

**THE RHETORIC OF COMMERCIAL PROPHETS IN GHANA:
A CASE STUDY OF BISHOP DANIEL OBINIM AND REVEREND OBOFOUR
ISAAC FORSON ADJEI, THOMAS ODURO-KWARTENG,
VICTORIA NANA POKU FRIMPONG¹**

ABSTRACT

Lately, the Christian church has suffered both public and scholarly criticisms. This because of the way some of its religious leaders, especially, those of the prophetic strand christened *Commercial prophets* in this paper, by virtue of their high inclination merchandize the gospel to gullible patrons. Characteristically, these Neo-prophetic prophets with unique nicknames, persuasively sell self-prepared religious products, adopt aggressive media campaigns and organize fee-paying counselling sessions called *emergence consultations* for financial gains. Steadily, this seemingly weird religious routines by these Neo-prophetic prophets appear to be tarnishing the image of the prophetic office. Using the qualitative research methodology, the study investigates the prophetic ministration of two popular Neo-prophetic prophets in Accra and Kumasi, and highlights their rhetorical strategies deployed to hoodwink their audience into submission. The paper is significant because its findings help deepen the understanding of the ways most commercial prophets use language persuasively in their sermonic discourse to win the attention of their listeners.

Keywords: Christianity, commercial, Ghana, prophet, religion, rhetoric.

INTRODUCTION

The church in Ghana has played and continue to play pivotal roles in the general development of the country. Apart from its core mandate to win souls into the faith, it has over the years built several schools and hospitals, developed human resource capacities, and have collaborated with relevant stakeholders to promote peace in the country. Although one is likely to hear in public discourse that Ghana is a Christian nation, the 1992 Constitution has indicated that Ghana is a secular nation.² Statistically, the 2010 Population and Housing Census has shown that; Christians constitute 71.2%, Muslims 17.6%, Traditional believers represent 5.2% and less than 1% belongs to other religions.³

In Ghana today, the rate at which churches are springing up in the country is phenomenal. They are either located in classrooms, under trees, uncompleted structures or magnificent cathedrals. However, behind these platitudes are the external (globalization, modernity) and internal (negative local developments) simmering challenges confronting the very existence of the church. George Anderson Jnr. and Margaret Makafui Tayviah in their paper titled *Corruption in the Wake of High Religiosity in Ghana*, question the promotion of wealth creation and prosperity at the expense of moral teachings by a sizeable number of Pentecostal/charismatic and neo-prophetic churches as being one of the causes of high corruption

¹ ISAAC FORSON ADJEI, MPhil, currently a PhD student in the English Department, KNUST. A lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. His research interests are in Rhetoric, Cultural linguistics, Language and communication, Ethnography of Communication. Email: iadjeiforson@yahoo.com; THOMAS ODURO KWARTENG, MPhil, currently a PhD student in the English Department, KNUST. A tutor, Language Department, Mampong College of Education, Mampong. His research interests are in Phonology, Rhetoric, Semantics and Pragmatics; VICTORIA POKU FRIMPONG MPhil, currently a PhD student in the English Department, KNUST. A tutor, Language Department, Wesley College of Education, Kumasi. Her research interests are in Language and communication, Sociolinguistics and Rhetoric.

² George Anderson Jnr., and Margaret Makafui Tayviah, *Corruption in the Wake of High Religiosity in Ghana: Questioning the possibility*, *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 1(2): (2019) 113.

³ Ghana Statistical Service, *Population and Housing Censures*, 6

cases in the country in an era that high percent of the population claim to be Christians.⁴ Observed that “*Even an alien who enters the church for the first time will see an evidence of the power of money reigning in it today; the church has been structured to be dependent on money rather than the Holy Spirit.*”⁵

Lately, Neo-prophetic churches especially in Ghana have come under severe criticism from some religious leaders, the public and scholars for numerous reasons. Key among the criticisms are; the overly spiritual nature of its activities and promoting the gospel of prosperity/money at the expense of holiness. Key among these accusations are; the church being overly spiritual and promoting the gospel of prosperity/money at the expense of holiness. The major targets for this incessant criticism have been Neo-prophets; who are accused of financially milking their patrons dry through the sales of religious items. Characteristically, as part of their prophetic style they can effectuate this financial inducement practice in their respective churches by connecting spirituality to almost anything problem that confronts humankind. This spirituality dimension is not surprising as the trait is deeply inherent in African Traditional belief and even among the African Christians who believe that there is a spiritual dimension to every human situation. In what has been christened prosperity gospel.⁶ Rev. Prof Emmanuel Asante for instance, has, expressed his displeasure about this situation which appears to be worrying and at the same time has adverse effect on national development. He indicated that:

*“as soon as something terrible happens, instead of us (Ghanaians) investigating –finding out what might have been the cause and therefore trying to find a solution- we go for the cheap way, spiritual, and that mitigates any attempt to do serious investigation to find what is the actual cause of the event”.*⁷

Prophet Isaac Osei, aka *Obootuo*- “The Sniper”, on his part on KofiTV’s revealed series of somewhat weird prophetic schemes involving some popular “men of God” during a television program hosted by Kofi Adomawawani:⁸

“(a) in our culture/country it is difficult if not impossible to see a woman’s panties or underwear but today women are asked to bring their undies for spiritual help and they oblige, (b) Kofi, about 99% of our prophecies are based on psychology, if you want to know where criminality is thriving the most in Ghana, is in the prophetic office, (c) instead of us urging our children to study, parents send their wards’ pens to us to pray over them so that they can excel in their exams, (d) prophets hire people at a fee of GH¢1,000 to dramatize blindness, paralysis, insanity, (e) prophets hire agents to plant charms in the houses of rich people and later prophesy about the charm in church and collects GH¢10,000 from such people to uproot the charm”.

Based on this that this paper sets out to investigate who a commercial prophet is and explore the rhetorical strategies deployed by this crop of Neo-prophets to hoodwink their patrons to patronize their religious wares in the Ghanaian religious space. This study samples two popular Neo-prophets; Bishop Daniel Obinim and Rev Obofour. In term of structure, this paper is divided into seven sections. The first part is the introduction, the next is commercial prophets, Neo-prophetic and religious commercialization, literature review, followed by rhetoric, discussions on the rhetorical strategies deployed by CPs, conclusion and recommendations.

This paper is significant because it offers student of language and religion insights into the theoretical perspectives and practical outlook on the activities of Neo-prophets relative to rhetoric. The findings of this paper have implication for Neo-prophetism, the church in Ghana and national developments in general.

Methodology

⁴ George Anderson Jr., and Margaret Makafui Tayviah, Corruption in the wake of high religiosity in Ghana: Questioning the possibility, *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies*, 1(2): (2019) 117.

⁵ Amo-Asare, *The Church is Losing its Efficacy*, Daily Graphic 9th July, 2018.

⁶ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyedu, *African Charismatics: Current developments within independent indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. 2005, 23-28.

⁷ Myjoyonline.com, *Over-spiritualization is Making Money Ghanaians Non-Critical Thinkers*. Wednesday,20, 2016

⁸ Kofi TV, *Exclusive Secretes about the Prophetic Ministry in Ghana*, 31-01-18

According to Creswell⁹ “Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”. The study which adopts qualitative approach selected Kumasi and the Accra Metropolis respectively as our research areas. The metropolises were purposively selected for data collection based on the saturated nature of this category of prophets. Kumasi, for instance, was chosen because the two CPs used for the study are from the Ashanti region; they started their ministry in the metropolis before later opening branches in Accra and Tema respectively. The study used mediatized data (recorded news items and programs on TV and radio, downloaded Youtube videos), promotional church posters and banners, and newspaper articles. Using rhetorical analysis approach the paper also used both primary and secondary data. We adopted participant observation approach by visiting their Accra and Kumasi branches to observe their unique rhetorical ministration. Also, we conducted semi-structured interviews. The secondary data was gleaned from published books, journal articles, and thesis and newspaper articles. The Twi text was later transcribed into the English language.

We used Bishop Daniel Obinim aka Angel Obinim, founder of the International Godsway Church, as the case study for this paper. In Ghana, he has three main branches of the church in the following areas; Tema Community 9, Madina Ashale Botwe, Accra and Kenyase Bosore. He is one of the most popular Neo-prophets in Ghana whose major speciality includes: performance of miracles, healing the sick and preaching the word of God. The second prophet sampled is Kwaku Antwi Agyei popularly known as Asanteman Bofour simply Obofour. He is the founder of Anointed Palace Chapel with its headquarter at Fawoade a suburb in Kumasi. This vibrant Neo-prophetic church has branches in Accra and Tema where prophetic, healing and counselling services are held on specific days of the week. The two CPs were chosen for this study because currently they are among the popular Neo-prophets in the country and also they have all the features of CPs: they run their respective churches on business principles by selling religious items, they aggressively use the media space to brand and sell their prophetic ministries, they carry prophetic nicknames and many more.

Commercial Prophet

‘Commercial Prophets’ (hereafter, CP) refers to daring prophets in the Ghanaian socio-religious space who commercialize self-prepared religious products/items and render services to religious consumers. Some of the religious products include anointing oil, apples, perfumes, car stickers, wrist bands, handkerchiefs, eggs, well water, bottled water, porridge, cream, soaps and powder.¹⁰ They also render spiritual counselling sessions for their patrons with or without a fee. Characteristically, majority of them do not belong to any recognized regulatory body in the country.

Fundamentally, these prophets have prophetic and lifestyle trademarks that distinguish them from mainstream prophets. That is, they use nicknames as brand strategy to market themselves. For instance, Nicholas Osei-Kumchacha, Chris Asante- Abruksu Abruksu, Daniel Obinim- Archangel, Linda Boakye-Agradaawaa, Kwaku Agyei Antwi- Asanteman B[fo]/}b[fo] and many others with such nicknames. Moreover, they communicate eloquently using the Akan language (Twi dialect) to project their values.¹¹ In their ministration, they strategically harness Akan cultural narratives, and allusions by choosing strategic Akan idioms and proverbs that have strong persuasive hooks and use them to mesmerize their patrons. CPs are also aggressive in their prophetic narratives. Their prophetic messages thrive on fear as a rhetorical frame to coerce their audience to submit to their dictates. They highlight the destructive powers of witches

⁹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design, Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Approaches*, 4th Edition. 2014, 32.

¹⁰ Special Breakthrough Oil, Bad Dreams Oil, Back-to-sender Oil, Solution Water, *Kosua-kodiewuo* –Killer Egg, *Abayifo* Nku-Witches Cream, Miracle perfume.

¹¹ The Akan language is considered the most widely spoken indigenous language in Ghana although English remains the official language. As a language, Akan is taught in schools from the basic to the university level, it is used in the media, at church and in commerce;

Solace Ago Yankson, *Language Contact and Change in Linguistically Heterogeneous Urban Communities*, 2018.

Emmanuel Kwaku Osam, *An Introduction to the Verbal and Multi-verb System of Akan*, 2003.

Mary Esther Kropp-Dakubu, *Role Restriction and Marginalization in an Urban Context: The Fate of Ga in Accra*, 2005.

Florence Abena Dolphyne, *The Volta-Comoe Languages: In the languages of Ghana*, ed. M.E. Kropp Dakubu and 50-75. London: Kegan Paul international, 1988.

and demons in the lives of their audience. In terms of their encounters with the law, they are always in the news for one bad reason or another. They are often accused of visa frauds, doubling of monies, taking people's properties, and physical and sexual assaults.

Neo-prophets and Religious Commercialization

Considering the major role prophecy play in the life of the African, some ¹²scholars believe African Christian prophets have replaced indigenous priests and priestess who offer similar spiritual services in health, career, marriage, and business. However, focusing the narrative on Ghana, the last decade has seen a steady growth in the activities of Neo-prophets relative to religious commercialization. These prophets aggressively leverage on technology to market their religious items on television, radio and social media on regular basis despite public condemnation. This act has gone a long way to affect the image of the church in terms of unpalatable remarks directed at the church despite the fact that such acts are perpetuated by a section of men of God in the country, David Okai noted that "The Church is sometimes labelled as object of scorn because of the abominable praxis of merchandizing ministry on some television stations in Ghana"¹³.

Princewell Achor Nwanganga provided an in-depth insight into religious commercialization by conceptualizing the notion as "every action, activities of church leaders, pastors, prophets etc. that have economic or profit-making annotation"¹⁴. He went further to establish two main principles that define church commercialization. The first identifiable factor is the adoption of commercial principles akin to smart business that ultimately aims at maximizing financial gains. The second factor talks about the idea of using manipulative principles in church/Christianity with the sole aim of exploiting patrons of such churches. This gives the fundamental background of the operations and mentality of men of God who engage in various religious commercialization.

Literature Review

Extensive scholarly works have been done on the activities of Spiritual churches and Contemporary or Neo-prophets in Ghana with seminal works such as; Baeta's work on Spiritual churches in Ghana;¹⁵ Oyina's PhD work on Akan Witchcraft and Exorcism;¹⁶ Ansah also studied the use of anointing oil by Neo-prophets;¹⁷ Kuwornu-Adjaottor also treated Contemporary Prophecy in Kumasi;¹⁸ Omenyo & Atiemo worked on Neo-prophetic/contemporary prophets; Owusu compared indigenous African prophets and Traditional Akan priest, ¹⁹ Coker and Nartey studied flaming between prophets on Ghanaian radio.²⁰ Fallout from these empirical studies confirm the fact that the phenomenon of prophecy has always been with the indigenous African for ages and the indigenous people are intrinsically attached to their primal understanding of issues of life which calls for search into the unknown. Naturally, the nature and form of prophetism keep changing to reflect the different epoch of the Church and the socio-economic dynamics that characterize Ghanaian Christianity.

¹² Cephas Narh Omenyo, "Man of God Prophecy unto Me: The Prophetic Phenomenon in African Christianity". *Studies in World Christianity*, 17(1)2011.

¹³ David Okai, Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry on some TV Stations in 21st Century: A Study of Prophetic Ministry in Ghana. *The American Journal of Biblical theology*, Vol. 18, 20, (2017): 2

¹⁴ Princewell Achor Nwanganga, Church Commercial in Nigeria: Implication for Public Relation Practice. *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. Vol. 29, (2017) 3.

¹⁵ Christian Baeta Goncalves, *Prophetism in Ghana: A study of 'Spiritual Churches'*. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1962.

¹⁶ Onyinah Opoku, *Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost*, PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2002.

¹⁷ Ansah Owusu Roland, *The Usage of Anointing Oil in Some Charismatic and Neo-Prophetic Churches in Kumasi*, Mphil Thesis, KNUST, 2011.

¹⁸ Jonathan Kuwornu-Adjaottor, *Contemporary Prophetism in Kumasi*, A Sociocultural and Theological Assessment. *Herald Journal of Education and General Studies*, 2 (1) (2013)

¹⁹ Omenyo Cephas Narh & Abam Ofori Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Space: The case of neo-Prophetism in Ghana". *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, 1(1): (2006)

²⁰ Coker Wincharles and Nartey Francis, When Men of God Go Wild: A Study Flaming in Sermonic Discourse on a Ghanaian Network. *International Journal of Social Science and Education*. 2(4), (2012)

The phenomenon is not unique to Ghana as similar studies have been conducted on the African continent; key among them is Madzokere and Machingura work on *True/False Prophet in Zimbabwe* which they identified the following key factors that help establish a distinction between a true/false prophet/prophesy.²¹ Studying the Prophetic Movement of Prophet Esa in the Traditional religion of the Wolaitta people of Ethiopia, it emerged from the study that prophecies are typically generated in response to social crisis.²² This clearly affirms some parallels in the²³ emergence, growth, style and dynamism in the operation of some of these prophets across the continent.²⁴

Different Phases of Prophetism in Ghana

Extensive studies have been conducted into the activities of Neo-prophets across Africa and beyond. Some of the key areas that these scholarly works looked at include; the emergence and proliferations of Neo-prophets, their modes of operation, their contributions to society and the various criticisms concerning their activities as men of God. In terms of generational categorization of prophetism in Ghana, scholars like²⁵ Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh and²⁶ George Anderson Jnr. agree on a six-phase generational strand of prophets in the religious landmark of the country. The basis for their categorization is underpinned by the following; the period of emergence on the Ghanaian religious scene, prophetic style, and focus of prophetic ministration. For example, in the first phase, African Initiated Churches (AIC), were characterized by powerful prophets such as Samuel Nyankson and Samuel Oppong who provided spiritual assistance in terms healing and protection to believers²⁷. However, their fortunes dwindled following the death of their founding leaders and also when some of their practices were proclaimed to be demonic or ritualistic by the new Pentecostal churches.

Gideon Tetteh in his work *Analyzing Perspectives on Evil, Enemy and Divinatory Consultation*,²⁸ labelled the second phase prophets as the Classical Pentecostals. These vibrant prophets had prominent personalities like Apostle Anim and Prophet John Mensah. Their activities focused on divine healing based on God's promises and stories in the Bible concerning good health for the children of God. The third phase had their roots in the tertiary institutions to be specific Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, where young and energetic prophets emerged. These educated categories believed in the gift of prophesy to all believers. It emerged that although their leaders were educated yet they lacked theological depth. The fourth phase also emerged in the 1980's and 90's with notable prophets and prophetess like Grace Adu of Adumfa prayer camp in the Central region and, Elder Dan's Paradise Spiritual in Accra²⁹. Characteristically, they operated prayer camps where strong prayers targeting witches and demons dominated their activities. Their activities were spearheaded mostly by members coming from the Church of Pentecost.³⁰

The fifth phase was led by firebrand young prophets like Isaac Owusu Bempa, Bernard Opoku Nsiah, and Isaac Anto, among others whose main preoccupation was aggressive prophetic declaration. They emerged in the 1990's and their stock-in-trade was their vibrant organization of crusades and church programs in cinema halls, community centers and, school parks for patrons. This phase is what Paul Gifford

²¹ Nyasha Madzokere and Francis Machingura, True and False Prophet/esses in the Light of Prophet/esses and Wonders in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Critical Southern Studies*, Vol. 3, (2015), 55.

²² Bisrat L. Bergene, Prophets and Prophecy as a Response to Crises: Prophet Esa in Traditional Religion of Wolaitta (1920-28). *African Journal of History and Culture*. Vol.8, (2016).

²³ Princewell Achor Nwanganga, Church Commercial in Nigeria: Implication for Public Relation Practice. *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. Vol. 29, (2017), 3-8.

²⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 19-23.

²⁵ Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: An examination of Selected of Re-enacting Biblical work of John D.K. Ekem of Mother Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics for the African Context*, 47-53

²⁶ George Anderson Jnr, *Ghana's Neo-prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity*, 3.

²⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 19-23.

²⁸ Gideon Tetteh, *Analyzing Perspectives on Evil, Enemy and Divinatory Consultation*, 57-57

²⁹ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, Prophetism in Ghana's New Prophetic Churches. *Journal of Pentecostal Theological Association* 35 (2) (2015) 59-81.

³⁰ Oyina Opoku, *Akan Witchcraft and the concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost*, 2002.

called Ghana's New Christianity or 'Neo-prophetic'.³¹ The last phase, the sixth phase, according to Anderson Jnr. emerged in the 2000s, however, some of them claim they had practiced before the said date. This strand of prophets leverages aggressively on the media to brand, market, and sell their type of prophetic ministry to the general populace.³² They have been criticized on issues like morality, unpopular propaganda schemes, financial malfeasance, verbal and physical abuse, and profligate lifestyle.³³ This category of prophets constitutes the focus of this paper as their prophetic style thrive massively on rhetoric where they craftily leverage on language and other semiotic markers to captivate their patrons into submission. Also, a sizeable number of them engage in the selling of religious products and services.

Proliferation of Neo-prophets

According to Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "prophecy is a religious phenomenon that involves an individual being spiritually endowed with extra-sensory capabilities that enables him/her to perform supernatural functions".³⁴ The emergence of these prophets have been welcomed by the indigenous people because their prophetic activities incorporate primal religious concepts and traditions such as the belief that objects like rocks, rivers, animals etc. having the potential of being inhabited with spirits, problems of life are intrinsically caused by demons and witches, divinatory consultation, *Abisa*.³⁵

Several factors have been assigned by scholar to have accounted for the fostering of Neo-prophetic activities on the African continent and Ghana to be specific. Scholars like Princewell Achor Nwanganga³⁶ and David Okai have outlined the following factors as contributing to the emergence and growth of Neo-propheticism in Nigeria and Ghana respectively;³⁷ unemployment, high rate of illiteracy, ignorance, misunderstanding, the quest to be autonomous, and doctrinal difference among other factors. Generally, economic, socio-cultural condition, and personal greed create fertile grounds for Neo-prophetic activities to thrive.

Rhetoric

Michael Burke in his article, *Discourse Implicature, Quintilian and the Ludicity Principle*, captures three classical definitions of rhetoric from progenitors of the concepts;³⁸ Aristotle defines rhetoric as "the faculty of discovery in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion; Plato also defines it as the "art of enchanting the soul" and, Cicero's definition of rhetoric captures the notion as "speech designed to persuade". From the definitions it emerged that rhetoric is characteristically human and is purposively activated to establish change in the behavior or attitude of a targeted audience under a given rhetorical situation. Rhetoric has persuasion as one of its focus occurs in response to either a created or an observed exigency by a rhetor. The rhetor intend crafts a message with an audience in mind to achieve an intended goal. Characteristically, a rhetor maximizes the created or the observed exigency by masterfully creating a discourse/message utilizing the five canons propounded by Roman philosopher Cicero; invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery.³⁹ A typical rhetoric narrative thrives on these key factors: the subject, audience, context, purpose, exigency, tone and strategies. Rhetoricians claim that for any communicative to establish the desired impact, these factors need to be carefully synchronized to maximize the expected results.⁴⁰ Stressing on the objective of rhetoric, in his book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth

³¹ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 2004: 90.

³² George Anderson Jnr. *Ghana's Neo-prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity*, 16.

³³ Coker Wincharles and Nartey Francis, *When Men of God go Wild*, 2012.

³⁴ Quayesi-Amakye Joseph 'Let the Prophet Speak': A study on Trends in Pentecostal Prophetism with Particular Reference to the Church of Pentecost and some prophetic Churches in Ghana, 2009: 24.

³⁵ Kofi Asare Opoku, *Communalism and Community in the African Heritage*, 1990:488-491.

³⁶ Princewell Achor Nwanganga, *Church Commercial in Nigeria: Implication for Public Relation Practice*, 2017:1.

³⁷ David Okai, *Evaluating the Effects Merchandizing Ministry on some Television Stations in 21st Century*, 2017: 5.

³⁸ Michael Burke, *Discourse Implicature, Quintilian and the Ludicity Principle: Rhetorical Phenomenon in Pragmatics. Topics in Linguistics*, 17, 1, (2016), 1-6.

³⁹ Bitzer, F. Lloyd., *The Rhetorical Situation*. Philosophy and Rhetorical Vol.1 (1968) 1-14

⁴⁰ Murray D. Wolfe, *The Power of Rhetoric*, 3-6.

Burke (1950) aptly remarked that “rhetoric’s goal is to get the audience to identify with him/her – audience remakes the substance of its identification into a state of oneness/consubstantiality with speaker”. Characteristically, rhetoric is epistemic in nature because it is considered a conscious creation rather than knowledge reflection in speech situation.

Historically, rhetoric can be traced to Aristotle who came up with his famous three rhetorical appeals of Ethos, Logos and Pathos which rhetoricians harness its potentials to persuade targeted audience.⁴¹ Aristotle explained “*Logos*” as, the logical structure of an argument, using reason; *Ethos*, as the character of the speaker and *Pathos*, as the use of emotional theme or language to make an audience more receptive to the conclusion”. Persuasion inherently underlie almost every human endeavor although it comes in different forms and shades (overt and covert).

Rhetorical analysis systematically breaks a text into meaning units with the sole aim of providing insight into the general discourse crafted by a rhetor by highlighting areas like; who the intended audience is, the order of presentation, and the diction used (formal/informal). Also, a typical rhetorical analysis provides the opportunity to understand and appreciate the rhetor’s purpose (warn, inform, persuade, criticize). It also highlights the incorporated emotions, credibility and logic, and the strategies used in creating the message to establish the desired effect on the audience. Major users of rhetoric for persuasive and other motives include advertisers, journalist, parents, teachers, politicians, and the clergy among many others. Rhetorical analysis is germane to this paper because the focus of the work is on CPs, a strand of prophets who maximize the power rhetoric to sell their brand of ministry. Adopting a rhetorical approach will unveil the varied rhetorical strategies typically used by this crop of Neo-prophets to hoodwink gullible religious consumers to patronize their religious items and services.

Findings and Discussion

Rhetorical Strategies of CPs

CPs deploy a whole range of rhetorical strategies to project their brand, ward off threat from rival prophets, sell religious items and to stay relevant in the face stiff competition from fellow CPs. The rhetorical strategies used by these CPs come in both verbal and non-verbal (semiotic elements) forms. In terms of analysis, the rhetorical strategies used by these CPs have been broadly categorized into two main parts; (a) rhetorical strategies common to the two CPs and (b) rhetorical strategies unique to individual CPs.

Rhetorical strategies common to the two CPs

Bishop Obinim and Rev. Obofour are among the most popular Neo-prophets in Ghana with huge fanatical followers. They use different forms of rhetorical strategies as CPs to win new converts and maintain the old ones in order to remain relevant as Neo-prophets. First, they use clichés that communicate their prophetic values; flaunting wealth, power and authority and cast insinuations. Obinim uses terms like “*Aboro so aboro so*” ‘*abundance abundance*’. The man of God uses this cliché to communicate the abundance of grace and blessings of God available to him and his patrons. On the other hand, Rev Obofour also uses clichés like “*Who say power no dey, power dey papa*” and “*agye w/n ns/m*” they have been shocked. The first clichés rhetorically communicates power and authority whilst the second strategically sends insinuations to rival Neo-prophets and critics; as the message ridicules perceived distractors who have been disgraced by his prophetic abilities and blessings.

Both CPs typically use the Twi language and its associated cultural tenets to weave persuasive narrative about their prophetic brand, products and services. They dwell heavily on Akan proverbs and idioms to explain concepts and analogies during their prophetic ministrations and other dealings although they code-mix periodically. Interestingly, both claim to be angels hence Daniel Obinim calls himself Archangel while Kwaku Agyei Antwi also calls himself Asanteman Obofour (the angel of the Asante kingdom) or simply Rev. Obofour (angel). In the Neo-prophetic religious worldview, these pseudo names are rhetorically significant because they communicate identity, power and authority. Also, these two CPs

⁴¹ Aristotle, Rhetoric (trans. W. Rhys Roberts), in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, pp. 2152 – 2269. Princeton University Press, 1984:2250.

have flagship religious items they sell to patrons with unique names and functional abilities that are intrinsically linked to their respective prophets. Bishop Obinim's key religious item is his sticker (Obinim sticker) which he professes can perform miraculous things in the life of the user. On his part, Rev. Obofour's version is the *abayifo* nku- witches' cream which he claims does wonders to those who purchase it. These two religious items are very popular religious items in the Neo-prophetic nomenclature in Ghana based on how they have been systematically branded and marketed aggressively on different media platforms where songs have been composed to promote these religious items.

Rhetorical strategies unique to Bishop Daniel Obinim Lottery Narrative Rhetorical Strategy

Unlike their conventional counterparts, CPs are characteristically unique per their prophetic utterance and lifestyle. Unique to Bishop Obinim, he gives a well-crafted narrative on how he spiritually aids his patrons to win lottery through his spiritual powers. The man of God professes to have the spiritual ability to foresee the lottery numbers that will be drawn in the week hence he calls people to come and see him for numbers. Strategically, people are seen on his private television, Sweet and Soul TV filling up to give testimonies about how they have won thousands of Ghana cedis with the help of man of God. This monetary narrative entraps gullible individuals based on the harsh economic situation in the country, illiteracy and ignorance. This lottery rhetoric is another commercialization scheme systematically orchestrated to maximize profit as patrons are made to pay money to the man of God before they are given the lottery numbers to stake.

Mass Prophetic Pronouncement as a Rhetorical Strategy

Unique to Bishop Obinim's style of rhetorical prophetic delivery, he conducts rapid prophetic session periodically for worshippers in his church. This prophetic session is done in mass and is different from his usual prophetic ministration where individuals are called from the congregation and prophesied to. During this mass prophetic session, worshippers are made to queue up in the church auditorium for the man of God to foretell their future. In rapid succession the man of God predicts both good and bad news ahead of them. For example, the man of God prophesy how people are going to die (through road accidents, drowning, gunshot, fire, suicide, poison); how people are going to experience breakthrough (in marriages, childbirth, new jobs, travelling documents, exams, job promotions, and finances). This prophetic exercise often creates mixed feeling in the auditorium as some worshippers appear happy and appear dejected and fear stricken. Strategically, those who patronize this rapid prophetic session are admonished to see the man of God for spiritual direction after church to seal the good news or change the bad news. This rhetorical move offers the man of God the opportunity to sell his religious items such as calendar, necklace, sticker or toffee to the patrons of this rapid prophetic session.

Angelic Work as a Rhetorical Strategy

Another unique rhetorical strategy deploy by Angel Obinim is his narrative on performing angel activities for his members. He proclaims to be an Archangel with the spiritual ability to visit people in their dreams, change into different animals depending on the circumstance, putting money into people's bank accounts, changing himself to either male or female and many others to help people spiritually. This rhetorical narratives projects him as a demigod in the heart and minds of his followers capable of anything. On his television network, Soul and OB TV, he invites viewers through a section he calls *Immediate Dream Invitation* to visit his church so that 'Angelic works' will be done for them. Rhetorically, he mentions that "if you ever see me in your dream, bring the item that I directed you to use physically to me so that I perform some of the angelic things for you; I can help you get visa, fruit of the womb, money, come and meet me personally!" This rhetorical strategy psychologically endears him to viewers who follow him on television and those in his church to patronize his religious items.

English and French Translators as Rhetorical Strategy

Another important rhetorical strategy deployed by Bishop Obinim to connect to his audience through effective language use. Strategically, he makes maximum use of the power of multilingualism by employing both English and French translators during church service. Ghana is surrounded by three francophone

countries with some of them domiciling in the country therefore he uses this linguistic strategy to connect these people to his brand of prophetic ministry. Despite the strength of the Twi language in Ghana, we have other indigenous languages and English as the official language hence a good number of the populace understand the English language. Rhetorically, the translated messages in English and French especially on television opens him up for both foreign and local viewers to access his brand of prophetic ministry and through that establish himself internationally.

Unique Religious Items as a Rhetorical Strategy

One interesting feature about these CPs is their creativity in designing new religious products periodically for their patrons. These items are painstakingly chosen and named by the various CPs to reflect their purpose and use. One popular religious item unique to Bishop Obinim is his trademark sticker and wrist band. The sticker is the most popular and commonly referred to as *Obinim Sticker*; it has a whole narrative around it by way of what the man of God proclaims it can do and testimonies given by people who bought them. For instance, testimonies have it that people attached it to their doorpost and it scared armed robbers off, someone gave a testimony of attaching it to her empty gas cylinder and was able to use it for months without filling, a driver attached it to his car and was mysteriously rescued in a road accident. Most of these testimonies about the use of the *Obinim Sticker* and *Wrist band* have gone viral on social media because of the weird narratives surrounding them. The mystery surrounding these religious items crafted by the man of God ultimately resonates with miracle chasers and desperate patrons who needed quick fix to their problems.

Healing Ministration and Prophetic Direction as a Rhetorical Strategy

The old adage that bad news travels faster and sells perfectly fit with this rhetorical strategy. Bishop Obinim has been in the news for both good and bad reasons over the years. Rhetorically, he has unique unconventional and weird mode of healing and spiritual direction among Neo-prophets in Ghana. On one occasion, he is seen on his private television during church service digging his leg into a lady's abdomen repeatedly all in the name of healing. This strange way of healing attracted a lot of public attention and bashing, especially from human right campaigners in the country and beyond. Another occasion, he gave a spiritual direction asking both male and female to bring their used underwear to the church premises for spiritual works. The man of God was able gather huge packs of used undies from his patrons and later at midnight together with his associate pastors offered prayers on the heap of undies and set it on fire based on spiritual direction from "his father Jesus". This weird approach to healing and spiritual direction strategically stirred discussion within and across religious and social circles. Strategically, he takes advantage of these seemingly controversial prophetic and healing episodes to explain his unique brand of prophetic ministration to the media and for that matter the general public. This well-orchestrated rhetorical move makes him and his brand relevant and eventually stays competitive among his CPs peers.

Rhetorical Strategy of Rev. Obofour

Strong Media Presence as a Rhetorical Strategy

Rev. Obofour is one of the most visible social media Neo-prophets currently in the country. Excerpts of his social life as well as his religious programs are always flaunted on social media platforms such as Twitter, Youtube and Facebook and media avenues for public consumption. This aggressive social media campaign is strategically created to make his prophetic brand visible and vibrant among his Neo-prophetic peers. Secondly, he owns private television and radio stations which broadcast both live and recorded programs to the masses.⁴² He uses this media platform to show his interviews, miracles, donations and other programs making him very visible. Unlike other CPs, Rev. Obofour's taste for music, dressing, and close associates are carefully chosen, different and strategic. For example, in terms of dressing, he sometimes conducts his church services in either in polo shirts and jeans, snickers and tracksuits showcasing his street lifestyle. This unconventional Neo-prophetic dress code endears him to the youth for his trendy and smart outfits.

⁴² Kiss TV, Lion TV, Cash TV, Sweet TV

This media visibility is also used to cast innuendoes to rival CPs, respond to allegations/clarify issues and importantly market the prophetic brand of Rev. Obofour to the masses.

Flaunting of Wealth and Benevolence as Rhetorical Strategy

One of the key principles in prosperity gospel is for the children of God to acquire wealth and occupying key position in the society⁴³. In order to demonstrate his blessing in terms of wealth Rev. Obofour flaunts his family's expensive clothing and vacation travels, fleet of luxurious cars, houses and expensive church auditorium on social media for public consumption. For example, in the third quarter of 2019, he purchased 2020 version of Rolls Royce reported to have cost him a whopping \$920,000. Another important rhetorical trademark that makes Rev Obofour hit the headlines is the number of charity works/donations that he does especially to celebrities and the needy in the society. He gifts fleets of cars, gives people capital to start business, pay rent, school fees and many others. These benevolent acts are strategic as it communicates hegemony among CPs in Ghana. These charitable acts and flaunting of wealth are underlie by subtle display of power play among the CP as to who reigns in terms of; spiritual powers to perform miracles, wealth, size of congregation, and number of branches. This is evident in the way their associate pastors' cross carpet to rival Neo-prophets camp and he is shown on social media receiving expensive gift⁴⁴.

Narrative on Witches as Rhetorical Strategy

Rev. Obofour strategically creates a whole narrative around the concept of witchcraft by highlighting their evil deeds. He extols the efficacy of his spiritual power called *gyak[jk]* red fire (hot fire) capable of arresting witches and rendering them powerless on his nocturnal spiritual activities. To affirm his spiritual prowess, he parades witches and wizards including children during church service on his television programs confessing how they got their witchcraft powers, the various evil acts they have perpetuated and how they got captured by the powers of the man of God. Leveraging on his flagship religious product *abayifo] nku* – 'witches' cream', these witches are alleged to have been arrested by the powers of the man of God hence his prophetic nicknames is *Jkyereabayie* 'the one who arrests witches and wizards' to showcase his spiritual status. In a country where the people have strong believe in spiritual entities being the cause of very mishap, Rev. Obofour uses this rhetorical narrative on the efficacy of his witches' cream and his powers to deal with witches and wizard to psychologically projects himself as a powerful man of God in the minds of his patrons.

Celebrity Endorsement as Rhetorical Strategy

Rev. Obofour is one Neo-prophet whose lifestyle in terms of those that he associates with characteristically distinguishes him from his Neo-prophetic peers. Uncharacteristic of other Neo-prophets in Ghana, Rev. Obofour periodically invites celebrities such as musicians, comedians, movie icon and many others to his church to socialize with them. What makes these visits memorable is the fact that the man of God will be seen dancing to favorite secular tunes provided by these celebrities. Pictures and videos of such occasion go viral on social drawing receiving both positive and negative reviews. This rhetorical move draws attention to Rev Obofour and his prophetic ministry as he brings entertainment, life and freshness to his followers. For instance, the man of God with his junior pastors who are mainly young men dance to different renditions of popular Hiplife tunes from Shatta Wale, Kwaw Kese, Yaa Pono, Fameye, and others in his church. The youth, especially, who forms the bulk of the population follow these celebrities therefore naturally extend their endorsement to the man of God because to them he identifies with the ordinary person on the street.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

⁴³ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 23-28.

⁴⁴ Rev Obofour in 2019 gave one of the associate pastors of Bishop Obinim, Kingsley Baah aka 'One Blow' Range Rover after his defection from the latter's Neo-prophetic church.

CPs are a new crop of prophets who have emerged on the Ghana religious landscape who harness the power of rhetoric and semiotic highlighters to brand and commercialize spiritual items for financial gains. A careful reflection on the analysis has revealed that the messages deployed by CPs are carefully thought through and masterfully constructed. Their rhetorical narratives are underpinned by socio-cultural, economic and political factors purposefully constructed to make their prophetic ministry stay relevant in the face of stiff competition from fellow CPs and maximize financial gains. Also, it emerged from the analysis that the activities of CPs are sharply in response to needs from people whose primal practices intrinsically pulls them to the schemes of this category prophets who also leverage on their audiences' vulnerability to formulate persuasive messages that entice and entrap them to patronize their religious products and services.

Again, the paper identified four rhetorical strategies uniquely deployed by CPs in their prophetic ministration; eloquent utilization of Akan language and its cultural tenets, aggressive media campaigns, unique use of semiotic highlighters, and crafty maximization of economic hardship and illiteracy in the country. In the view of the findings of the paper, it is recommended that major stakeholders for instance the Parliament of Ghanaian the country who have oversight responsibility and the wellbeing of the common Ghanaian at heart should come out with laws that will regulate the activities of some men of God in the country especially, Neo-prophets, as their activities bother on human life and national development.

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