

REACHING THE GOLD COAST – A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF MISSIONS IN GHANA

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Introduction

Missionary activities in Ghana formerly known as the Gold Coast have come a long way. They have been the channels of Western influence, origin of good education and health-care, and a base for raising leaders not only for the church but also for economic development. The introduction of Christianity in the mid-fifteenth century also marked the birth of other problems that have been affecting modern mission activities in the West African sub-region, both explicitly and implicitly.

There is no doubt at all that the work and sacrifices of these early missionaries contributed to the development of Ghana. The early missionaries were instrumental in helping to build Ghana through the establishment of mission schools that have trained many renowned citizens. The products of these schools have served and still serve in various positions of influence both in Ghana and beyond. Notable amongst them is the former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan who had his second cycle education in Mfantsipim School, founded in 1876 by the Wesleyan Missionaries in Cape-Coast. The holistic training from these missionary schools indirectly promoted the feeling of self-governance, which culminated in the struggle for, and eventual independence of Ghana from colonial rule.

A brief overview of Missionary work in Ghana reveals that, the earliest missionaries to the Gold Coast were the Roman Catholic Franciscan Friars who accompanied the Portuguese traders in 1482. The primary aim of these missionaries was not to evangelize as such. They came as chaplains to the Portuguese

traders.

This Article looks at how Christianity eventually was established in the Gold Coast and the succession of the various missionary groups and individuals.

Earliest Contact Between Western Europe and the Gold Coast

From the first half of the fifteenth century, Portuguese explorers began to visit the Guinea Coast, and by 1471 they had reached the coast of modern Ghana. For about two centuries they stayed on the coast mainly for trading purposes and made a permanent impact on the places where they had settlements. In time, other European traders followed the steps of the Portuguese to share in the rich trade with the people of the Guinea Coast.

A Permanent mission station was not established until 18th December 1828 when missionaries from the Basel Society (Karl Salbach, Gottlieb Holzwarth, Johannes Gottlob Schmidt) came to the Gold Coast. They initially settled at Christiansburg, Accra and later moved to Akwapim ridge for climatic reasons. The Wesleyans followed the Basel missionaries in 1835. They established their station at Cape Coast, the Central Province.¹

The German Bremen Society arrived on the 5th of May 1847. They first stayed in Cape-Coast and then later settled in the Trans-Volta area.²

The Roman Catholic Missionaries followed in 1880 and settled in Elmina.³ In 1898, the African Methodist-Episcopal (AME) Zion Mission, an Afri-

¹ Larbi, Kingsley E., 2001. Pentecostalism, The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity. Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, Accra-Ghana. p.16

² Agbeti, J.K., West Africa Church History, Christian Missions and Church Foundations: 1482-1919, Lieden E.J. Brill, 1986. 81

³ The pioneer missionaries FRS. Augusta Moreau and Eugene Murat arrived on Pentecost Tuesday, 18th May, and 1880. Helena Pfann, a Roman Catholic Historian stated that, the Catholics found it difficult sending missionaries to the Gold Coast because of the ravages malaria was causing among the Europeans on the Coast. ; Agbeti, J.K. 81

can-American group followed.⁴ The Anglicans came in 1906 and started their missionary activities again.⁵

The world wars disturbed missionary activities in Ghana (the Gold Coast) for some time. The Bremen Missionaries in Ghana were deported in 1916 from the Trans-Volta area. The British Colonial authority also expelled the German Basel Missionaries in 1917 during the First World War over fear of perceived German missionary influences and potential German military spying from Nsaba, then a very strong German Missionary post in the dense tropical forest of Ghana.

For a short while the institutions were left without management until 1919 when the Scottish mission arrived to take over their institutions. Although the deportation of the Germans was regarded necessary for the conduct of the war, Governor Guggisberg of the Gold Coast later described it as “The greatest blow which education in this country has ever suffered”.

When the Basel missionaries returned to the Gold Coast in 1926, various efforts were made by the representative of the Scots and Germans to foster closer cooperation and understanding between the missionaries of the two missions.

The incarceration of the German Nationals of both Basel and Bremen missions in 1939 during World War II saw the Scottish missions assuming full responsibility of the Ewe (Evangelical) Presbyterian Church.

Denominational competition became a subtle problem for the churches. The Wesleyans began their work at Cape-Coast, and although they were active in the rural areas, their main strategy was to settle first in the large urban centers before moving to the interior. Smith notes that when the Wesleyans began the spread from Accra into what was considered the traditional mission field in Akwapim and Akim, this for some time caused much concern

in the Basel circles. Discipline was made more difficult as, “Presbyterian members under censure often made their way to rival missions”. Another point of conflict was the use of English language in the Wesleyan Schools as opposed to the use of vernacular by the Basel mission. The use of English was said to have attracted young people to the Wesleyans.

The 1880’s saw the Roman Catholic missions competing for members in the original territories of the Wesleyan and Basel missionaries. Within twenty-five years, the Roman Catholics established missions in Elmina, Cape-Coast, Accra, Keta and Navrongo. “Thus, from the east and west sides of the country, the Roman Catholics entered the traditional Basel and Wesleyan spheres of activities”.

Reasons for the European Journey

Several reasons caused the Portuguese explorers to sail round the continent of Africa. In addition to their desire to bypass the Muslim sphere of influence in what is today the Middle East and find a new sea route to the Far East, there were several other reasons.⁸ The most important reason was economic; they wanted to have a share in the rich trade with western Sudan without having to use the trans-Saharan routes, which for centuries were controlled by the North Africa Berbers and other Muslims.

⁹According to Buah, Portugal being a strong Christian country also aspired to reduce the Muslim influence, which was spreading fast in western Sudan. If successful in this enterprise, the Portuguese would not only have been in the position to gain a hold on western Sudanese trade but could also convert the people to Christianity.¹⁰ Thirdly, the exploration was prompted by the spirit of enquiry and enthusiasm for knowledge that was sweeping across Europe at this time of renaissance.¹¹

The Portuguese arrived in 1471, and for 11 years

⁴ Agbeti, J.K.147

⁵ Larbi, Kingsley E, 2001: Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity. Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, Accra-Gh

⁶ Larbi, (ibid) p.17

⁷ Larbi, Kingsley E, 2001: Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity. Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, Accra-Ghana. 17

⁸ Buah, F.K.1998: A History of Ghana (Revised and updated). Malaysia: Macmillan. 65

⁹ Buah, 65 see also Hildebrandt, Jonathan. 1987: History of the Church in Africa. African Christian Press. Achimota. 59

¹⁰ Buah, 65

were engaged in trade with the people of Edina, which they named El- Mina (the gold mines) because of the abundant gold they found there and its surrounding areas. Becoming convinced that the prospects of trade were very good; they obtained a piece of land from the King of Elmina, built a magnificent castle in 1482 near the mouth of the River Benya, and named it Sao Jaogo (or St. George). To this day the castle (with later modification by the Dutch) has remained the greatest memorial of Portuguese activities on the Western Coast of Africa.

For well over a century, the Portuguese enjoyed a near monopoly in the prosperous trade on the coast of Guinea, but in the course of the sixteenth century, other Europeans entered into the trading scene. The formidable challenge posed by these other European merchants; especially the Dutch and the English compelled the Portuguese to leave the Gold Coast (Ghana) and many of their other trading posts along the Guinea Coast. The early attacks on the Portuguese monopoly were sporadic, as the other European competitors lacked the backing of their home governments. In due course, however, their home governments welcomed the advantage of giving their adventure-merchants patronage. They began to enjoy the results of their operations on the west coast.

Anticipating failure in their repeated attempts to find alternatives to routes to the Far East, which would help them avoid the sphere of influence established for Portugal and Spain by the treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the English entered into a competition in an attempt to obtain a share of the Guinea Coast trade. In 1553, the year the English adventurers Willoughby and Chancellor were fruitlessly searching for a Northeast passage to the east, an English expedition led by Captain Thomas Wyndham reached the coast of Ghana. Continuing their exploration as far as the Niger delta and Benin, Wyndham and his men returned to England with a quantity of gold, silver and other valuable Guinea commodities such as pepper.

Other English men such as John Hawkins followed Wyndham in 1562, 1564 and 1567, and took home slaves. Another English explorer was Francis Drake,

who became famous for his successful circumnavigation of the world from 1577 to 1580.

These early successful visits created an interest in England in the 'golden' trade that the Gold Coast offered. Merchants then began to go out to the Gold Coast. They first made a settlement in Cape-Coast, where they built their first fort in 1664. From here they spread their influence to several coastal towns, including British Komenda and Anomabu. The firm establishment of the British in these places resulted in strong rivalry between the Dutch and later, other European merchants.

The greatest challenge to the Portuguese monopoly in Ghana came from the Netherlands whose traders began going out to the Guinea coast in 1593. Within half a century they had forced the Portuguese to capitulate and withdraw from Ghana. The Netherlands merchants intensified their trading activities along the Guinean Coast, including the 16 supply of slaves to the Portuguese in the New World. Other Europeans were also attracted to the wealth of the Gold Coast, now Ghana, from the mid seventeenth century onwards: the Danes (1642), the Swedes (1647), and the Bradenbergers (1682).¹²

SUCCESSION OF MISSIONARIES TO THE GOLD COAST

The Roman Catholic faith was the first to be introduced. This was followed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), later renamed the Anglican Church. The next important Christian sect was the Presbyterian Church, introduced by the Basel Missionaries Society and then the Bremen Mission. They were followed by the Wesleyan (now Methodist) Church. The last of the mission churches established in the nineteenth century was the American Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church.¹³ It is worth acknowledging the efforts of the Moravian missionaries who also came to the Gold Coast in 1732 from the Danish Island of St. Thomas even though their work ended fruitlessly after sowing eleven (11) precious human seeds in the soil of Ghana.¹⁴

¹¹ Buah, 65

¹² Buah, F.K. 1998: A History of Ghana (Revised and updated). Malaysia: Macmillan. 68-69

¹³ Buah, F.K. 1998: A History of Ghana (Revised and updated). Malaysia: Macmillan. 132

The Catholic Missionaries

Apart from the economic gains, one of the important goals that urged Portugal, a fervent Catholic Nation, to embark upon the sea voyage to the African coast and beyond was the promotion of the Catholic faith in these new lands. In the company of the merchants on the Coast were priests, who initially served as chaplains to the merchants. On 20th January, 1482, the first public mass was said at Elmina. The priests soon started making converts among the people of Elmina and other immediate districts and in 1503, the Chief of Efutu and about 1,300 of his subjects received baptism. In 1534, the country was made part of the diocese, with headquarters on the Island of Sao Tome. In succession, three different orders of Monks were assigned to the country to open mission stations but, in the eighteenth century, the Catholic Church in the Gold Coast went into oblivion; it was revived in the second half of the 19th century.

The decision to re-establish the Catholic Church had some support from Sir Garnet Wolseley, the Governor and the military leader of the Sagrenti War of 1874. It was also influenced by another colonial official, a Catholic who worked in both Ghana and Nigeria, who enthusiastically promoted the idea of inviting Catholic missionaries to Ghana. He was James Marshall in whose honour the Knights of Marshall in Ghana and other parts of West Africa was founded.

For some time, Kumasi was considered for the headquarters of the Church in Ghana, however, Elmina was chosen. On the 18th of May 1880 the first two priests of the Society of the African Mission (S.M.A) founded in France in 1856 arrived at Elmina. Like the earlier missionaries of the other churches, the priest did not survive long. One of them, Father Eugene Murat, died barely three months after his arrival and the other Father Augusta Moreau, six years afterwards. Undaunted by this setback, the S.M.A sent out other missionaries. In 1897, the church moved its headquarters from Elmina to nearby Cape Coast, probably because Cape Coast although no longer the capital of the country had become the provincial headquarters of the colony's political administration.

From 1900, the Catholic Church spread rapidly not only to the south of the country, but also the

Asante/Bono-Ahafo and Ewe lands. This success was attributed to the hard work of the fathers of the SMA. In 1939 another group of missionaries, the Society of the Divine word (S.V.D) arrived to work at the present-day Greater Accra and Eastern Regions.

Missionaries commonly known as the White fathers, who entered the evangelical scene from present day Republic of Burkina Faso, pioneered the establishment of the Catholic Church in the Northern and Upper Regions. After initial problems arising from the refusal of permission by the British Colonial authorities, largely because the New Missionaries were French nationals, the White Fathers were finally allowed to open their first mission station at Navrongo in 1906.

For some time, the British colony again placed obstacles on the development and expansion of the church in the North, particularly in the Upper West Region. After a period of struggle, the White Fathers were given permission to operate throughout the north and they created an ecclesiastical province in 1950. By 1980 the Catholic Church had become so well established that, in addition to two archbishops at Cape-Coast and Tamale, it had bishops in Accra, Sekondi-Takoradi, Keta-Ho, Kumasi, Sunyani, Wa and Navrongo - Bolgatanga, all nine leaders being Ghanaians.¹⁵ Recently, the Archbishop of the Cape-Coast diocese, Arch Bishop Appiah Turkson was elevated to the sacred position of a Cardinal.

Anglican Missionaries

In response to requests made by the Royal African Company trading on the coast of Ghana, the society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G) of the Church of England (Anglican) sent out the first chaplain, the Rev. Thomas Thompson, who arrived at the Cape-Coast castle in 1752. Except for the few visits he made to the other English settlements like the Anomabo Castle, Rev. Thomas Thompson confined himself to working in Cape Coast where he made some conversions among the Mulattoes. In less than 5 years, he was compelled by poor health, to return to England. Being convinced that the success of the Church in the country would depend on the native clergy, Thomas Thompson had, in 1754, sent three boys to England from Cape

¹⁴ Addae, Kwame Divine. 2003: The Influence of Episcopalianism on Charismatic/ Independent Churches in Ghana. An unpublished dissertation for Masters in Divinity (ITS). 26- 28

Coast for training. Two of them died. The third Philip Kweku (anglicized as Quaue), was ordained priest of the Anglican Church and returned home in 1765. Like his patron Thomas Thompson, Rev. Quaue's activities did not extend beyond the Cape-Coast Castle. His converts were mostly mulattoes. However, by his death in 1816 Philip Quaue had laid a firm foundation. As headmaster, for Cape-Coast castle school, a number of the nineteenth century Cape Coast castle intelligentsia received their first cycle education.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the SPG church on the Coast was dormant, and in 1905 when new missionaries arrived, there were only four coastal congregations: a colonial chaplaincy at Cape-Coast and Accra, a station at Axim started in the late 1890s and a small congregation at Sekondi comprising Yoruba members.

Unlike the other Christian churches, the Anglican Church does not have many centers in rural communities. The relatively few mission stations in the rural districts owed their foundation to certain groups of laymen. Among such people was the "Prophet" John Swatson of Beyin in Nzema, a disciple of Prophet William Wade Harris, a Liberian national who led a religious movement across the Ivory Coast into Western Ghana. With a band of Catechists, Swatson established congregations in different places in the South western part of the country, including the Sehwi district.

In due course, these congregations were absorbed into the Anglican faith. Another group of Anglicans derived their origin from Yoruba workers and traders in the mining centers. These communities established their own congregations of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) brought over from their native Nigeria. As the C.M.S was an offshoot of the Anglican Church, the S.P.G missionaries in the country extended their missionary work to the Yoruba foundations. Some Anglican congregations also owed their foundation to leaders under censure imposed by their mother churches, particularly the Presbyterian Mission, which in the early days unlike the Anglican Church was unduly inflexible to their members' participation in some harmless traditional rites, festivals and social activities like dancing.

It is worth noting that perhaps the greatest source

of strength that helped the establishment of the Anglican Church, especially in urban communities, was the official patronage given to the Church. The elite gained some prestige from their membership of what, in the British colonial days, was virtually the 'established church'. Also, people who attended the 'Government Schools' were often trained with the Anglican bias for the Anglican Church.

Despite the advantages it enjoyed over the other missions, the Anglican Church, for lack of adequate missionaries and local clergy, did not spread as widely as the other denominations. By 1990, the Church's two bishoprics in Accra and Kumasi were still part of the West African Province, although headed by the Archbishop resident in Koforidua in Ghana.¹⁶

Basel and Bremen Missionaries

There are two groups of Presbyterian Churches in the country: The Presbyterian Church of Ghana with headquarters in Accra and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church with its own headquarters in Ho in the Volta Region. Early attempt to establish the churches in the country from continental Europe, including the United Brethren of the Moravian Church, did not yield permanent fruits. It was not until the second decade that a fresh start was made by the Swiss Missionaries.

Taking advantage of a request made in 1826 by Major de Richelieu, the Danish governor of the Christiansburg Castle in Accra, the Basel Missionary Society in Switzerland offered four missionaries for service in Accra. After training and ordination in Denmark the four missionaries arrived at Osu, Accra on 18th December 1828. As was to happen to all the early missionaries of the other churches, the tropical climate had a heavy toll on their lives; within the first seven months of their arrival, 3 of them had died, and the fourth died not long after. In March 1832, three other missionaries arrived on the coast.

The group included Rev. Andreas Riis, the only one who survived. Owing largely to health reasons, Riis left the Christiansburg and opened a station at Akwapim Akropong. While returning to the Christiansburg for a brief period, Andreas was recalled home. Meanwhile two other missionaries

¹⁵ Buah, F.K. 1998: A History of Ghana (Revised and updated). Malaysia: Macmillan Publishing Limited. 6 132-3

¹⁶ Buah, F.K. 1998: A History of Ghana (Revised and updated). Malaysia: Macmillan.134

had arrived on the coast in 1837; they like their predecessors did not survive the climate.

The Rev. Andreas Riis returned to the country with two other pastors, George Thompson, a West African trained in Basel, and the Rev. Widmann. Also in company with Riis was a group of twenty-four West Indians, who were not only to help in spreading the gospel but also to become an example of Christian living in Akropong. Some of their descendants, the Halls at Akropong and the Clerks at Osu, Accra, became the leading ministers and Christians in the Presbyterian Church.

Having been reported to the Basel Missions in Switzerland by newly arrived missionaries for dealing in gun and gun powder, and for running a mission plantation worked by slaves who were guaranteed their freedom when they accepted baptism, Andreas Riis was called home for good in 1845. The remaining missionaries carried on, and opened stations in rapid succession in both present-day Greater Accra and the Eastern Regions. Thanks to the Rev. Frederick Ramseyer, whom the Asantes captured at Anum in 1869 and eventually sent to Kumasi as a prisoner, other stations inland were established. These included Begoro (1875), Abetifi (1877) and Kumasi itself.

During World War I the Basel missionaries were expelled from the country. In 1918, missionaries from Scotland arrived, and the Church, which had hitherto been known as the Basel Mission, became known as the Scottish Mission. In the 1920s some of the German missionaries returned. In 1926 the church became autonomous with its own national synod.

As mentioned above, the other branch of the Presbyterian faith was introduced by the North German Missionary Society, and was for many years, known as the Bremen Mission. The pioneer missionary, the Rev. Lorenz Wolf, started the first mission station at Peki in 1847. His two companions died soon after arrival, and he himself died in 1851, having made very few converts. The infant church had a fresh lease of life when the new missionaries opened a mission at Keta in 1853. By 1859, two other stations had been opened, Anyako in the south and Wegbe, near Ho. With funds raised from a trading enterprise in palm oil and cotton, the missionary

built a catechist school in 1864. To assist the Bremen missionaries, some churchmen in the Basel missions were sent to work in parts of the Volta Region. These included the West Indian, Rev. Peter Hall and the Ghanaian mulatto, Rev. Christian Quist. Two others who had a great impact on the area were the Rev. Nicholas Clerk and Daniel Awere.

The Bremen missionaries spread their work to Lome where a mission was opened in 1896. By 1905, one synod with headquarters at Keta served all Ewe communities on both sides of the present day boundary.¹⁷

Wesleyan Missionaries (The Methodist Church)

After the Catholic, the Wesleyan, at first known as the Wesley Mission became the strongest of the Christian churches in the country both in terms of membership and geographical spread. The arrival in the country of the early Wesleyan missionaries owed much to the ground prepared in Dixcove in the western region by some products of the Rev. Philip Quaque School in Cape Coast, led by William deGraft, who in 1831 formed the Society for Promoting Scripture Knowledge. Welcoming their request for Bibles and their enthusiasm for promoting the word of God, the Methodist Missionary Society in England sent out to Ghana the Rev. Joseph Dunwell, who arrived at Cape-Coast on 31st December, 1834. Both Dunwell and his successor did not survive for long in the inclement climate, as happened to the pioneer missionaries of the earlier churches.

In 1838, the Wesley Missionary Society sent out a missionary who survived the harsh climatic conditions of the country for 52 years. He was the Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman, the son of an English mother and a West Indian Father. Encouraged by Captain George MacLean, 'President' of the English possessions on the coast, Birch Freeman laid the roots of the Methodist Church in the country.

After a successful start, including a trek to Kumasi, Freeman returned to England and came back to the country with other missionaries. One of these was the Rev. Shipman, posted to Accra, to train catechists

¹⁷ Buah, F.K. 1998: A History of Ghana (Revised and updated). Malaysia: Macmillan.135

and other evangelists. The rest worked at Dixcove, Dominase near Saltpond and Kumasi. Perhaps over-ambitious Freeman spread his efforts more widely (including Lagos and Abeokuta in Nigeria) than the mission resources could bear at the time. He was relieved of his position as the superintendent of the church and was succeeded by the Rev. William West in 1860. By the 1870's, the church had taken such firm roots that a chairman was appointed. He was Rev. T.R Picot.

Having served the outside church for some time, Rev. Birch Freeman returned to evangelical work, and it is recorded that in the first six months of 1873 he converted and baptized about 1060 souls in Anomabo. In spite of this and similar successes elsewhere, the Methodist Church faced the common problem which beset most European missionaries at the time - ill health and death of ministers. To overcome this problem, the Mission commenced a policy of training local converts in 1877, men and women, fit to carry on the work in the remotest places.

Early in the twentieth century, the Methodist church made efforts to open stations at Tamale and Wa, but faced the opposition of the colonial authorities in the north. The governor ruled against the stand of the Chief Commissioner, Cecil Hamilton Armitage, and in 1913 permission was granted to the Wesley Mission to open a station at Tamale. Barely two years after, the Mission was closed down, due largely to the obstacles that the Chief Commissioner continued to place in the way of the church's success in the north. A second attempt was made in 1920 but it also failed. It was from the 1930s that Methodism began to have some hold in the north. In 1951, the church became independent of the parent church in England, and had its own conference headed by an elected president.¹⁸

A.M.E Zion Church

There were many other Christian denominations with many followers in the Gold Coast. These included the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church, the Seventh Day Adventist church, the Salvation Army and the Lutheran Church. Of these, A.M.E. is not just the oldest but the largest in terms

of membership and geographical spread. The Zion Church has more in common with the Methodist Church than any other denomination. Unlike all the other churches the A.M.E Zion church has its roots in the United States of America, from where the first missionary, Bishop J. Bryan Small, came to the country and opened the first mission station at Keta in 1896. Today this Church comprises two Zonal units, the Western and the Eastern, each are with a deputy Bishop.¹⁹

Assemblies of God

The Assemblies of God (AG) was the first foreign Pentecostal body to work in Ghana. The Rev. Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, Assemblies of God missionaries in Mosiland (Ouagadougou) crossed over to Northern region of the then Gold Coast in 1931. They found the land ready for missionary activities so they returned to the USA to recruit missionaries. They returned to the Gold Coast in September, 1931 with the first recruits, Miss Beulah Buchwalter and Guy Hickok. Miss Buchwalter while in the States enrolled at Central Bible College. She returned to the Gold Coast with another worker, Miss Florence Blossom who later on became Mrs. Ed Beck. They initially settled at Kumbungu near Tamale. During the War, it became difficult to recruit couples for the field, so at one time, Miss Beulah Buchwalter and Miss Florence Blossom were the only missionaries on the field. Miss Buchwalter died on the 15th November, 1942 and was buried at Yendi near Guy Hickock.

Health was a problem for most of them. Guy Hickock died within two years of his arrival. Miss Buchwalter had to leave for the Canary Islands in March, 1934 with the hope of regaining her health. Finally, she had to leave for the same reason back to the USA in January, 1935. The Shirers and their team first settled at Yendi on the invitation of the Ya-Naa, King of Dagbon.

The most outstanding of the AG missionaries were Lloyd and Margaret Shirer. The Shirers closely associated themselves with the Northern people "more than missionaries ordinarily do". They served AG until the Second World War when they left the direct service of the AG in order to place their

¹⁸ Buah, F.K. 1998: A History of Ghana (Revised and updated). Malaysia: Macmillan.136

¹⁹ Buah, (ibid) p.138.

services at the disposal of the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development. The Shirers were so popular in the North that the Northern people made Rev. Lloyd Shirer a Chief.

The construction of the necessary facilities for the mission stations and language study were the two main activities of the early missionaries. Stations were built in Tamale, Walewale and Bawku.

Henry B. Garlock joined the AG in 1932, followed by Eric Johnson in 1934. Thelma Godwin came in 1937. The initial mandate was to set up and run the Bawku mission station. When the Godwins arrived in Bawku, a chief was said to have come to them with what appeared like a heart-warming message about the prediction of the coming of missionaries: “This is the Man of God, I saw in my dream. This is the one whom that one with bright light about him said would come and lead us into the truth”

The AG established its first clinic among the Kokomba tribe, about 40 miles Northeast of Yendi in 1948. The Clinic was erected by the McNutts who had gone to the Gold Coast as builders. When they saw the need for medical as well as Gospel work, they went from village to village dressing sores and preaching the gospel. In the first part of 1949, Ozella Reid and Ruby Johnson went to Saboba to work as missionaries. Another clinic was built at Nakpanduri. It functioned under Hilda Eichen and Betty June Shackleton. A third clinic (maternity clinic) was set up at Walewale under Vivian Smiths to augment the medical efforts of the church.

The Kumasi station was opened in 1944; and the Takoradi station was opened in 1945. The Southern Ghana District council was inaugurated in 1950, a year after the inauguration of the Northern Ghana District Council. In spite of AG’s early activities in the southern parts of Ghana, the numerical growth up to the 1970s was very slow. One of the reasons could be because, “the Pentecostal element” was less pronounced in this church than the Apostolic Church. The Assemblies of God is a somewhat Puritan Church, leaving individual missionaries much personal freedom to adopt the mission policy they think most suitable.”²⁰

Unlike other Pentecostal denominations, the work of

the Assemblies of God was heavily dependent upon a western financial and personnel support system. Between 1931 and 1970, about 99 missionaries worked with the missions in various capacities: Typists, clerks, cooks, and building contractors were all included in the list alongside medical personnel, teachers and church planters. It appears the sacrificial lifestyle of the early missionaries like the Shirers, was not followed by later ones. Until recently it was the smallest church among the mainline Pentecostal denominations. As at 1978 it had only 151 churches as compared to 1,209 for the Church of Pentecost, 370 for the Apostolic Church and 255 for Christ Apostolic Church. The actual numerical growth of the Church took place when the organization became less dependent upon American Missionaries. Perhaps the limited numerical strength of this church seems to have influenced the apologetic tone of the following statement:

“Every Assemblies of God Mission and Bible Institute in Ghana is strategically located. Not one fails to serve a specific need. As a result, the actual influence of the Assemblies of God is many times greater than its numerical strength...”²¹

The organization’s achievements are more profound in the areas of health needs of the people and literature development than the area of church planting. It was able to create a vernacular literature and managed to produce a tentative Dagomba version of the New Testament. Assemblies of God in Ghana gained autonomy in 1970 and the first Ghanaian General Superintendent, Elijah L. Namyela Panka was appointed to office the same year. He served until 1986 when S.B. Asore succeeded him.

In 1969, the mainline Pentecostal bodies came together to form an association called the Ghana Pentecostal Council.²²

Apostolic and Pentecost Missionaries

The genesis of Apostolic Church and Church of Pentecost in the Gold Coast could be traced to Peter Anim and his Faith Tabernacle Church in 1917.

²⁰ Larbi, Kingsley E, 2001. Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity. Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, Accra-Ghana.p.70-74

²¹ AG 1981. The Ghana Story (1931-1981), p.3

Susana Hanson stated in her book

“...in May 1923 at Asamankese, an unusual, spectacular phenomenon took place that had great repercussions on the Pentecostal Movement in the Gold Coast. It is said that while some devout members of Anim’s movement were praying in a building in the town, a “pillar of fire” was seen resting on the roof. The people in the town who saw the fire raised an alarm and tried to put it off but they couldn’t succeed. Therefore, they called the Fire Brigade to come and quench the Fire of the Holy Spirit but they also failed.”²³

Due to Anim’s enthusiasm and evangelistic activities, by 1924, many branches of his church had been opened at the Akwapim district, Coaltar, Asuokyene, Pampanso, Kwahu; others were Teshie, Nungua, Keta, Anlo and the Togoland. A remarkable event that saw the rapid spread of Anim’s organization was what was referred to as “Holy Ghost Outpouring”. From August 31 to September 12, 1932, Peter Anim launched one of the greatest revivals at Asamankese. Anim recalled that:

“At these meetings a great number of our sisters received mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues, prophesying together with the manifestation of all other signs of the Apostolic promises, Acts 1-4; 10:44-46... Prayer was continued and the sisters filled with the Holy Ghost were moved to lay hands on the brothers and some were baptized by the Holy Ghost. Brother Owiredu (junior) and I, received sanctification during the process of the Revival Prayer Meetings.... People who were hungry for the deeper spiritual experience and desirous of receiving the power from on high... arriving from far and near in search of the Holy Ghost Baptism. As a result of practical demonstrations of the work of the Holy Spirit as in the days of the

Apostles and testified by public, many were converted and received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and left [for] their various towns and villages – propagating the good news.”²⁴

Peter Anim’s organization entered into an affiliation with the UK Apostolic Church in 1935. By this time the American Assemblies of God missionaries Lloyd and Margaret Shirer had entered the country across the northern border and had established churches in Yendi, Tamale and Walewale. In 1937, James McKeown and his wife Sophia²⁵ were sent to the Gold Coast as missionaries of the UK Apostolic Church, to work with Anim’s group but they parted company due to some misunderstanding regarding divine healing and the use of preventive and curative medicine. As a result of this contention, Peter Anim disassociated himself from the UK Apostolic Church and founded the Christ Apostolic Church while James McKeown continued to work with the UK Apostolic Church until 1953, when he also parted and formed his church, The Church of Pentecost, then known as the Gold Coast Apostolic Church.

Consequently, there were four main Classic Pentecostal Churches in the Gold Coast. These were Peter Anim’s Christ Apostolic Church, James McKeown’s Church of Pentecost, the Apostolic Church of Gold Coast, affiliate of the UK Apostolic Church, and of course, the Assemblies of God.²⁶

McKeown, when he retired in 1982 had been a resident minister for 45 years. He had also been in the forefront of the apostolic or charismatic ministry (normally called “Pentecostalism”) throughout that period. It is pertinent to mention that a great number of the Holy spirit-led spiritual churches in Ghana today are the result of McKeown’s organizational acumen and distinguished endeavours.²⁷

Conclusion

Christianity in the earlier days was known for sound

²² Larbi, Kingsley E, 2001. Pentecostalism, The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity. Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, Accra-Ghana.70-74

²³ Hanson, Susana. 2002: A History of Pentecostalism in Ghana (1900-2002). Accra. Heritage Graphix, 60

²⁴ Larbi, (ibid)p.104-105

²⁵ Leonard, Christine. 1989: A Giant in Ghana. New Wine Press.Chichester, England. 23

²⁶ Larbi, (ibid) p.70

²⁷ Duah, O.K.Alex.2001: Parting Words of Rev. James McKeown. Blessed Publications. Accra. P.11

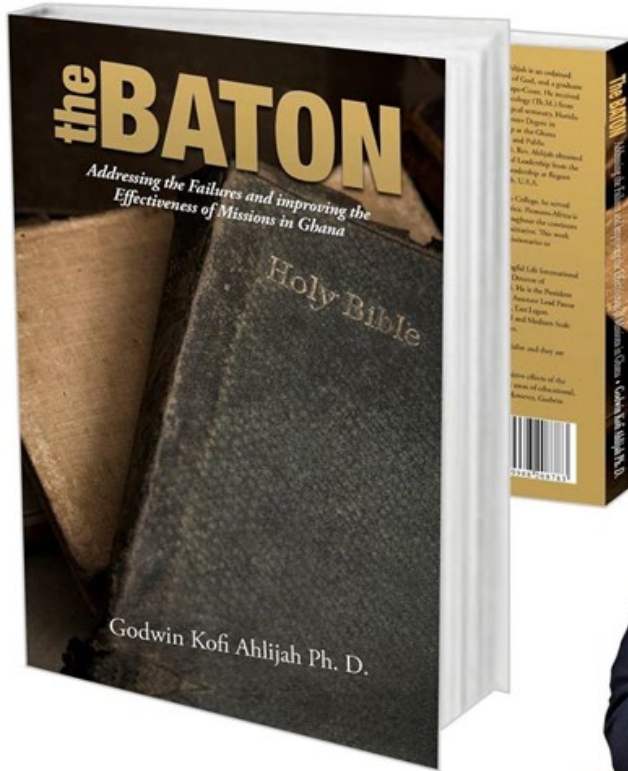
doctrine and moral teachings with the purposes of bringing up responsible future leaders in the nation. Currently there are many denominational and non-denominational churches. Some of these churches that have no traces of their foundation from the work of the earlier missionaries have betrayed the sound doctrine and moral teachings. This is largely

due to internal crises and the lack of any formal or spiritual training.

However, the presence of Christianity in Ghana has brought major developments into the land, notable among which is education or literacy and made Ghana a predominantly Christian nation.

OF THE BATON

by Godwin Kofi Ahlijah Ph.D.



A MUST read for Missions