does not know Jesus and to let him pass by without doing anything.'*

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*'We Christians believe that revolutions achieve nothing if they merely set out to change or destroy structures and leave unchanged the men and women that run them. We believe and we assert that only Jesus has power to change man's nature and to make him able to change his own society.'*

*'It is inescapable that the Christian has been placed where he is to influence his society for good.'*

### Paa Willie had this to say in 1978 in a pamphlet as he made this conclusion:

"I know that very soon I shall, in the words of Peter, "put off this tabernacle" and be with the Lord. And my constant prayer at my age is and should be that in my remaining few years or months or days or hours, I should by His grace and enablement live only for the Lord, grow daily into maturity and be able at my death to say with Paul (in Timothy 4: 7-8) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day and not me only but unto all them also that love His appearing".

Of him, it is said, "he felt at home in the company of world leaders like Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and Pandit Nehru of India, yet ordinary people of our society were drawn to him and he regarded them as brothers and sisters." He used to call himself the five-star detainee as he was detained five times. He loved and forgave all. His sense of humour is admirable.

His deeds are worth emulating and his mind and word coordination a thing to be learnt.

Paa Willie is a missionary statesman par excellence!

We thank the Lord for the life of William Ofori-Atta. May his legacy continue to impact generations to come for the Great Commission and for true transformation across Africa and the nations.

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**Abraham Debrah Narh** is a young gentleman whose desire is to see young people live purposefully and fulfilled. His inspiration is Jesus and he believes in leadership through service. He is currently working with Oneway Africa Ministries. He is interested in writing, speaking, serving and encouraging.