

## Seeking Spiritual Direction: The Motivation of the Contemporary Ghanaian Christian

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### ABSTRACT

Traditionally, divination is believed to offer alternative solutions to the challenges of some Ghanaians, and its version in the Christian space is commonly known in Akan as *Akwankyerε* (spiritual direction). Given this, most contemporary Christians turn to *Akwankyerε* as the major hope in life to solve their daily problems. Consequently, spiritual centres and patronisers are fast growing and dominating Christianity in Ghana. Therefore, this study explores the reasons behind the Ghanaian contemporary Christians' search for spiritual support. Forty participants, including spiritual practitioners and clients, were studied from a qualitative perspective. Interviews were conducted and recorded for analysis. The study showed that many participants do not only seek *Akwankyerε* to strengthen their religious affinity to a deity, but also for different reasons such as health, economic, psycho-social, and desire for justice. The study recommends the integration of trained counsellors into the practice of *Akwankyerε*. This study contributes to the discussion of the proliferation of *Akwankyerε* in Ghana.

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### INTRODUCTION

The Ghanaian religious and cultural environment is highly superstitious, lending itself to many beliefs about spiritism and the fear of the unknown. For some Ghanaians, life depends on spiritual control. Religiously, there is a proliferation of churches with various forms of teaching on spiritual attacks and the fear of the devil. The main activities of spiritual centres constitute consultation, healing and deliverance from spiritual forces. Healing, deliverance, and various forms of exorcisms are believed to play different roles in the Ghanaian socio-religious milieu, and they are gaining ground. This practice is referred to as *Sunsum Akwankyerε*. Contemporary Ghanaian healing ministries promise everything about life and offer *Akwankyerε*. The practitioners and patronisers believe in the practice, and some pay money to seek spiritual direction from the practitioners.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, *Biblical, Traditional, and Theological Framework for Understanding Christian Prophetism in Ghana Today* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019).

Some studies have been conducted on spiritual direction, but the available literature seems to pay attention to the description of the phenomenon and what the clients are directed to perform to get results. Although some studies investigated and got some clients to narrate their encounters to determine how it worked or did not work for them, the interest was in whether the practice was biblical.<sup>2</sup> *Akwankyerε* is seen as the emerging style of mediation and source of spiritual power for sections of Ghanaian Christians. The factors that lead clients to seek spiritual direction seem to receive little or no research attention. A thorough investigation of this phenomenon may contribute significantly to Christian practices, healing and prophetism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Traditional Source of *Akwankyerε*

There is a belief that the practice of *Akwankyerε* is the offshoot of traditional religious consultation (*abisa*). It has been claimed that the major duty of the *akɔmfɔ* (traditional priests), who hold the official position of priests within the *abosomsom* tradition, is the execution of *abisa* rituals.<sup>3</sup> The term *akɔmfɔ* can be traced back to its etymological origins in the word *kɔm*, which signifies several activities like divination, prophecy, prediction, and dance. The proliferation of anti-witchcraft shrines might be ascribed to the impact of *Abisa*.<sup>3</sup> Akan philosophical thought suggests that the core principles of Akan existence revolve around the pursuit of achievement, the preservation of good health, and the attainment of riches. Hence, when faced with unforeseen circumstances, members of the Akan community resort to their religious convictions and rituals. Here, individuals actively pursue the intervention of a transcendent being or an authoritative figure to obtain direction and resolutions for the diverse array of difficulties, queries, and ambiguities that arise in their day-to-day existence.

To advance the argument, Opoku Onyinah has contended that *abisa* holds significance in the protection against malevolent entities, and that the Akans do not promptly resort to the act of warding off malevolent spirits. In Akan culture, it is seen that when all early attempts to address challenges are ineffective, people turn to warding off malevolent spirits. This course of action is pursued after seeking *abisa*, a traditional method of divination, which reveals that the root cause of their difficulties lies in the realm of the supernatural.<sup>4</sup>

According to Opoku Onyinah, *abosom* holds a ritual known as *abisa da*, which is referred to as 'a day of consultation'. This event serves as a platform for individuals to seek guidance and advice. During these occasions, the deity is invited to manifest within the *akɔmfɔ*. The invitation is manifested through the performance of the *akɔmfɔ*, who engages in specific drum patterns while dancing. The state of possession occurs concurrently with the act of dancing. The *akɔmfɔ* subsequently receives divine messages, typically conveyed through the use of allusive phrases. Consequently, the information provided is incomprehensible to customers. The *akɔmfɔ* transmits the message through an interpreter who interprets it for the recipient. Additionally, indications of an imminent calamity, as well as strategies for its prevention, may also be provided.<sup>5</sup>

### Reasons for Practicing Divination and Spiritual Direction

From different perspectives, individuals pursue divination or *Akwankyerε* for a variety of reasons, including spiritual, cultural, psychological, and socio-economic aspects. Biblically, Old Testament Patriarchs and prophets were consulted to reveal God's special messages to his people.<sup>6</sup> Individuals seek the counsel of Neo-prophets for spiritual guidance, akin to their reliance on divination, for a multitude of reasons. When one observes advertisements for prophets and preachers, a perception of their capabilities is established. In the biblical narrative, specifically in 1 Samuel 9, the loss of Saul's father's donkeys led to consulting Samuel, the Seer, for counsel. Moses was sought for counsel on

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<sup>2</sup> Aryeh, *Biblical, Traditional, and Theological Framework for Understanding Christian Prophetism in Ghana Today*, 77-78.

<sup>3</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*, vol. 34 (Brill, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*, 41-44.

<sup>5</sup> Opoku Onyinah, *Apostles and Prophets: The Ministry of Apostles and Prophets throughout the Generations* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Onyinah, *Apostles and Prophets: The Ministry of Apostles and Prophets throughout the Generations*, 14-18.

nearly all matters during the desert journey until his father-in-law Jethro recommended that he appoint others to aid him (Exo. 18). This indicates that prophets are sought for different reasons in life.

In traditional African settings, divination is frequently employed to obtain guidance on significant decisions. Before people make a significant life decision on issues such as marriage, jobs, long journeys, war, etc., it is customary in primordial communities to consult (*abisa*) or obtain *Akwankyerε* from religious experts.<sup>7</sup> Individuals have access to supernatural knowledge to guide them during crises and uncertainties. It is contended that the function of divination is to offer spiritual remedies to problems because every problem has a spiritual origin.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, in some cultures, individuals pursue divination to establish a connection with their ancestors or spiritual entities considered to influence human matters, where ancestral spirits are commonly perceived as guiding entities that provide protection, wisdom, and foresight. Divination is regarded as a medium for individuals to engage with supernatural powers, seeking guidance and favours.

Studies in religious psychology indicate that spiritual direction and practices help people manage stress by offering responses perceived as authoritative and trustworthy.<sup>9</sup> Prophetic leaders provide information that elucidates an individual's circumstances and offers solutions.<sup>10</sup> Divination functions as a psychological instrument for managing the worries and fears frequently associated with life's uncertainties. Within West African faiths, divination transcends conventional fortune-telling; it constitutes a significant spiritual practice that provides psychological solace to individuals confronting crises, and the belief is that spiritual direction can replicate that.

Another reason is that divination and spiritual direction serve as a significant motivator for people seeking divination because it strengthens their cultural identity and religious convictions. Kofi Asare Opoku revealed that divination practices develop bonding between one and his/her ancestors as it offers the opportunity for ancestors to directly influence the living about moral and spiritual trajectory. In traditional African cosmologies, ancestors are an integral part of the welfare of their living descendants. Diviners, shown by practitioners in the Akan culture of Ghana, act as intermediaries between the living and the dead.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, divination is pursued as a method to achieve spiritual health and protection. Religion and spirituality can play a pivotal role in supporting clients in various forms of treatment.<sup>12</sup> In numerous African traditional religions, illness and misfortunes are perceived as consequences of spiritual imbalances, curses, or the intervention of malicious entities. Diviners are frequently sought to ascertain the origin of these spiritual disturbances and to recommend rites or sacrifices that can re-establish equilibrium and save the individual from additional harm. Similarly, the Neo-prophetic churches assure people that *Akwankyerε* has the power to offer security in health, in curses, and in spiritual manipulations. For instance, within the Ashanti community of Ghana, diviners are often sought for the spiritual origins of ailments, including witchcraft or ancestor discontent.<sup>13</sup> When the cause is identified, the diviner may suggest rites, sacrifices, or prayers to placate the spirits and facilitate healing. The diviner's position as a spiritual healer underscores the holistic perspective on health and well-being prevalent in numerous African traditional belief systems, wherein physical, emotional, and spiritual health are intricately connected. Here, *Akwankyerε* mimics some elements of the traditional Akan divination.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kwame. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. (Repr. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 202-230.

<sup>8</sup> John S Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Waveland Press, 2015), 153-162.

<sup>9</sup> J Osafo, I Agyapong, and M Kumi Asamoah, "Exploring the Nature of Treatment Regimen for Mentally Ill Persons by Neo-Prophetic Ministers in Ghana," *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health* 8, no. 3 (2015): 325-39.

<sup>10</sup> Cephas N Omenyo and Abamfo O Atiemu, "Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana," *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2006): 55-68.

<sup>11</sup> Kofi Asare Opoku, "Traditional Religious Beliefs and Spiritual Churches in Ghana: A Preliminary Statement," *Research Review* 4, no. 2 (1968).

<sup>12</sup> Mihaela Frunza, Grad Ovidiu, and Frunza Sandu, "The Role Of Spirituality In Therapeutic Practices," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 18 (January 1, 2019): 60-74.

<sup>13</sup> K. Asare-Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion* (Singapore: FEP International Ltd., 1978), 93-97.

<sup>14</sup> Aryeh, *Biblical, Traditional, and Theological Framework for Understanding Christian Prophetism in Ghana Today*.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative approach to explore the reasons behind the strong desire of some Ghanaian Christians for spiritual direction. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 40 participants, including both males and females, who were between the ages of 26 to 50 years. The study recruited both spiritual practitioners and clients who embarked on spiritual directions. The participants were chosen from Ahafo, Bono, Bono East, Ashanti, and Greater Accra Regions, where *Akwankyerε* seems prevalent in Ghana. The interviews were used as the main instrument to collect the data.

Before beginning data collection, the researcher sought ethical clearance from the Committee on Human Research, Publication and Ethics, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (CHRPE, KNUST). The consent forms were signed by the participants, and their confidentiality was ensured as the research used pseudonyms for their names. Subsequently, participants were labelled as male 1, 2, 3, etc., female 1, 2, 3, etc., or prophet 1, 2, 3, etc. The interviews were recorded, and the audio files were kept in files on a computer with a password securing them. The interviews were transcribed, where different reasons assigned by the interviewees were thematised.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The interviews showed that the clients seek *Akwankyerε* for different reasons. Some of these reasons were based on health, economic, spiritual, and psycho-social issues. These are explained and illustrated.

### Health Reasons

Many of the participants revealed in the interview that their health led them to seek *Akwankyerε* from prophets, prophetesses, or pastors. The participants disclosed that persistent illness affecting their lives was believed to have spiritual sources and that seeking spiritual support could lead to lasting solutions to their problems. It offered an alternative approach when conventional methods seemed ineffective. Some of the clients revealed that seeking spiritual support was easy, cheaper, and less time-consuming than the conventional method. Extracts 1 and 2 illustrate how some of the participants expressed their health concern.

#### Extract 1:

Female 1: *I was sick with stomach ache and when I went for Akwankyerε the prophet washed my feet with water and oil. I was asked to buy Coke and mix it with salt and drink it.*

#### Extract 2:

Female 4: *I needed protection for my children, who often got sick, so I went to see a prophetess. I was asked to wash them with water mixed with salt. I was also directed to ask my priest to bless incense for me to burn in my room.*

Extract 1 suggests that some participants sought spiritual direction to solve their own illnesses, but Extract 2 was on behalf of others. Doing so of their own volition meant that they had some level of energy to control themselves to seek spiritual support, but those who had a conscience or energy challenge received spiritual direction with or without their consent. Some interviewees who sought spiritual support for their loved ones sometimes discussed and agreed with them before consulting a prophet for direction. In some cases, the direct beneficiaries were children who did not understand spirituality or direction. Extract 2, for instance, suggests that the children who received the direct benefit of the so-called spiritual support were not aware of the kind of support their parents provided them.

Beyond participants seeking spiritual direction to solve individual illnesses, the submissions also suggested that other participants sought spiritual direction to aid in childbearing. The interviewees believed that mainstream hospitals could not solve their child-bearing issues and therefore turned to *Akwankyerε*. In the traditional setting in Ghana, child-bearing tends to define a good and stable

marriage. Childlessness in marriage is seen by others as a sign of a bad omen and people ostensibly needed to seek spiritual clarification on such issues. Women ordinarily become anxious in the face of childlessness in marriage, and mostly believe that they are the main cause without recourse to the potential cause from the man. Some of the victims affected by childlessness were clear about their distress of not having children, as can be seen in Extracts 3 and 4. Also, other participants became extremely concerned about a safe pregnancy and delivery.

**Extract 3:**

Female 2: *I was married for five years without a child and a friend directed me to consult a man of God. The prophet pointed out that my mother-in-law was behind my childlessness.*

**Extract 4:**

Female 3: *When I was pregnant with my twins, I was uncertain of my security, and I went to see a prophet to avoid a Caesarean operation. I was given some 'Voltic water' to drink to position the fetuses well in my womb.*

Extract 3 typifies how childlessness forced someone to consult a spiritualist on how to save her marriage from ridicule. Marrying for five years without a child was a cause for concern to the participant and other close friends, and the advice to consult a spiritualist came from a concerned friend. Her narration suggests that every persistent problem in Africans has a spiritual root cause. Additionally, the case of the speaker in Extract 4 is at the level of safe pregnancy and safe delivery. The main reason for the client consulting a prophet was predominantly to secure the safety of her health during delivery and to have a male child. She and her husband were expecting a male child, but realised that they were gifted with twins. She complained of a fear of caesarean section because she thought she would lose her life during delivery.

**Economic Reasons**

Another major reason assigned for participants' quest for *Akwankyerε* was economic concerns. Many participants raised this issue based on the high cost of living standards that affect their daily lives. Divergent views from the interviews suggested that some sought spiritual direction to direct their general finances, trading, personal protection, and travel.

Firstly, most of the participants sought *Akwankyerε* to secure job opportunities in life. Many revealed that they were not working and needed to improve their living standard and quality of life because they could not meet the general financial needs to make their lives better. This reason caused them to explore spiritual means to seek solutions to their daily financial needs. Instances in Extract 5 show how some participants justified their reasons for seeking *Akwankyerε* to get jobs.

**Extract 5:**

Male 9: *I was not working, so I consulted a prophet for support. I informed the prophet that I wanted my brother abroad to support me in starting a big business. The prophet gave me some oil to apply to my body and mentioned his name three times before calling my brother.*

According to the participant in Extract 5, the only means to solve his joblessness was spiritual support. The speaker disclosed that a shift from his unbearable life to a successful life could only be propelled by *Akwankyerε* so he ended up seeing a prophet for help.

Regarding trade, the interviews revealed that some traders needed to spiritually boost their businesses to flourish for better deals. To increase customers' patronage of their products, some participants indicated that adding spirituality to trading was the norm to sustain and progress businesses in Ghana. They argued that, without spiritual support, businesses could not flourish. In view of this, some had the belief that those who do well in buying and selling space still needed to get spiritual backing to bolster their businesses (Extracts 6-7).

### **Extract 6**

Female 11: *My trade was not progressing, and I needed more customers, so I went to see a man of God and he revealed to me that it was a spiritual attack for insulting my in-law.*

### **Extract 7**

Male 9: *When I first opened my shop, I realised I needed some spiritual backing for more customers, and I consulted one pastor. He asked me to fast, and I was given some oil and candles to use at the shop.*

Extracts 6 and 7 give an indication that the main purpose for some traders to seek spiritual support in their trading was to gain more access to customers to patronise their products to increase the progress of their work. The common thing all these participants had in mind was to see their trading progressing steadily, and that required spiritual support to them.

Similarly, those who believed in spirituality at work also revealed that one needed to protect or fortify his or her position. They argued that previous experiences and stories from workplaces put people in fear of standing up against similar future events. Extract 8 provides evidence of why some participants consulted a spiritualist for direction.

### **Extract 8**

Male 11: *I work in a reputable company, so I needed to secure the position I was occupying. I consulted a prophet for direction, and he gave me some water to bathe for some days and oil to use at the workplace.*

The participants in Extract 8 revealed that the sustainability of his positions in workplaces depended mainly on some form of spiritual protection. He revealed in the interview that different high-profile men in politics, governance, and workplaces had a way of spiritually fortifying themselves and therefore it was normal for them to also safeguard their positions.

Another economic reason for participants to explore spiritual direction was seeking greener pastures outside the country. Some of the participants revealed that one's ability to travel outside Ghana to seek greener pastures depended on spiritual support (Extracts 9 and 10).

### **Extract 9**

Mmale 16: *I consulted a prophet to help me get the opportunity to travel outside. He asked me to buy candles, incense, and olive oil and give them to my (Catholic) priest to bless them for me.*

### **Extract 10**

Female 19: *My husband got stuck in Libya en route to Europe. He informed me about his ordeals and impediments. I therefore went for Akwankyerε to help my husband. The man directed me to do something I cannot disclose to you. My husband did not know that I consulted a man of God for support.*

The evidence in Extracts 9 and 10 shows that the participants supposedly sought to consult a spiritualist to aid their travel outside. The interviewee in Extract 9 explained that travelling outside the country was a dream for many young people. The lady in Extract 10 disclosed that she consulted a spiritualist to support her husband to go through his travel without challenges because she thought of getting benefits irrespective of the kind of direction given to her by the spiritualist.

### **Psycho-social Reasons**

The interviews suggested that some of the participants consulted with spiritual fathers/mothers to understand how they could be supported to control their marriage or social/emotional balance in society. One of the psycho-social issues which compelled participants to seek spiritual direction was good and peaceful marriage. Some of the interviewees revealed that every married couple needed to maintain balance to maintain a peaceful marriage because some marriages were under spiritual attacks.

So, the quest for peaceful marriage and good relationships led some of the participants to look for spiritual directions and support. Extract 11 provides evidence to support this claim.

**Extract 11:**

Female 5: *I used to accuse my husband of my bad marriage, so I consulted a prophet. The prophet upon some prayers asked me to check my own behaviour and check my own family for my challenges in marriage.*

The major concern that can be seen from Extract 11 is problematic marriage. The interviewee associated this bad issue with misfortune emerging from spiritual forces and thought that consulting a spiritual leader was the best option. The interviewee accused her partner of being the main cause of destabilising their marriages. However, she was shocked to learn from the prophet that her own actions and inactions were the cause of her bad marriage, which required her to adjust her behaviour to restore peace in her marriage.

Another compelling psycho-social factor that sent participants to spiritual leaders for support was their emotional imbalance. Some of the participants believed that there were spiritual forces around them that caused them to constantly switch emotions between good and bad. They explained that they were in a bad mood most of the time, and sometimes had problems with their neighbours. Some of the participants interviewed were clients while others were prophets who believed that people needed protection to ward off these unknown forces so that their clients could control their emotions peacefully. Extracts 12 and 13 explain some of these ideas clearly.

**Extract 12:**

Prophet 3: *I can listen to people and know how to direct them to change their behaviours and mood in life. Through prayers, I am able to know and direct some people to stop bathing at certain places and times of the day. I am able to know why some people are suffering in life. Some people are followed by bad spirits, and I can pray and get insight on how to direct them.*

**Extract 13:**

Male 6: *I believe that some special forces are always disturbing my daughter. Mostly, my daughter becomes moody and isolates herself from the public. She can keep herself indoors without food for a whole day without talking to anyone. If we ask her about the problem she is facing, she doesn't mind you. She talks to people after she is relieved of herself. I became so disturbed that I went to see a prophet for direction.*

The prophet in Extract 12 was convinced that he could help a lot of people get out of life's dilemma due to his spiritual insight. He said in the interview that he had helped a lot of people get out of trouble including emotional issues through spiritual intervention. The daughter in Extract 13 was not conscious of her moodiness and that was why the father sought *Akwankyerε* for her. According to him, the daughter had been in a moody predicament for a long time, which was worrying to the family. He indicated that he had no option but to seek spiritual help because he attributed it to spiritual attacks.

In a different situation, curiosity led others to seek *Akwankyerε* because life is full of uncertainties. This mostly emerged from advice from friends, and influence from other people's lives. Some of the participants said that they sought *Akwankyerε* to satisfy their curiosity. Most of them were young people between the ages of 15 and 30. Extract 14 exemplifies respondents' curiosity to seek *Akwankyerε*.

**Extract 14:**

Male 1: *I was curious and wanted to know what was going on in my life. A friend used to visit a certain man of God so I joined him to find out if anything could be revealed about my life.*

From Extract 14, one can see that the participant visited a spiritualist without any specific purpose in mind. Mostly, their friends introduced them to their visit to spiritual space to satisfy their curiosity or to understand what was going on in their lives.

Again, education and its related stress made some people seek *Akwankyerε*. Some of the clients believed that spiritual guidance could be a way of intervening in their studies, as there were some challenges they were facing. Extract 15 provides evidence that suggests that some of the participants visited spiritual leaders for directions.

#### **Extract 15:**

Female 12: *When I learn, I forget it so I thought visiting a prophet or spiritualist could solve the problem. I went to see a prophet for direction. He prayed for me and gave me some anointing oil to use anytime I was sleeping.*

The participant in Extract 15 intimated that the problem was more spiritual than psychological or hereditary. She believed that visiting a prophet for guidance could be a breakthrough in her studies. Other participants who expressed similar concerns sought spiritual direction on behalf of others while some did that for themselves. A female respondent thought that spiritualism could solve all problems, so she visited a spiritualist for her daughter to be like her sister's daughter academically. She had no idea about the psychological basis behind the learning success of her sister's daughter.

#### **Reason of Justice**

The data also revealed that seeking justice was one of the reasons why some of the participants visited spiritualists for directions. The main purpose was that they had cases or accusations that needed verification of the truth for justice to be served. Seeking justice here meant verifying the truth in an accusation or seeking revenge for accusing the participants falsely. Extracts 16 to 18 provide evidence of seeking spiritual direction on justice.

#### **Extract 16:**

Prophets 2: *I am a spiritual mother and people come to me to seek justice for false accusations. Some come to find out the truth in their matter while others come to seek revenge. In some cases, some people are the culprits but come to me to avert the truth so that they are not caught. For me, I do my work as a spiritualist, so I help people with their problems. When they come, I give them different directions based on the nature of the case.*

#### **Extract 17:**

Female 21: *In fact, I mistakenly led to the loss of some money of a company I was working for. The police arrested me, and I was sent to court. This was going to be a big blow to me and my entire family, so something needed to be done. I therefore consulted a powerful prophet and eventually the case became null and void.*

#### **Extract 18:**

Male 8: *I was doing a big business, and someone deceived and extorted huge sums of money from me to collapse my business. I couldn't let this go so I consulted a man of God to seek revenge. The man gave me some directions of which I cannot say it here. Within a month, the person felt seriously sick and started confessing.*

Extract 16 is from a spiritual practitioner while the others are from individual clients who were directly affected by varied issues they claimed needed spiritual support. Extract 16 is a testimony from a spiritual mother who claimed to support people spiritually. She revealed that some of their clients seeking justice visited her for three main reasons. Firstly, some visited her because they needed to establish some truth in their cases. Secondly, some came there to seek revenge on false accusations they suffered from. Lastly, some of the clients came to them to avert the truth. Extract 17 confirms the spiritual mother's claim of averting the truth while the case of Extract 18 indicates revenge. Another participant explained that it was difficult to establish the truth in falsehood in an abstract sense because

he had no evidence to prove his innocence. Therefore, it was worth establishing the truth through spiritual means, which was offered exclusively offered in the spiritual space.

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results of the interview. The results suggest that different life challenges presented opportunities for participants to seek *Akwankyerε* because it has been found that before people make a significant life decision on issues such as marriage, jobs, long journeys, war, etc., it is customary in primordial communities to consult (*abisa*) or obtain *Akwankyerε* from religious experts.<sup>15</sup> This practice is not only done traditionally but also biblically as Old Testament Patriarchs and prophets were consulted to reveal God's special messages to his people.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the findings of the current study show that different reasons were assigned by different people who visited spiritual practitioners for *Akwankyerε*.

### Health Reasons

This study revealed that most of the participants sought spiritual support to solve different health challenges. Other studies have supported the idea that most Christians believe in miracles and God's intervention in human life.<sup>17</sup> In view of this, the participants in this current study saw the need to seek spiritual direction on health issues. The literature maintains that religion and spirituality can play pivotal roles in supporting clients in various forms of treatment.<sup>18</sup> To some of the clients, they were bedevilled with persistent illness, and utterly lost hope in mainstream medicine. This practice is deeply rooted in the Akan religious activities, as it represents the desire to comprehend the supernatural causes and effects of many occurrences. Some of the clients argued that mainstream medicine was expensive and did not address some of the health challenges because certain health conditions were spiritually based. Spirituality and religion are critical sources of strength for many people in therapy. It means that people rely on spiritual revival to find solutions to their sufferings and health problems. One such health issue was childbearing. The clients justified that the glory of marriage was childbearing and failed to accept adoptions because it was believed that the couple without a child was a curse or manipulation of the devil. Therefore, relying on spirituality was the only solution. Another health condition was a persistent illness that affected them or their loved ones. Good health for Africans consists of mental, physical, and emotional stability. Irvin David Yalom explains that, because people want to find meaning in life to exist, they will make all plans and projects to solve existential problems.<sup>19</sup>

### Economic Reasons

From the perspectives of some of the participants interviewed, economic success could only be achieved by spiritually blessing them. Certain prophets argue that they serve as intermediaries between humans and the divine to provide spiritual assistance for achieving prosperity, success, and triumph.<sup>20</sup> Regarding economic factors, the participants revealed that they once visited a spiritual practitioner because of the unbearable high cost of living, joblessness, trade boosting, safeguarding job positions, or travelling abroad to seek greener pastures. This was not surprising because when people want to find meaning in life, they will go to any lengths to find solutions to their existing problems.<sup>21</sup> Many of the clients argued that they could not bear the hardship conditions in which they lived, so they thought that spiritual direction was the major means to overcome such misfortune. Here, some affected clients thought of manipulating family members to financially support them. They complained that they could not meet their daily financial needs no matter how hard they tried. However, some of the clients needed

<sup>15</sup> Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, 202-230.

<sup>16</sup> Onyinah, *Apostles and Prophets: The Ministry of Apostles and Prophets throughout the Generations*, 14-18.

<sup>17</sup> Jakub Pawlikowski et al., "Beliefs in Miraculous Healings, Religiosity and Meaning in Life," *Religions* 6, no. 3 (2015): 22-30.

<sup>18</sup> Sandu Frunzā et al., "Aspects Regarding Ethical Counseling In Organizations," *Journal for the Study of Religions & Ideologies* 18, no. 54 (2019).

<sup>19</sup> Irvin David Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (USA: Basic Books, 1980).

<sup>20</sup> Onyinah, *Apostles and Prophets: The Ministry of Apostles and Prophets throughout the Generations*, 14-18.

<sup>21</sup> Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 1980: 463.

to secure good jobs to meet their financial obligations and therefore resorted to spiritual directions to succeed in this direction. They argued that securing a job these days is extremely costly, but spiritual support could improve their chances. Those with job opportunities, trade, or occupying job positions also joined the trail to visit spiritual practitioners to secure their economic powers and to boost their businesses for more income. They thought that safeguarding their positions at workplaces and businesses was the best way to achieve their economic freedom.

### Psycho-social Reasons

Some of the participants also believed that everything in their lives had spiritual manipulations and implications without recourse to human behaviour or attitudes. In view of that, their psycho-emotional issues were attributed to spirituality. This confirms the assertion that the Akan culture places great importance on diagnostic prophecy, sometimes referred to as *abisa*, as a crucial component of personal prophecy.<sup>22</sup> People resort to the logotherapy approach of therapy as a form of spiritual revival to end their sufferings.<sup>23</sup> This is to indicate that evidence from the data suggested that some of the participants sought *Akwankyerε* to deal with their emotional attitudes and behaviour disorders. This finding corroborates the literature that religion has a protective role in depression, anxiety, suicide, schizophrenia, alcohol and drug use, and delinquency.<sup>24</sup> This is where religious experts become useful in offering a variety of approaches to deal with emotional suffering and attitudes of people.<sup>25</sup> *Akwankyerε* consultations often provided a space for individuals to discuss their concerns and receive emotional support similar to counselling. This finding is similar to what the literature reveals because the practice of prophetic counselling is commonly observed in neo-prophetic circles, where the prophetic figure or leader is expected to provide information that elucidates an individual's circumstances and offers solutions.<sup>26</sup>

Also, some of the clients sought *Akwankyerε* to deal with the attitudinal challenges and imbalances they faced in their marriages. The evidence gathered from the participants suggested that a good marriage was something that could not be earned without spiritual support. Many who had marital unrest believed that they were bewitched or manipulated from the spiritual space and therefore needed spiritual backing to control them. Additionally, some of the clients visited spiritual practitioners just to satisfy their curiosity. Those who were led by curiosity to visit spiritual leaders were generally influenced by the testimonies given by friends. They were mostly based on hearsay and how they perceived the spiritual leaders as very powerful. Spiritual leaders could apply psychology to such clients to overcome their challenges because psychology is currently embedded in spiritual directions.<sup>27</sup>

### Reason of Justice

In some jurisdictions, some of the clients purposefully visited spiritual practitioners for *Akwankyerε* because they needed to verify the truth in their cases, revenge, or avert the consequences of accusations. This approach is explained by the fact that people facing developmental crises make choices to seek freedom, cope with guilt and anxiety, make sense, and find value in life.<sup>28</sup> This represents the desire to comprehend the supernatural causes and effects of many occurrences.<sup>29</sup> Many of the clients interviewed thought that they needed justice because they were accused unfairly, and therefore needed spiritual support to establish such truth, since court systems needed hardcore evidence. This became

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<sup>22</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*. 41-44.

<sup>23</sup> Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 97-134.

<sup>24</sup> Jeff Levin, "Religion and Mental Health: Theory and Research," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2010): 102-15.

<sup>25</sup> Harold G Koenig, "Religion, Spirituality, and Health: The Research and Clinical Implications," *International Scholarly Research Notices* 2012, no. 1 (2012): 278730.

<sup>26</sup> Omenyo and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana," 55-68.

<sup>27</sup> Duane R Bidwell, "The Embedded Psychology of Contemporary Spiritual Direction," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 11, no. 3 (2009): 148-71.

<sup>28</sup> Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 97-134.

<sup>29</sup> Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana*.

necessary because they lacked sufficient evidence to show the public that they were free. Also, others consulted spiritual practitioners for revenge. They argued that some deceived them into collapsing their businesses by bolting away with their property or capital, but lacked evidence to prosecute them. However, others were falsely accused but needed revenge. Therefore, they allowed spiritual support to lead their way to revenge. Some also sought *Akwankyerε* to avert any imminent harm that was upon them. In such instances, the participants acknowledged their guilt but needed to avert any bad consequences befalling them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations based on the study:

- The study has revealed that clients of spiritual direction seem to over-rely on spiritual leaders to solve all life problems. It is therefore recommended that formal counselling be integrated into such practices to support those who seek spiritual guidance. Neo-prophetic, Charismatic, Pentecostal, and Orthodox churches which practice spiritual guidance should consider training their spiritual practitioners to acquire skills in a professional approach to counselling. It is the integration of formal counselling into the practice of *Akwankyerε* and mental health that could bring solace to people going through any form of crisis.
- It is also recommended that the government set up professional counselling units and centres in the various districts of the country to support those with mental health and life challenges to access them to avoid over-reliance on spiritualism and manipulations. The counselling units can regularly sensitize the populace on the relevance of seeking professional counselling to overcome life challenges.
- Lastly, the study recommends that a further study be conducted on the long-term relationship between religion and mental health to determine the impact of unfulfilled prophecies. Such a longitudinal study may trace the adherents of *Akwankyerε* to assess their mental health status and religious life to validate their quality of life after receiving *Akwankyerε*.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the motivation behind most Ghanaian contemporary Christians' desire to embark on spiritual direction. This phenomenon seems to be prominent in Ghanaian Christianity today. So far, it can be established from the data gathered from both spiritual practitioners of *Akwankyerε* and clients that most participants visited prophets, prophetesses, or pastors for different reasons. These reasons included health, economic, psycho-social, and justice. This practice is not strange because *Akwankyerε* is an offshoot of traditional religious consultation (*abisa*), which is embedded within traditional societies in Ghana. The existing body of research in the field of religion and health suggests a correlation between religious beliefs and practices and the overall well-being of individuals, both in terms of their physical and mental health. Religion is the organising principle of Ghanaian thinking, culture and identity, politics, and economics, and social networks. This is to indicate that religion plays a significant role in the daily lives of Ghanaians, as has been illustrated in this current study, because Ghanaians are deeply religious and often find spiritual means to solve daily issues affecting them. It can be argued from the results of this study that the strong desire to seek *Akwankyerε* seems more psychological because the motivation for it cannot be scientifically justified.

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