

Neo-Prophetic Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Narrative on the Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, Kumasi-Ghana.



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ABSTRACT

In recent times, there has been an upsurge of Neo-Prophetic Christianity in Ghana, Sub-Saharan Africa. Churches that belong to this genre of Christianity appeal to the socio-religio-cultural worldviews of the African and Ghanaian people to bring meaning to their lives. In view of this, they have carved for themselves a niche in the religious space of Ghana. One of the churches that is of interest to this article is the Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, Kumasi, Ghana. Comparatively, whereas in the public space the church has gained much popularity, little in scholarship is known about its history and activities in the Ghanaian religious field. This article is a narrative on the church's history, beliefs and activities. Using a qualitative approach, a phenomenological study is conducted. The two research principles of *epoché* and eidetic intuition are observed. The article significantly contributes to the scanty existing literature on the history of some prominent Neo-prophetic African Pentecostal Christian churches in Ghana.

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INTRODUCTION

At every vantage point in Ghana, one catches a glimpse of a church. Such churches are characteristic of the Pentecostal strand of African Christianity birthed out of either schism or a person's so-called personal religious experience inspiring him/her to initiate a church. In this regard, it leaves one in a state of cleft stick to ascertain what could have accounted for the upsurge of these churches. Some of the obvious identified reasons may possibly be that most Ghanaians have a predilection for religion and that the nature of Ghana's religious field is slipshod without the state enforcing any rigorous regulation on church formation and its related activities.

Perfunctory study of the religious field of Ghana today reveals a steady growth and development of this new brand of Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches – Neo-prophetic churches.¹ This genre of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christian church chiefly appeals to the socio-religio-cultural worldviews of the African and Ghanaian people, seeking to bring meaning to the lives of believers. One of the churches that has merited

¹ Karen Lauterbach, *Wealth and Worth: Pastors and Neo-Pentecostalism in Kumasi*, *Ghana Studies*, 9, (2006): 91-121; Gideon Tetteh, *Analysing Perspectives on Evil, Enemy and Divinatory Consultation among Participants in Neo-Prophetic Movements in Pentecostal Ghana*. Unpublished M.Phil in Intercontextual Theology, University of Oslo, (2016): 64; Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. (Indiana: University Press, 2004).

much admiration and prominence in the public and religious space of Ghana; yet with modest scholarship is the Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, located at Ahenema Kokoben, a suburb of Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana. Whereas this church continues to play socio-religio-political roles in the lives of a majority of Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians who patronise it, little is known in scholarship about the church. In this regard, this article seeks to present a narrative of the church's history and activities. This exercise is important since it seeks to add up to the scanty academic literature on Neo-prophetic African Pentecostal Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

This article has been structured into seven sections. The first section is the introduction, the second presents the methodology, the third section discusses the phenomenon of neo-propheticism in Ghana, the fourth deals with the beliefs/practices and teachings of neo-prophetic churches. The fifth presents the history of Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre and its weekday activities, the sixth session makes a recommendation for further research and the final session is the conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

This article is approached qualitatively. It involved the use of participant observation as the research technique for data collection for a period of one and a half years. During this period, the author attended and participated in the church's weekly activities. While he was actively involved in the church's religious activities, he meticulously observed the principles of *epoché* and eidetic intuition. Edmund Husserl² has argued that in doing phenomenological studies, it is essential for a researcher to observe the two principles: *epoché* and eidetic intuition. This is because the principle of *epoché* for example, helps the researcher to bar his/her preconceived notions on the phenomenon under study; while the eidetic intuition guides the researcher to occupy him/herself with the essential information, and critically observes and analyses the nature of the phenomenon under study for a comprehensive and objective evaluation. By observing these principles, it allowed for the facts in the phenomenon under investigation to speak for themselves. The narrative provided in this article are results from the author's doctoral fieldwork conducted from July 2017 to December 2018 at the Ebenezer Miracle Worship Center, Kumasi. With reference to the methodology used, the author documented the history of the church, its beliefs and its church activities.

Neo-Propheticism in Ghana

Neo-Propheticism is a genre of African Pentecostal Christianity that constitutes a new manifestation of Propheticism. It grounds its beliefs and practices in African worldview and thus exemplifies a high degree of hybridity in practices of the older African Independent Churches (AICs), Classical Pentecostal Churches and Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches.³ Neo-Propheticism in Ghana's religious field began with the insurgence of the phenomenon of Propheticism, which was characterised by different phases; each phase surfacing to provide palpable solutions to people's predicaments. Although some scholars such as Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi⁴ and Johnson Asamoah-Gyadu⁵ have differently categorised the classifications of the Christian renewal movements leading to the emergence of Neo-Prophetic Christianity in Ghana, this article sticks to the phases that Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh⁶ has outlined.

² James K. Cox, *An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*, (rev. ed.). (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010). 28-30.

³ Cephas Narh Omenyo, & Wonderful A. Arthur, The Bible Says! Neo-Prophetic Hermeneutics in Africa. *Studies in World Christianity*, 19, 1, (2013): 50-51.

⁴ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *The Development of Ghanaian Pentecostalism, A Study in the Appropriation of the Christian Gospel in Twentieth Century Ghana Setting with Special Reference to the Christ Apostolic Church, the Church of Pentecost, and the International Central Gospel Church*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Edinburg University, (1995).59.

⁵ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: A Study of Independent Indigenous Pentecostal Movements in Ghana*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005): 29-30.

⁶ Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, Hermeneutics of Re-enacting Biblical Text(s) and Concept(s) in the History of Propheticism in Ghana's Christianity: A Case Study of the Ministry of Agabus and Prophet Bernard Opoku Nsiah. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 40, 1, (2017): 47-53.

The first phase of Christian prophetism in Ghana occurred with the emergence of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)⁷ in the year 1914 in Axim and Apollonia in Nzema by Samuel Nyankson, William Wade Harris, John Swatson, and Sampson Oppong.⁸ Their emergence was because of the inability of Mission Christianity to provide acceptable solutions to the spiritual problems of their converts.⁹

After about 50 years of existence and popularity, the activities of these prophets waned in view of the reasons that follow.¹⁰ First, newer Pentecostal Churches demonised the prophets' religious practices as occultic and ritualistic. This is primarily because their religious practices were identified with the African religio-cultural practices.¹¹ Secondly, there was the difficulty of finding replacements after the death of their prophetic leaders.¹² Thirdly, leaders of the AICs perceived theological education as a form of Westernisation and therefore preferred a mentorship form of training to formal theological training.¹³

The second phase of prophetic renewal was Classical Pentecostalism; emerging from the activities of Apostle Peter Anim. Other important personalities included James McKeown, Prophet Gilbert Ablorh Lawson and Prophet John Mensah among others.¹⁴ This phase was characterized by divine healing.¹⁵ The third phase was characterised by the revival of Christian fellowships in tertiary institutions. This phase placed emphasis on the prophethood of all believers. Samuel B. Adubofour¹⁶ has shown how this phase put forth a great revival among Inter-hall Christian Fellowship (IHCF) at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi in the 1990's. He contended that this fellowship attracted derogatory remarks and outright condemnation."¹⁷

Phase four, surfaced in denominational prayer camps/centres of the Church of Pentecost. For instance, Prophetess Grace Adu's Adumfa Prayer Camp located in the Central Region, Mama Grace's Agape Prayer Camp at Ablekuma, Elder Okyere's Salvation Prayer Centre, Elder Dan's Paradise Spiritual, Revival and Healing Centre, all in Accra, and Elder Andoh's Down Town Prayer Revival Centre at Kasoa.¹⁸ These camps served as 'safe havens' for majority of troubled and perplexed Ghanaians who sought for supernatural remedies to their predicaments.¹⁹ The fifth phase, which commenced in the 1990s, has been described as Ghana's New Christianity, otherwise called 'Neo-Propheticism' by Paul Gifford.²⁰ Progenitors of this phase include but are not limited to Bernard Opoku Nsiah, Elisha Salifu Amoako, Isaac Anto, Eric Nana Kwesi Amponsah, Isaac

⁷ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Let the Prophet Speak, A Study on Trends in Pentecostal Prophetism with Particular Reference to the Church of Pentecost and Some Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Ghana*. Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, University of Cape Coast, (2009). 39.

⁸ Christian G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some "Spiritual Churches"*. (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 1962), 27-30.

⁹ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Pentecostalism and the Missiological Significance of Religious Experience in Africa Today: The Case for Ghana 'Church of Pentecost. *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, XII, 1&2, (July/December 2002): 30-54; Gideon Tetteh, *Analysing Perspectives on Evil, Enemy and Divinatory Consultation among Participants in Neo-Prophetic Movements in Pentecostal Ghana*. Unpublished M.Phil. in Intercontextual Theology, University of Oslo, (2016). 64.

¹⁰ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: A Study of Independent Indigenous Pentecostal Movements in Ghana*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005):29-30. Asamoah-Gyadu writes: The Sunsum sore are experiencing an overall numerical decline, verified by two church attendance surveys conducted in 1988 and 1993 by Ghana Evangelical Committee. For example, attendance in the Mosama Disco Christo Church (MDCC) declined by 17 per cent over the five years, that of the Twelve Apostles Church declined by 22 per cent, and the African Faith Tabernacle by 23 per cent.

¹¹ Cephas Narh Omenyo & Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana". *Ghana Bulletin of Theology, New Series*, 1, 1, (July 2006): 58.

¹² Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 65-66.

¹³ Frederick Mawusi Amevenku, "Mother Tongue Biblical Interpretation and the Future of African Instituted Christianity in Ghana" in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, 18, 1, (2014): 133-148.

¹⁴ Quayesi-Amakye, *Let the Prophet Speak*, 40.

¹⁵ Aryeh, *Hermeneutics of Re-enacting Biblical Text(s)*, 5.

¹⁶ Samuel Brefo Adubofour, *Evangelical Para-Church Movement in Ghanaian Christianity: (1950 to Early 1990's)*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, (1994): 183.

¹⁷ Adubofour, *Evangelical Para-Church Movement in Ghanaian Christianity*, 187.

¹⁸ Aryeh, *Hermeneutics of Re-enacting Biblical Text(s)*, 51; Quayesi-Amakye, *Let the Prophet Speak*, 41-42.

¹⁹ Opoku Onyinah, "Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost". (London: New York, University of Birmingham, 2002): 203.

²⁰ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. (Indiana: University Press, 2004).

Owusu-Bempah, Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom, Daniel Obinim, Daniel Bonigas and Gabriel Akwasi Sarpong among others.²¹

Beliefs and Practices in Neo-Prophetic Christianity

Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal Christianity places emphasis on theological concepts/teachings/beliefs and practices such as *ɔtamfo*, (enemy), *akwankyerɛ* (spiritual counselling/guidance/direction), *ngosra* (anointing), *yiedie* (success, well-being or prosperity), and exorcism and healing.²²

Neo-Prophetic Christianity holds a staunch belief in the existence of an enemy, *ɔtamfo* (singular), *atamfo* (plural). The enemy is generally perceived as either a human or a spirit being who initiates harm to people. Frimpong Wiafe and Harriet Clotey²³ have corroborated this explanation and have argued that the *ɔtamfo* (enemy) is either physical, spiritual, or both physical and spiritual in nature, and may include Satan, members of one's family, people outside the family and one's own self²⁴. This understanding of who an *ɔtamfo* is, largely influences Neo-Prophetic prophets and their followers to do anything possible to deal with the enemy since it has the power to cause them harm (such as barrenness, insanity, poverty, failures, sicknesses, and deaths).²⁵

Akwankyerɛ (spiritual counselling/guidance) is another practice in Neo-prophetic Christianity. Cephas N. Omenyo and Abamfo Atiemo,²⁶ and Simon K. Degbe²⁷ have depicted *akwankyerɛ* as a practice in which a prophet gives 'spiritual' information/directive to a person or group of persons (congregants of a church). Such information/directive is believed to provide explanation and solution to one's plight. The practice of *akwankyerɛ* is premised on the teachings that, every mishap has both physical and spiritual dimensions. Thus, the only appropriate means to deal with every mishap is through *akwankyerɛ*. Here, one is expected to acquire sanctified religious paraphernalia such as handkerchiefs, stickers, headgear, anointing oil, anointed eggs among others to serve as protective ornaments to repel the enemy and its paroxysms.²⁸

Ngosra (anointing) is a very common religious practice in Neo-Prophetic Christianity. This practice is believed to invoke God's presence and power unto the believer.²⁹ Besides, the practice facilitates 'impartment' of spiritual gifts to empower the believer to realise wealth, obtain healing and see visions.³⁰ The anointing oil is the main religious item used for this purpose. Omenyo and Wonderful Arthur³¹ have observed that anointing oil is usually applied on one's forehead, ailing part of the body and on the palms. This is done for healing, and blessing purposes. In some rare cases, the anointing oil is taken orally to mediate 'swift healing.'

Healing and deliverance/exorcism are also practices reflected in Neo-Prophetic Christianity. Atiemo³² has pointed out two major forms of healing and deliverance. They are mass and individual types. The author indicates that mass healing and deliverance takes place in the church or at special revival services or crusade

²¹ Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "The Role of Pentecostal Churches as an Influential Arm of Civil Society in Ghana". *Ghana Social Science Journal*, 11, 2, (2014): 77-101.

²² Gideon Tetteh, *Analysing Perspectives on Evil, Enemy and Divinatory Consultation among Participants in Neo-Prophetic Movements in Pentecostal Ghana*. Unpublished M.Phil.Thesis in Intercontextual Theology, University of Oslo, (2016). 76.

²³ Frimpong Wiafe, & Harriet Clotey, Ghanaian Christian Understanding of the Concept of Enemy with Reference to Psalm 35: 1 - 10: A Case Study of Some Selected Churches under the Neo-Prophetic Strand of Ghanaian Christianity. *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, 2, 11, (2015):1707-1713.

²⁴ Matthew 10:36. Revised Standard Version Bible.

²⁵ Cephas Narh Omenyo & Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, Claiming Religious Space: The Case of Neo-Prophetism in Ghana. *Ghana Bulletin of Theology, New Series*, 1, 1, (July 2006). 62.

²⁶ Omenyo & Atiemo, *Claiming Religious Space*, 62.

²⁷ Simon Kouessan Degbe, Sumsum Akwankyerɛ: Emerging Modes of Mediation and Appropriation of Spiritual Power in Sections of Ghanaian Christianity. *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 24, (2015):273-274.

²⁸ Tetteh, *Analysing Perspectives on Evil*, 79.

²⁹ Tetteh, *Analysing Perspectives on Evil*, 80.

³⁰ David B. Stiles-Ocran, "Prophetism in Ghana: A Case Study of some Charismatic Churches". An unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Unpublished MPhil Thesis, submitted to the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, (2004). 96.

³¹ Omenyo, & Arthur, *The Bible Says!*, 56.

³² Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, "Mmusuyi and Deliverance: A Study of Conflict and Consensus in the Encounter between African Traditional Religion and Christianity". Unpublished M.Phil. Thesis submitted to the University of Ghana, Legon, (1995). 103.

grounds. In most cases, healing and deliverance is officiated by a 'deliverance team' or 'prayer warriors'³³ led by a deliverance leader who may be a prophet or is believed to be Holy Spirit-filled. Demon-possessed and sick persons are respectively exorcised and prayed for by the deliverance and healing team.

History of the Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre³⁴

Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre takes its name from the leader and founder, Prophet Ebenezer Opambour Adarkwa Yiadom. The church is located in Ahenema Kokoben, a suburb of Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana. According to Prophet Adarkwa Yiadom, the church began in the early 90's after he returned from Abaasua/Atwea Mountains in the Sekyere Central District in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, having spent 3 years in fasting and prayers.

He added that he felt fulfilled after his 3-year stay. Afterward, he decided to go back to Alaba Zongo. There, he received a revelation to wait for a sign to commence his ministry. He then moved from Alaba Zongo to Sakora Wonoo, a Kente weaving sub-urban area in the Kwabre East District of the Ashanti Region to further his usual fasting and prayers. At Sakora Wonoo, he fasted for twenty-one days three consecutive times. During the latter part of the twenty-one days of fasting and prayers, he woke up from sleep one day only to find a Bible lying close to his bed. Finally, he was convinced by this sign that the time was due for the commencement of his ministry as God's servant.

Motivated by this sign, he moved from Sakora Wonoo to wait upon God by fasting. Following this activity, he began a prayer fellowship at Dichemso School Park at Krofrom. This new place attracted many people, coupled with miraculous occurrences. There were many visually impaired who regained their sight, the deaf and dumb could hear and speak, while the crippled walked. At that time, his ability to reveal, interpret, and foresee what lay ahead of people earned him the accolade, 'Prophet' or *Ɔdiyifo* which initially he rejected; but he later came to accept it.

With time, the number of prayer faithful increased daily and it became necessary for him to search for a much bigger place to accommodate them. He then moved the prayer fellowship to South Junction. It was at this new place that the prayer fellowship took on the name "Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre". The name was informed by the rampant miraculous occurrences during prayer meetings. According to Adarkwa Yiadom, while at South Junction, the church suffered many setbacks. One of the most disturbing setbacks was when the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) gave the church a week's ultimatum to vacate from where they had their fellowship. The evacuation was motivated by a series of criticisms and allegations leveled against them by inhabitants in the neighbourhood who held that their peace was often disturbed by the frequent loud noise anytime they had a church service. They moved from South Junction to Ahenema Kokoben, a suburb of Kumasi in the Atiwma Kwanwoma District of Ashanti Region, where Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom had long ago secured a small piece of land and built a house for himself. He restructured the place and pitched tents for church service in his house. After 6 months, he bought a piece of land and put up a temporary structure to host church service.

The church was gradually becoming established and faring well at Ahenema Kokoben. However, one day, while in his bedroom, according to Yiadom the Lord woke him up and he saw a bottle of anointing oil in the midst of a flaming fire on the wall. The Lord told him that by using the anointing oil, he would bring deliverance to His people. The Lord, according to Yiadom, also revealed to him that anyone who comes to the church and assisted the work of God financially should be given anointing oil with directives on its use. Prophet Adarkwa Yiadom intimated that ever since he started using anointing oil in his ministry, the Lord is always faithful and has brought healing and deliverance to people in diverse ways. This directive from God, according to Yiadom served as the basis for the use of anointing oil in his church.

³³ Tetteh, *Analysing Perspectives on Evil*, 53.

³⁴ Information on the history of the church were gathered via personal interviews with Prophet Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom and Rev. Ransford Tawiah Oduro on June 27 and September 25, 2018. The history as presented here is couched from the Author's unpublished PhD thesis (Christian Ethical Perspectives on Commercialisation of Religion in Neo-Prophetic Christianity in Ghana, 2019) submitted to the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

He also noted that one day, while he was engaged in intense prayers, God told him to visit the church premises. On arriving at the church premises, God revealed to him two separate places behind the church auditorium where fire was emanating out from the ground. God instructed him to drill two separate wells from the two spots. The revelation was that the well water contains supernatural power that would bring healing and deliverance to persons who utilise it. The revelation also indicated that anytime the Prophet makes an announcement for the fetching of the water for distribution, there would be a heavy downpour of rain. Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom added that this sign always occurs prior to fetching and distributing the water to people. People who have used the water share miraculous testimonies. He indicated that the water (*aburamu nsuo*) is not sold to anyone.

Vision and Mission, Core Religious Beliefs and Practices

The main vision of the church is to teach both believers and non-believers the word of God and to prepare them for Heaven. Its mission is to extend the Gospel of Jesus Christ to ‘perished souls’, break family curses, liberate the demon-possessed, and win souls into God’s Kingdom.

The church holds the belief in the Holy Trinity (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) which is a central dogma in Christianity. Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre believes that power emanates from God through his son Jesus Christ. Besides, the Holy Spirit is believed to operate as the force that actualises God’s power and presence in the Church for miracles to occur. The church also believes that Jesus is both God and the only begotten son of God who existed in human form, died, and resurrected for the world.

There is also the staunch belief in the sanctity and indwelling power and presence of God in anointing oil *dadie bi twa dadie* (literally meaning, iron cuts iron), *ɔpata ko agye ko abɔwobo* (literally meaning, separator of fight and collector of fights), *ɔseadeeyɔ* oil (literally meaning, fulfiller of what he (God) has promised) and well water (*aburamu nsuo*). The church believes that God reaches out to people through the administering of the anointing oil and well water. The holiness of life of the believer is another core belief of the church. It is believed that living a holy life is the surest way to inherit God’s Kingdom. Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre believes that Heaven and Hell exist. In that regard, efforts are made to teach people the word of God and to save ‘perished souls’ and prepare them for the Kingdom of God. The church holds the staunch belief in God’s authority and the power vested in the Prophet. They believe that the Prophet is the direct spokesperson who disseminates God’s will and instructions to congregants. In that sense, the Prophet must be respected, cherished, and be given all the necessary audience.

The core religious practices of the church include administering anointing oil and well water to people for the purposes of healing, protection, and realisation of successes in one’s endeavours. Exorcising demon-possessed persons is another core religious practice of the church. It is done to set such persons free from the shackles of demons. The church also organises free guidance and counselling sessions. This session is organised to inform the Prophet and his associate pastors about people’s problems so that they can offer spiritual remedies.

There is a healing service to offer healing to the sick and the depressed. The church also trains interested and committed young males who desire to become pastors and prayer warriors. The young males are trained to assist in church liturgy and to attend to the congregants’ needs during church service.

Church Auxiliaries/Groups

Nine auxiliaries/groups exist in the church. They are Men’s Fellowship, Women’s Fellowship, Boys Brigade, Joyful Ladies, Precious Sisters, Church Choir, Individual Soloists, Prayer Warriors, and Church Ushers.

The Men’s Fellowship comprises all married and unmarried men, and old men in the church. The Women’s Fellowship is also made up of all married women in the church. The Boys Brigade is mostly made up of boys and young men between the ages of 10 and 20 years. Joyful Ladies are young females between the ages of 20 and 30 years. Precious Sisters are also young females between the ages of 20 and 30 years who have been selected by the Prophet to undergo rigorous Bible training.

The church choir is made up of adult men and women who sing every Sunday during church services. Individual soloists are mostly females who sing to prepare the grounds for the commencement of church

service. The prayer warriors are committed young males the Prophet has selected, trained, and tasked to pray for the spiritual growth of the church. Moreover, they assist the Prophet and the associate pastors during exorcism service. Church ushers are mostly women who are responsible for ensuring proper sitting arrangements and order of movement in the church during offertory time and counselling services.

Leadership Structure of the Church

The leadership structure of Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre has Prophet Ebenezer Opambour Adarkwa Yiadom as the Head of the church, assisted by senior and junior pastors, church elders, church committee, marriage committee, church counsellors, and other auxiliaries/groups.

Weekday Church Activities³⁵

Sunday Church Service

Sunday Church Service at Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre is an 'Anointing Service.' It commences at exactly 9:00 am with a ten-minute prayer, followed by an hour and fifteen-minute bible study session. Usually, one of the associate pastors of Prophet Adarkwa Yiadom leads the Bible studies session. It is important to note that while the Bible study is in session, the main church doors are closed to late congregants so that they do not come in to interrupt the session.

When the Bible studies session ends, an associate pastor leads the entire congregation in a ten-minute prayer. The prayer is followed by an hour of song ministration from six separate individual soloists. It is believed that the song ministration prepares the grounds for the main church service to commence. It also keeps the congregants prepared while they await the Prophet's arrival. Upon his arrival at 11:45 am, the song ministration ceases, and all the associate pastors run quickly to meet and welcome the Prophet into the church. At that same time, the entire congregation rise on their feet and chant the Prophet's attributes (Prophet 1, Asante Moses, Nation's Prophet, Chairman 1) until he finally takes his seat.

An offertory is taken, after which the choir sings and then the Prophet is welcomed to the pulpit to deliver a sermon. Usually, the Prophet starts the main church service at 12:00 noon. He does not often preach. He sometimes reads a few passages from the Bible and mainly performs prophetic ministration and closes at 2:00 pm. It is important to note here that in some cases he offers the opportunity to some of his associate pastors to deliver a sermon after which he takes over to perform prophetic ministration. This can last for about 45 minutes. When the church service is over, one of the associate pastors reminds the congregants to tune in to New Mercury FM or watch the Prophet 1 television channel to listen to God's word from the Prophet.

Tuesday Counselling Service

'Counselling Services' are scheduled for every Tuesday. It is a day when Prophet Adarkwa Yiadom listens to the personal problems of individual congregants and non-congregants as well. Customarily, the counselling session is open to people from different religious affiliations and churches. Usually, the service commences at 8:30 am with an opening prayer led by one of the associate pastors. The prayer is followed by song ministrations by individual soloists who sing to prepare the grounds while they await the Prophet's arrival. At 11:00 am, the Prophet is hailed to the pulpit. He performs an hour of prophetic ministration. Following this, he calls out to the congregants to support the work of God with their money. This exercise can last for about 45 minutes. Testimonies are invited from congregants who have used the *dadie bi twa dadie* (iron cuts iron) and *ɔpata ko agye ko abɔwobo* (separator of fight and collector of fights) anointing oil.

After the testimonies, the Prophet sits in his chair and rest for about 30 minutes before he commences the counselling session which starts at 2:00 pm and ends at 6:00 pm. It is important to note that the counselling session time is not fixed. It ends when the Prophet indicates that he is exhausted. Alternatively, the session ends depending on the number of people present. At this time, the church ushers and associate pastors queue the congregants for them to go and meet the Prophet. It is important to note here that the Prophet uses three different approaches to listen to everyone's plight. The first approach is that he sits in his chair while the people walk to him one after the other. The second is that he stands in the open area close to the pulpit to

³⁵ Field observation from January to December, 2018.

listen to each person's problems. The third is that he listens to about 250 or more congregants after which he instructs his associate pastors to disburse anointing oil he calls – *breaking oil* to the congregants. He recesses for 30 minutes after which he continues to listen to the rest of the congregants. After each congregant has received the oil, the Prophet prays, informs them to return the oil the subsequent day – Wednesday so that he directs them on how to use it for one to receive miraculous healing or breakthrough.

One striking event that takes place during the counselling session is the arbitration of family disputes. Usually, families who have issues and are unable to resolve them come to the counselling session to meet the Prophet for arbitration. Married couples with marital problems also come to resolve their problems. Students and orphans also come to see the Prophet for school fees and money for their upkeep. After he has attended to everyone, all the associate pastors run to kneel before him to receive prayers and this closes the counselling session.

Wednesday Church Service

Wednesday Church Service is designated as Great Worship, *osom kesié*. The service begins at either 8:30 am or 9:00 am. This is dependent on the Prophet skipping or not skipping his usual morning preaching at his radio station. When the service commences with the Prophet present at 9:00 am, he sings and performs prophetic ministration until 9:30 am. After the ministration, one of his associate pastors invites the soloists to sing. However, in his absence, an associate pastor leads the entire congregation in a moment of worship and prayer for about 25 minutes. The worship and prayer session is followed by song ministration from individual soloists who sing for about 5 minutes in anticipation of Prophet Adarkwa's arrival.

On the prophet's arrival, the song ministration stops. All the associate pastors run to meet and welcome him into the church. At that same time, the entire congregation rise on their feet to welcome the Prophet as an indication of respect for him. After he has taken his seat, the song ministration continues for about 10 minutes. Subsequently, in a standing ovation, one of the associate pastors leads the entire congregation to make various chants and with a loud voice directs the congregants to wave their handkerchiefs to invite the Prophet to the pulpit. At the same time, he chants the Prophet's name and his usual attributes for about 5 minutes while the Prophet walks to mount the stage. This happens usually at noon when he mounts the stage to the pulpit to deliver a sermon. He sings for about twenty minutes and runs commentaries on a few bible verses with the help of one of his associate pastors (Rev. Maxwell Acquah, a.k.a Osofo Chief). This is followed by a 40-minute prophetic ministration. During this time, he prays for demon-possessed people, the sick, and those who are yet to face certain mishaps. He ends the prophetic ministration by leading the entire congregation in a five-minute prayer. Mostly, the prayer is focused on offsetting the works of enemies, and invoking God's blessings. After the prayer, he commences the sale of 'separator of fight and collector of fights' and 'iron cuts iron' religious items. The approach he uses to sell these religious products is not different from that of the one during Sunday service. After the sale of the religious items, he prays for the congregants.

The prophet ends the church service after he has anointed the entire congregants with *dadie bi twa dadie* anointing oil. At this point, the congregants queue for the Prophet to drop the oil in their palms. Congregants are encouraged to either lick or smear the oil on their bodies. This is done for God's impartation on their lives. The belief is that God blesses and revokes the enemy's attacks through the anointing oil. When the anointing service is over, Prophet Adarkwa Yiadom drinks some of the anointing oil. He closes the service with a benediction and encourages the congregants to have faith in God.

Friday Church Service

Fridays nights are dedicated to prayers. It is called "all-night" or "war night" – a night characterised by prayers meant to dispel the activities of witches and wizards who are perceived as enemies who impede their successes. Prior to the start of the main service, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm, one of the associate pastors turns on a television set mounted in the church for congregants to watch a replay of prophetic ministration, and other miraculous scenes from previous church services. This is done to encourage the congregants to have faith in God and his prophet.

At 8:00 pm, the television is turned off for the main service to commence. At this point, one of the associate pastors opens the service with a prayer accompanied by worship and adoration songs. After this, he leads the congregants in 2-hour non-stop prayers until 10:00 pm. The prayers seek to deal with one's enemies, invoking God's blessings and protection, successful businesses, good marriages, and the growth and welfare of the church. The 2-hour prayer is followed by an hour of exhortation by another associate pastor until 11:00 pm. This pastor encourages the congregants and assures them that Jesus Christ has defeated the enemy who has hijacked their businesses, marriage, progress, finances, and health.

A third associate pastor takes over and engages the entire congregants in an hour of non-stop prayer until midnight. This is followed by an offertory and a 45-minute song ministration from individual soloists who sing to prepare the congregants for the service. The Prophet mostly arrives at 12:30 am. On the prophet's arrival at the church premises, the song ministration stops and all the associate pastors run to meet and welcome the Prophet into the church. The song ministration continues for about 25-minutes. At 1:00 am, the Prophet is welcomed to the pulpit, where he sings and runs commentaries on a few scriptures for about 10-minutes and then commences his prophetic ministration.

Usually, with the support of his associate pastors, prayers are offered for the sick and those mishaps are yet to befall. Unlike on other regular weekday services, on Friday, the Prophet and his associate pastors exorcise people possessed with witchcraft. Following this, he personally leads the entire congregation in a time of fierce prayer he calls 'prophetic prayers.' This prayer aims at invoking God's blessings, and his protection against witches and wizards. After the prophetic prayers, he invites congregants to give offertories which range from GH ₵5.00 to GH ₵50.00. He calls this offertory, prophetic offertory, *nkɔmhyɛ afɔdeɛ*. He normally prophesies to people who present the money to him. The prophetic offertory is followed by testimonies from congregants who have used the separator of fight and collector of fights items³⁶ and iron cuts iron anointing oil. After the testimonies, Prophet Adarkwa Yiadom sells religious products, in the same manner he uses during the Sunday and Wednesday church services. After the sale of the items, he anoints the entire congregation. The Friday church service closes at 5:00 am on Saturday. This is followed by the Sunday service and the cycle continues week after week.

SUMMARY

The Ebenezer Miracle Worship Center has been in existence for over three decades. Its vision and practice have all the traits of Neo-Prophetic Christianity which emphasize theological concepts/teachings/beliefs and practices such as *ɔtamfo*, (enemy), *akwankyerɛ* (spiritual counselling/guidance/direction), *ngosra* (anointing), *yiedie* (success, well-being or prosperity), and exorcism and healing. This ministry has many adherents with various testimonies to prove the power of God.

RECOMMENDATION

From the narrative on Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre, it is recommended that further studies on Neo-prophetic churches in Ghana investigate how the use of religious items by congregants affects their belief in and reliance on Jesus Christ instead of their prophets. It is also recommended that further studies engage in a comparative study on the religious beliefs and practices in African traditional religion and Neo-prophetic Christianity since it appears some similarities exist in these two religious traditions. Finally, it is recommended that further studies catalogue all the types of religious items prophets in Neo-prophetic churches sell, their uses, the sicknesses they cure and the theology behind their preparation.

³⁶ The religious item called *ɔpata ko agye ko abɔwobo*, literary meaning separator of fight and collector of fights comprises anointing oil and eggs. A person who pays GH ₵500 receives two bottles of anointing oil and two eggs, GH ₵1,000 attracts four bottles of anointing oil and four eggs, and GH ₵2,000 attracts eight bottles of anointing oil and eight eggs. The Prophet gives these religious items to a person accompanied by spiritual direction/counselling, *akwankyerɛ*. In a situation where a person's predicament is described as serious, it requires of the Prophet to perform an aspect of the *akwankyerɛ* with the eggs, and thus, gives the person only the anointing oil to go home and execute his/her part of the *akwankyerɛ*. However, if a person's problem is perceived by the Prophet as relatively not very serious, the prophet gives the entire package (anointing oil and eggs) to the person and then instructs the person on how to execute the *akwankyerɛ* at home.

CONCLUSION

This article has looked at the phenomenon of Neo-prophetism, thus linking it to Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre. The main objective of this article was premised on the fact that Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre as a Neo-Prophetic church has gained much popularity, and has helped many consumers of religion to address their socio-religio-psychological plights in Ghana; yet little in scholarship is known about its history and activities in Ghana's religious field. It is in view of this backdrop this article sought to present a narrative on the church's history, beliefs and activities in order to contribute to the scanty existing literature on the history of some prominent Neo-prophetic African Pentecostal Christian churches in Ghana.

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