

**From *Sebewie* to *Sebetutu*:
A Theological and Missiological
Analysis of the Life and Ministry of
Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong**



Isaac Boaheng (PhD)

Edited by Rev. Dr. Kwaku Boamah

Foreword by Rev. Dr. Casely B. Essamuah

Introduction by Rt. Rev. Daniel Kwasi Tannor

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Analysis of the Life and Ministry of
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 Noyam

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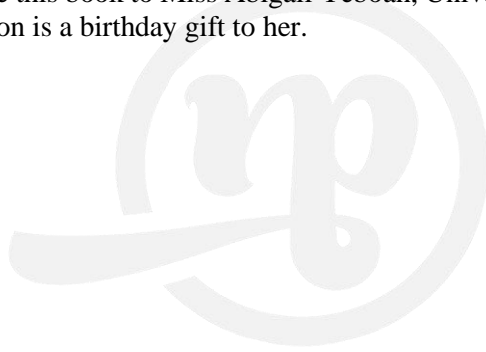
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my wife, Gloria Adu-Agyeiwaa and children, Christian Adom-Boaheng, Benedict Adu-Boaheng, Julia Ampomah-Boaheng, Kalix Ohene-Boaheng and Myjiloy Twenewaa-Boaheng.

I also dedicate this work to the members of Prophet Sampson Oppong Memorial Methodist Church, Akontanim.

I also dedicate this book to Miss Abigail Yeboah, University of Ghana. The publication is a birthday gift to her.



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I owe The Rt. Rev. Daniel Kwasi Tannor (Bishop of Sunyani Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), The Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel K. Asare-Kusi (Bishop of the Koforidua Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), The Rt. Rev. Fred Ansu (Immediate Past bishop of the Wenchi Diocese) and The Rt. Rev. Samuel Mensah (Bishop of the Fosu Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana) much gratitude. Each of them offered very useful information that shaped the book. I once walked to my Bishop's office and told him my intention to conduct a research into the Prophet's life and he wholeheartedly supported the idea. Bishop Tannor had earlier supported a church-theme-song project which I had embarked on in the previous year and he was now more than ready to support this new project too. In spite of his tight schedule, he read the manuscript and wrote an introduction to the book. Papa, I have learnt a lot from your humility. Bishop Asare-Kusi patiently waited for me at his Abesim residence until I finally got there deep in the night to interview him. Immediate Past Bishop Ansu willingly granted an interview during the Sunyani diocesan synod at Wamfie. Bishop Mensah had no idea about the project when he arrived at the Wamfie synod to preside over the Sunyani diocesan Lay Chairperson election.

It was in his short address that I learnt that he was once a superintendent minister of the Wamfie circuit. I said to myself, “I must interview this Bishop.” I approached him and he was more than ready to grant an interview. In short, my interactions with these great men of God have taught me much about the right use of power. Each of them has really impacted my ministerial career. “My Fathers”, may God richly bless you all. Mr. Michael Agyeman (Lay Chairperson of the Sunyani Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), Dr. Jackson Adiyiah Nyantakyi (Past Lay Chairperson of the Sunyani Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), Very Rev. Robert Oppong (supernumerary residing at Wamfie) and Very Rev. Richard Ampofo (Supt. Minister of Wamafo circuit) are also commended for the role they played at different stages of this project.

I owe a profound gratitude to my parents, Mr. Noah Nti (posthumously) and Mad. Mary Ampomah, for their care, love and support. I pray that my mother will enjoy the fruit of her labor. May God richly bless my siblings, Yaw Boahen, Kofi Boachie, Samuel Boahen, Hayford Ampaabeng-Kyeremeh, Racheal Oforiwaa, Collins Frimpong, and Solomon Amoh for their encouragement and support. My in-laws need a special mention at this point for their unfailing love and support. Mr. Adu Ofori and Mad. Mary Twenewaa, may you live longer than you expect. My brothers-in-law, including Isaac Adu-Ofori, George Adu Prempeh, Seth Adu-Ofori and Samuel Adu Gyamfi have supported me in diverse ways and need to be acknowledged in a special way. Mr. Anthony Asiedu and his family (Berekum) contributed immensely to my ministerial formation and must be appreciated for their benevolence. Brothers Francis Acquah, Shadrack Adom Twum and Senya Peter contributed in diverse ways and need to be appreciated. Sis. Ama Serwaa also needs to be acknowledged for her encouragement throughout the research process.

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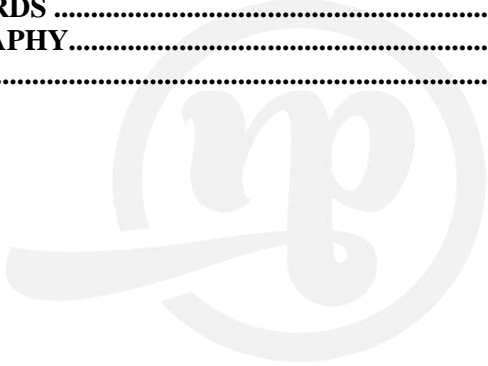
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FOREWORD

Cartographers of the global Christian landscape have confirmed that Africa has the most followers of Jesus Christ as of the year 2018. In fact, if present trends continue, by the year 2050, Africa will be home to the largest number of Christ-followers and the numbers in the African continent alone will be more than the next two continents combined.

Why the explosive growth of Christianity on the African continent—a continent that has the lowest indices of all aspects of human development? What accounts for the unstoppable desire of Africans to access the Divine as revealed through Jesus Christ? In what ways has God been tilling the soil for such dynamic growth?

As people of faith, naturally, we attribute “every good gift” to God and His providence. As scholars, we do well to point to ways that God has been at work before this stupendous development. One such is the life, and ministry of Sampson Kwame Oppong. The narrative revealed here directs all the glory to the Source – the Great God, who as we are told by the Apostle Paul, continuously “chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise . . . the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27 NIV).

Rev. Dr. Boaheng’s treatment of the life, ministry, and legacy of Prophet Sampson Oppong fills a glaring lacuna in the literature on the antecedents of Christian independency in Africa. Through his lucid writing, we are granted access to a comprehensive overview of the life and times of Prophet Sampson Oppong. Sofo (Rev.) Boaheng, himself a trailblazing leading scholar of African Christianity is also a true son of Bonoland, the land of Prophet Sampson Oppong. His succinct account brings to bear in this work, not only the meticulous analysis of the subject matter but his own heart as a pastor who seeks the full inculturation and indigenization of Christianity in the African religious and cultural landscape. In addition to citing other secondary sources, and sometimes reconciling divergent accounts, he had rare access to living relatives of the revered Prophet and received from them their own version of the Prophet’s life and legacy undoubtedly passed on from

one generation to another. It is truly remarkable to know that miraculous accounts of the Prophet are part of the Bono folklore.

Writ large over it all is the affirmation that when a person, no matter their background, takes God seriously and yields everything to the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no limit to how God can use them to further His kingdom and to bring liberation to His people. Whenever Christian mission takes seriously the worldview of the recipient culture, doors are wide open for conversion, discipleship, and church-planting. It can be argued that other than the Holy Spirit's enabling power, Oppong's ministry was successful because it took seriously the worldview of those to whom he ministered.

Precisely because of the subject matter, and the research that undergirds the work, and the avoidance of unnecessary academic overlays in Sofo Boaheng's narrative here, it is my prayer that this work will find as wide an audience as it deserves. All who are interested in the growth of Christianity in Africa, and all ecclesiastical futurists will do well to read this magnificent work to learn what God can do through human hearts fully yielded to Him.

The Reverend Dr. Casely Baiden Essamuah
Secretary, Global Christian Forum
Author, *Genuinely Ghanaian: A History of the Methodist Church
Ghana, 1961-2000*.
March 2022.

PREFACE

The second and third decades of the twentieth century saw the sudden rise of a crop of African prophets/evangelists with extraordinary charisma and compelling messages. These charismatic figures, who became the forerunners of the African Pentecostal movement, led masses to Christ without intending to establish churches of their own. They include Prophets William Wade Harris (Liberia), Garrick Sokari Daketima Braide (Nigeria), Walter Matiffa (Lesotho), and Sampson Kwame Oppong (Ghana), among others. Of interest to the writer is Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong whose life, ministry and legacy have been explored in this book for contemporary relevance.

Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong was an early twentieth-century prophet and revivalist whose ministry began in 1917 but gained prominence from 1920 onward. Before Prophet Oppong came on the scene, Prophet William Wade Harris itinerated on foot from Liberia to Ivory Coast and Gold Coast. He preached the gospel, performed miracles, and created an unprecedented numerical church growth for the Historic Mainline Churches. He also trained other prophets like him. Prophet Wade Harris was a charismatic figure stringently opposed to traditional religious practices and nominalism. Prophet Oppong was one of the pioneering Gold Coast (now Ghana) Christian prophets to take over from Harris. His missionary zeal, unconventional and fiery ministry helped entrench Methodism in the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Regions of Ghana, through a large-scale spiritual awakening and revival.

I first heard about Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong from my late father (Mr. Noah Nti) who told us (my siblings and I) that an “illiterate” from Dormaa-Akontanim had a flat stone from which he could read the entire Bible. My father told stories about the Prophet to make the point that God can use anyone no matter the person’s background. I learnt more about this Prophet at the Trinity Theological Seminary (Accra-Ghana) during lectures in Church History and

Pentecostalism. His contribution to Ghanaian Methodism and his role as one of the key forerunners of Ghanaian Pentecostalism got me astounded. These two experiences motivated me to do a documentary on the life and ministry of the Prophet. In the process of doing the documentary, I was moved to write a book and the result of this move is this publication.

Publications about Prophet Oppong are not lacking. Many church historians and scholars in the field of Pentecostalism and other fields of study have written a lot about Prophet Oppong. However, almost all publications on the ministry of the Prophet virtually ignore his ministry and impact in Bonoland, even his own hometown, Akontanim. This book addresses this literature gap by bringing to the fore the missionary endeavors of Prophet Oppong in Bonoland, without neglecting his ministry in other parts of the country.

Data collection was based on primary and secondary sources. Face-to-face interviews were conducted. One of the key interviewees was Nana Siaw Kyeremeh, the Gyaasehene of Akontanim who is a nephew of Prophet Oppong. According to Nana Kyeremeh, he was a young boy at the time that researchers like Hans W. Debrunner and others came to Prophet Oppong at his Akontanim residence to document Prophet Oppong's history. Nana Kyeremeh used to sit beside old Prophet Oppong to listen to his story and to facilitate the interview. He documented what Oppong told the researchers. His unpublished document titled "The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong" was one of the primary documents used for this book.

Other interviewees include The Rt. Rev. Daniel Kwasi Tannor (Bishop of the Sunyani Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), The Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel K. Asare-Kusi (Bishop of the Koforidua Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), The Rt. Rev. Fred Ansu (Immediate Past bishop of the Wenchi Diocese) and The Rt. Rev. Samuel Mensah (Bishop of the Fosu Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), Nana Yaa Korkor Sakyiwaa III (Queenmother of Ankobea Division of Dormaa Traditional Area, and Amasuhemaa), Nana Afia Kraa (Akontanim Gyaasehemaa), Very Rev. Robert Oppong (supernumerary residing at Wamfie), Dr. Jackson Adiyiah Nyantakyi (Past Lay Chairperson of the Sunyani Diocese of the Methodist Church

Ghana), and Mr. Michael Agyeman (Lay Chairperson of the Sunyani Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana), among others. Information obtained through interviews was analyzed through personal reflections and interactions with the existing scholarly literature on the ministry of the Prophet. My work drew mainly from the works of Hans W. Debrunner, G. N. Haliburton, Arthur Eustace Southon, Benjamin Appiah, and Paul Essiam, among others.

The work is organized into six chapters in attaining the objectives. There is an introduction dealing with a brief description of the subject matter of the book. Chapter one places the subject in the right historical and religious contexts by dealing with the planting and development of Christianity in the Gold Coast (Ghana) before Prophet Oppong's ministry. Attention is given to three different epochs of missionary activities in Ghana as well as the rise of Ghanaian Christian prophetism in the early part of the twentieth century. The chapter also explores the 18th century Akontanin society in which Prophet Oppong was born and raised in terms of the political, social, religious and economic contexts. It also accounts for Oppong's ancestry and deals with the birth, early childhood and developmental stages of the Prophet. In chapter two, Prophet Oppong's journey from *Sebewie* to *Sebetutu*—that is, Prophet Oppong's journey from being a professional traditional priest and magician to becoming a Christian prophet and evangelist—is brought into focus.

Chapters three and four deal with Oppong's ministry in the Ashanti and Bono/Bono East regions respectively. Chapter five focuses on the legacy of Prophet Oppong from a Wesleyan perspective. His contribution to the renewal of the church, socio-economic development, lyrics (*abibinnwom*), mother-tongue theology, church growth and church planting, among others, are assessed. Chapter six explores how the name "Sampson" might have impacted the life of Kwame Oppong. The chapter concludes that though these two figures (the biblical Sampson and Prophet Sampson Oppong) ministered in different contexts (time, geography, culture), their ministries shared some remarkable similarities. Their ministries were characterized by the manifestation of God's power, the destruction of "enemies", rise to the peak of ministry and downfall. From the African socio-cultural

perspective, one may argue that the Prophet Oppong's ministry was influenced by the biblical Sampson whose name the Prophet bore. Such a conclusion is one of the reasons why Africans reflect carefully before choosing a name for their children. Throughout the book, the reader is made to reflect on what the Prophet's life and ministry reveal. A careful reader will draw many theological and missiological lessons from the book.

The book is written in simple language to make it accessible to ordinary readers. At the same time, it is written in such a way as to meet the academic needs of those in the academy. If after reading this book one is motivated to serve Christ and undertake missionary endeavors more effectively, my purpose for writing the book would have been accomplished.

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Department of Theology; Christian Service University College, Ghana
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September 2022
Sunyani, Ghana*

INTRODUCTION

Many a man has failed to realize his lifelong ambitions on account of his physical, physiological and mental inadequacies. A lot more men in the quest for success have stumbled and accomplished nothing significant as a result of their ailing backgrounds. Lacking the wits and inspiration to fulfill their ambitions, some seek the assistance of demonic forces to turn their fortunes around; yet, to no avail. For such individuals and in particular, people who aspire to have a fruitful evangelistic and prophetic ministry, Rev. Dr. Boaheng's incisive book on Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong's rise from ashes to fame as one of Africa's foremost indigenous prophets is highly recommended for their reading.

The wondrous exploits of Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong, a man of slavery descent, born in a midget house in hinterland Akontanin (Dormaa kingdom) in the Bono Region of Ghana, lead readers to the knowledge that Christ is not merely the answer to our most intractable problems and afflictions, but he also provides us the zeal to do the impossibly impossible. Prophet Oppong was a slave boy who began his adolescent life as a traditional priest and a magician, destroying many lives through magical activities. God called the renowned traditionalist and serial prisoner to repentance through many dramatic experiences but he resisted until he was finally arrested by the Holy Spirit through a-deep-forest event. After his conversion, Prophet Oppong preached against the practices of fetish priests and destroyed charms and amulets. His ministry was characterized by miracles including healings and exorcisms through the power of the Holy Spirit. He tapped the pneumatic resources to deal with the spiritual needs of his audience. He encouraged his audience to look up to Christ and break away from their past.

Though without formal education, he was endowed with a heavenly gift of reading fluently the verses of the Holy Bible on a miraculous stone he held in his hand. His powerful sermons and healing ministrations culminated in the conversion of thousands of heathens. As a sequel, the Methodist church in Ashanti and the then Bono-Ahafo

Regions grew in leaps and bounds. Possessing enormous venom to destroy amulets, talismans and all kinds of charms, he was nicknamed *Sebetutu*. Prophet Oppong’s journey “From *Sebewie* to *Sebetutu*”¹ demonstrates God’s ability to choose, prepare and use anyone for his purpose no matter the person’s background. The word “*Sebewie*” means “the one who ends life by magical powers” and “*Sebetutu*” means “the one who uproots and destroys amulets and charms.” Prophet Oppong acquired the two accolades owing to his two opposing professions—first as a traditional magician who used magic to “destroy” life and then as a Christian prophet and evangelist who used divine power to destroy charms and amulets.

The rapid transformation of an ardent traditional believer and “illiterate” serial prisoner into a vibrant and accomplished Prophet of repute provides evidence of God’s transformational power to inspire succeeding generations. The book is written in a way that makes it accessible to the ordinary reader. It is for this reason that I do not hesitate to introduce this book to the reading public and recommend the inspiring story of *Sebetutu* to everyone who nurtures a desire to uncover the hidden mysteries of Christ. I do so with the hope that the Prophet’s indomitable personality, passion and selfless attitudes will impact positively on you as you embark on a journey to read this soul-elevating life account of one of Africa’s Legendary Prophets.

The Rt. Rev. Daniel Kwasi Tannor
Bishop, Sunyani Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana
April, 2022

¹ The expression “From *Sebewie* to *Sebetutu*” was adapted from Rev. Dr. Casely B. Essamuah’s book *Genuinely Ghanaian: A History of the Methodist Church, Ghana (1961-2000)* (Asmara: African World Press, Inc., 2010).

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO PROPHET SAMPSON KWAME OPPONG'S MINISTRY

This book focuses on the life, ministry and legacy of Ghana's foremost native Christian prophet, Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong (also Sampson Opon or Oppon). This chapter deals briefly with the planting and development of Christianity in the Gold Coast before Prophet Oppong's ministry. It is necessary to place the study in the right historical and religious contexts so that the reader will know the nature of Christianity in Ghana prior to Prophet Oppong's life. Attention is given to three different epochs of missionary activities in Ghana as well as the rise of Ghanaian Christian prophetism in the early part of the twentieth century. The chapter also examines the religious, political and socio-economic contexts of Akontanim. Lamin Sanneh defines these epochs as the period of incubation, exploration and missionary groups.²

A Brief Account of Missionary Christianity in the Gold Coast Missionary Activities before the Eighteenth Century (Phase 1)

Sanneh describes this stage as the phase of incubation for the West-African church. Church historians trace the introduction of Christianity to the West Coast of Africa to 1482. On 19th January, six hundred (600) Portuguese merchants and explorers arrived at Elmina in the Gold Coast (Ghana) under the leadership of Don Diego d'Azambuja for economic and missionary purposes, among others.³ The merchants suspended the banner of Portugal on branches of a tree, erected an altar

² Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 20-22.

³ Isaac Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa: Implications for Rethinking the Great Commission," Emmanuel Asante and D.N.A Kpobi (eds.) *Rethinking the Great Commission: Emerging African Perspectives* (Accra: Type Company Limited, 2018), 208-209.

and had their first Mass under the tree.⁴ After this, their leader visited the chief of Elmina Nana Kwamena Ansah⁵ to introduce his group and their purpose to him. D'Azambuja promised the chief military alliance and trade relations with Portugal upon his conversion.⁶ The chief got converted and gave a parcel of land to the explorers/missionaries on which St. George Fort with a chapel was built.⁷ From here, Christianity spread to other parts of the country and other missionaries also came into the country.

Missionaries from the Dutch Reformed Church came to the Gold Coast in 1637 after the Danes had defeated the Portuguese and taken over their territories.⁸ The Danes opposed the work of the Catholic mission during these times since they were largely protestants. Later, the British took over from the Dutch.⁹ The English, unlike the Danes, allowed all missions to carry on their activities and so the Catholics came back to reintroduce their faith into the country. Unfortunately, the death of the missionaries ended missionary work in Gold Coast such that by the beginning of the 18th century Christianity was virtually absent in the Gold Coast.¹⁰

Missionary Activities in the Eighteenth Century (Phase 2)

More fruitful missionary attempts to reintroduce Christianity began in the 1730s with various missionary societies sending their missionaries into the country.¹¹ This is the period of chaplaincy and Africanization where owing to the rapid death of the European missionaries, some African were trained in Europe and sent as chaplains or agents of their denominations. This step became necessary because it was found that Africans were able to resist the malaria parasite which killed the

⁴ David N. A. Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana: The Ecumenical Heritage* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2008), 68.

⁵ The name was corrupted as Caramansa.

⁶ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 208.

⁷ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 209.

⁸ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 68.

⁹ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 68.

¹⁰ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 68.

¹¹ Richard Foli, *Ghana Methodism Today* (Accra: Trust Publishers, 2008), 14.

Europeans rapidly. The chaplains were primarily tasked to give attention to the spiritual needs of the European merchants in the Gold Coast, though they also attended to the evangelization of the indigenes. The Moravian United Brethren sent Christian Jacob Protten to the Gold Coast in 1737 after he completed his theological education in Denmark.¹² Protten had a Danish father and a Ghanaian mother. In 1742, the Moravians sent an ex-slave, Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, to Elmina.¹³ David N. A. Kpobi considers Capitein as the first minister to have been sent to work among Africans in the Gold Coast because he (unlike his predecessors) was specially ordained to convert Africans. Unfortunately, Capitein faced a lot of challenges and died five years later.¹⁴

The Anglican Church formed two missionary groups, namely; the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in 1699 and 1701 respectively for the spiritual wellbeing of European merchants living abroad.¹⁵ In 1751, the SPG sent Rev. Thomas Thomson as the first Anglican missionary to the Gold Coast. He worked at Cape Coast for five years without much success. Rev. Thomson sent three Ghanaian boys to Europe to receive a formal education, but only one, Philip Quaque, survived and returned home in 1766 after his ordination as an Anglican priest.¹⁶ Rev. Quaque, who was also a schoolmaster, worked for fifty (50) years without much success, though he maintained the Cape Coast School and became the first schoolmaster to introduce school uniforms for school pupils.

Missionary Activities in the Nineteenth Century (Phase 3)

This is the period in which missionary societies trooped into the country to win souls and build their denominational brand. The Basel Evangelical Mission Society (which was founded in 1815 in

¹² Foli, *Ghana Methodism Today*, 14.

¹³ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 72.

¹⁴ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 72.

¹⁵ Foli, *Ghana Methodism Today*, 17.

¹⁶ Foli, *Ghana Methodism Today*, 18.

Switzerland) sent four missionaries namely, K. F. Salbach, J. G. Schmidt, G. Holzwarth and J. P. Henke to the Gold Coast. They arrived in Christianborg (in Accra) on December 18th, 1828.¹⁷ They opened a school at Osu, a nearby community. Sadly, all four missionaries died less than three years after their arrival without any converts to show for their missionary efforts. Three more missionaries, namely Reverends Peter Peterson Jager and Andreas Riis (both Danes), and Christian Frederich Heinz (from Saxony) arrived in Accra in 1833 to continue the missionary work, but only Rev. Riis survived.¹⁸ Rev. Riis later moved to Akuapem because of perceived favorable weather conditions over there. After four years of missionary work, Rev. Riis had no convert due to the indigenous people's perception of Christianity as white people's religion.¹⁹ Consequently, the director of Basel missions tasked Rev. Riis to recruit suitable black missionaries to continue the mission.²⁰ The introduction of the West Indies (Jamaicans) into the Akuapem missionary field in 1843 reversed the indigenous perception about Christianity and led to the conversion of many people.²¹ The Basel mission worked in the country until World War I when they left due to political pressure.

The Wesleyan missions commenced their operations in the Gold Coast in 1835 as a response to the Bible Band's request for Bibles from the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) through Captain Potter.²² The Bible Band was a group of people, led by William De-Graft, who organized themselves to study the Bible. Rev. Joseph Dunwell, the first missionary from WMMS, arrived in the Gold Coast on 1st January, 1835. His coming was the WMMS's response to the Bible Band's request for Bibles. Rev. Dunwell established Methodism strongly but died after only six months. George Wrigley and Peter Harrop were also sent to the Gold Coast; unfortunately, they also died

¹⁷ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 211.

¹⁸ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 75.

¹⁹ Foli, *Ghana Methodism Today*, 19-20

²⁰ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 76.

²¹ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 76.

²² Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 211.

soon after their arrival due to the hostile environment. Later, Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman was sent to the Gold Coast. Being a mulatto, Rev. Freeman could cope with the African weather and ills. He lived longer than all his predecessors, working both in Ghana and other parts of West Africa, including Badagry and Abeokuta.²³

The North German missionaries from Bremen arrived in Cape Coast on 5th May, 1847.²⁴ They had sent four men to Gabon for mission work but failed due to opposition from the French authorities.²⁵ The four of them came first to Cape Coast. Two of them stayed at Cape Coast while the other two went to Gabon for feasibility studies, but one person died in each group. When the surviving missionary from Gabon came back (due to French opposition) to meet his counterpart in Cape Coast, they (James Graff and Lorenz Wolf) decided to move to Christianborg to seek missionary advice from other German missionaries who were living there.²⁶ Having been told about many unreached people on the coast, they decided to concentrate their missions in the Eweland. They started from Peki on 14th November, 1847 and entered mainly German Togoland among the Ewe, converting many of the people there. The Bremen missionaries worked in the Eweland until World War I forced them out of the country in 1919.²⁷

Early missionaries had a strong determination to overcome linguistic, cultural, environmental and ideological barriers to the proclamation of the gospel. In the process, they promoted formal education, agriculture, trade and the development of indigenous languages.²⁸ For example, the educational program of the missionaries helped in the growth of African nationalism.²⁹ Through formal education Ghanaians like J. W. De Graft Johnson, J. P. Brown and John Mensah Sarbah collaborated with local rulers to establish the

²³ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 211.

²⁴ Foli, *Ghana Methodism Today*, 24

²⁵ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 82.

²⁶ Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana*, 82.

²⁷ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 212.

²⁸ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 217ff.

²⁹ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 217-218.

Aborigines Rights Protection Society which fought against British imperialism.³⁰ In the agricultural sector, the Basel mission introduced cash crops such as coffee, mango, cocoa, pineapple, sugar cane and pear into the country as well as improved ways of farming.³¹

The approach that the various missionaries used in their operations had some setbacks, leading to confrontations with local authorities and the formation of African Independent Churches. The next section focuses on how the missionary approach to evangelism resulted in the emergence of Indigenous churches of Pentecostal persuasion.

The Emergence of Christian Prophetism in Ghana

Mission Christianity took an uncompromising approach to African traditional life, banning African converts from dancing, drumming, singing indigenous songs, and partaking in traditional festivals, among others. The Basel mission, for instance, established separated Christian communities (Akan: *salem*; Ewe: *kpodzi*) for their converts with the aim of separating them from the “corrupt” society. This step eventually broke the bond between Ghanaian converts and their families, thereby undermining the African communal worldview. The missionaries imposed Western ways of life on the African Christian converts due to their ethnocentric mindset. The result was the emergence of protest movements against white hegemony and missionary imperialism.³² The reaction to early missionary strategies anticipated Jerry John Rawlings’ assertion, “Christianize me if you may, but don't try to Europeanize me.”³³

Soon, the quest for a church that could merge Christianity and African culture began. Preparations for the indigenization of African

³⁰ Emmanuel Asante, *Culture, Politics & Development: Ethical and Theological Reflections on the Ghanaian Experience* (Accra: Combent Impressions, 2007), 24.

³¹ Asante, *Culture, Politics & Development*, 25.

³² Boaheng, “Early Christian Missions in West Africa,” 221-222.

³³ Jerry John Rawlings was Ghana's first president in the Fourth Republic.

Christianity included the training of African missionaries, language development and mother-tongue translations of scriptures. After some time, Africans felt that the mission churches could not satisfy their spiritual needs.³⁴ People joined the churches with the expectation that their spiritual needs would be addressed. Ghanaians, like other Africans, believe that physical realities have spiritual antecedents which need to be dealt with. The mission churches, however, paid virtually no attention to the African worldview about the spirit realm (particularly concerning witchcraft) and hence failed to provide the needed solution. Again, there was Western dominance over the church in terms of theology, worship style, governance and culture.³⁵ For example, in the Roman Catholic Church, the liturgy was in Latin, making the celebration of the Mass foreign to the indigenes. The worship style of mission churches was formal and rigid with no room for spontaneity. The Methodist Church Ghana, for example inherited from the British Methodist Church liturgical music tradition that comprised contemplative and solemn singing of Western chants, canticles, hymns, and anthems in a way that allowed no spontaneity in body movements (such as dances). The prohibition of the use of local Ghanaian musical instruments like *atumpan*, *frikyiwa*, *dondo* and *fontomfrom* prompted conflicts in some areas.³⁶ This situation prompted the establishment of African Initiated Churches to address the challenges associated with missionary Christianity. To summarize, African Initiated Churches emerged as a reaction “against the over-cerebral and rationalistic nature of Western forms of being Christian. The inability of Western Christianity to integrate Charismatic experiences, particularly healing and prophecy, into worship in Africa,

³⁴ Joseph Koech, *The Role of the Holy Spirit as Liberator: A Study of Luke 4: 14-30 in the African context* (Eldoret: Zapf Chancery, 2008), 65.

³⁵ Koech, *The Role of the Holy Spirit as Liberator*, 66.

³⁶ Joshua Alfred Amuah, Daniel S. Ocran and Emmanuel Obed Acquah, “Liturgical Changes in the Repertory of the Methodist Church Ghana,” *International Journal of Innovative and Applied Research* 2(2), (2014):18- 25, 18.

led in time to the rise of a plethora of independent, indigenous church movements under various local charismatic figures.”³⁷

Spiritual undernourishment and other similar factors prompted the emergence of prophetic activities in Ghana and Africa at large to provide a solution to Africa’s religious needs. As far as Ghana is concerned, the ministries of some three prophets stand out. The first major prophetic activity in the country was carried out by Prophet William Wade Harris (the “Black Elijah” of West Africa), a Liberian, who in 1914 came to the Nzema area of south-western Ghana to preach the word of God. He was called into ministry through an angelic visitation while he was serving a prison sentence for allegedly involving himself in a protest against the repressive policy of the Americo-Liberian government toward the Grebo people.³⁸ Harris dressed in white robes and carried a cross. He carried a Bible, and a bowl for baptism. A picture of Prophet Harris is shown below.³⁹

³⁷ J. K. 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) (2002):30-57, 7.

³⁸ Emmanuel K. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Blessed Publication, 2001), 58.

³⁹ The picture was retrieved from

https://www.google.com/search?q=prophet+william+wade+harris&sxsrf=ALiCzsZx8PBo_rAi2lwUmsOMhbUUQKQnxQ:1660648527129&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwipqLnsncv5AhWKPOwKHTWTCjUQ_AUoAXoECAIQAw&biw=1536&bih=696&dpr=1.25#imgrc=TYwgjwmRHF95zM [Accessed on 16/8/2021].

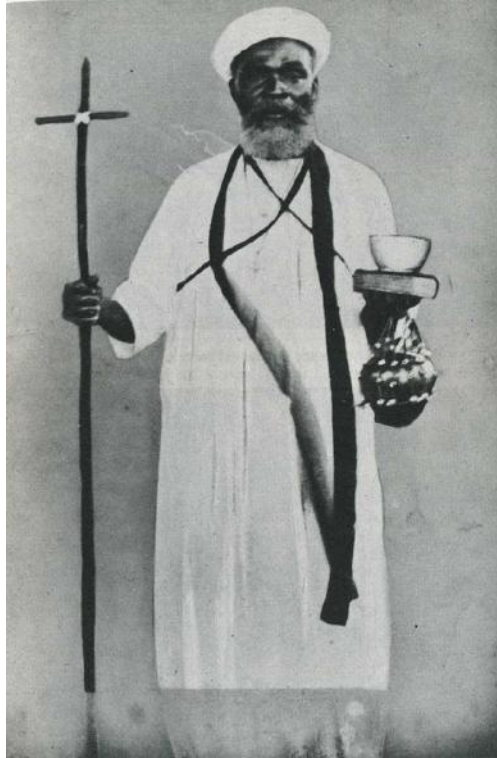


Fig. 1.1 Prophet William Wade Harris

His activities were characterized by a very strong uncompromising attitude toward tribal gods. He however, adopted an indigenous way of worship, a high evangelistic drive, and a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit, evident in his preaching, healing and deliverance ministries. Harris won many converts including many traditional priests. Prophetess Grace Tani and Prophet John Nackabah who founded the Twelve Apostles Church were traditional priests who got converted through Harris' ministry. Several African Independent Churches were established soon after the ministry of Harris and others. Baeta notes that the Twelve Apostles Church constitutes "a continuing

result of a visit paid to the Apollonia and Axim districts of the then Gold Coast by the well-known Grebo Prophet William Wade Harris as far back as the year 1914.”⁴⁰

The second prophetic figure, Prophet John Swatson (1855-1925), was a Euro-African mulatto born to a European father and a Ghanaian woman from an Nzema royal family. Swatson had his basic education at the Beyin and Cape Coast Methodist schools. He was a member of the Methodist church and became Harris’ disciple after he was led to encounter the Holy Spirit in 1914.⁴¹ He resigned from the Methodist church and began to preach in the Aboisso area as well as the western part of the Tano River.⁴² His appearance and ministry mirrored those of his master, Harris. Swatson worked hand in hand with an Anglican priest at Tarkwa and placed his converts under the care of the priest.⁴³ Later, Swatson was commissioned by the Anglican Church as a licensed preacher. He translated portions of the Lord’s Prayer and the Anglican hymn into the Nzema language and also prepared grounds for the evangelization of unreached interior areas in his vicinity.⁴⁴

The third prophetic figure, Prophet Sampson Opong, was a native of Akontanin in the Bono Region of Ghana. His life, ministry and legacy is the main subject of this book. Therefore, subsequent chapters will focus on different aspects of Prophet Opong. Prophet Opong, like the other personalities, used the healing and deliverance ministry to deal with problems such as sicknesses, the effect of evil spirits on one’s life and other similar issues common to Africans.

These prophets gave powerful sermons and demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit, thereby attracting many followers. Their activities were mainly concentrated in the rural areas, probably because of their low level of education. It may also be due to their desire to combat idol worship which was common in rural areas. Their worship

⁴⁰ Christian G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana* (Achimota: Ghana Christian Press, 1996), 8.

⁴¹ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 60.

⁴² Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 60.

⁴³ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 64.

⁴⁴ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 64.

style allowed key elements of African traditional worship style, including drumming, clapping and dancing. Their missionary activities later gave birth to African Indigenous (Initiated/Instituted) Churches (AICs) which became an African alternative to the mission churches.⁴⁵ The era of the AICs (*Sunsum sore*, spiritual churches) was followed by the era of Classical Pentecostalism, which was also followed by Charismatic Christianity. Therefore, the ministries of Prophets Harris, Swatson, and Oppong marked the transition of Ghanaian Christianity from being dominated by foreign missionaries to being owned and managed by natives.

The first part has given a brief account of Ghanaian Christianity before the life of Prophet Oppong. It is important to also consider the socio-cultural and religious background of the community in which Prophet Oppong was raised. This will help readers to better appreciate his worldview and ministry. The section focuses on the 18th-century Akontanin society which shaped the life and ministry of Prophet Oppong.

Background of Eighteenth-Century Akontanin Society

Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong was a native of Akontanin in the Bono Region of Ghana. This section examines the eighteenth-century Akontanin society in which Prophet Oppong was born and raised. This will enable the reader to better appreciate the Prophet's life (especially his career as a fetish priest) and ministry. An Akan community, Akontanin shares many beliefs and practices with other Akan societies, and most indigenous African societies.

Political Background

Akontanin is a town in the present-day Dormaa-East district of the Bono Region of Ghana, about sixteen (16) kilometers away from Wamfie, the capital of the Dormaa-East district. Traditionally, Akontanin forms part of the Dormaa kingdom currently superintended

⁴⁵ Boaheng, "Early Christian Missions in West Africa," 225-226.

by Osaagyefo Oseadeayo (*Obenfo*) Agyeman Badu II.⁴⁶ The Dormaa kingdom in its present state is made up of over two hundred cities, towns and villages located in the Dormaa East, Dormaa West, Tano North (Bomaa), Dormaa Municipality, Sunyani Municipality (Abesim) and Sunyani West Municipality (Chiraa).⁴⁷

Generally, the Dormaa people are members of the Aduana clan. The Dormaahene is the *piesie* (first-born) of the Aduana clan. Akan tradition has it that the Aduana clan is the first of the eight Akan clans that were given life after God created the earth.⁴⁸ The Dormaa people were part of the Akwamu kingdom during the 17th Century. Both the Akwamu and Dormaa kingdoms use the same state emblems—a dog with a burning piece of wood in its mouth—to underline their common origin.⁴⁹ They (the Akwamu and Dormaa people) were led by Nana Ansah Sasraku I and his sister and warrior, Nana Mpobi Yaa from the Songhai city of Timbuktu to Akwamufie (in the then Gold Coast) in 1640. Later, part of the Akwamu people (who later became the Dormaa people) migrated from Akwamufie to their present-day location(s) due to conflicts.

The Akontanim traditional stool belongs to the Kwatwemafo clan which traces its ancestry from the Akwamufie.⁵⁰ Like the other Dormaa clans, the Kwatwemafo clan migrated from Akwamufie due to wars and moved westward to settle in Suntreso, near Kumasi. Later,

⁴⁶ The present Dormaahene, like his predecessor, holds a doctoral degree (PhD) and that accounts for “*Obenfo*.” It must however be noted that, traditionally the chieftaincy appellation supercedes any academic title. Therefore, though Nana must be commended for attaining this academic feat, he did not become the Dormaahene because of his academic achievements. Again, the Dormaahene could have fulfilled his mandate as a traditional ruler without a doctoral degree.

⁴⁷ Nana Agyei-Kodie Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region: The Story of an African Society in the Heart of the World* (Accra: Abibrem Communications, 2012), 183.

⁴⁸ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region*, 183.

⁴⁹ Anane-Agyei, *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo Region*, 183.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Appiah, *Indigenous Christian Missions in the Brong Ahafo Region: A Case Study of the Temple of Praise Church (1988-2013)* (MPhil Thesis: University of Ghana, 2015), 59; Paul Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest: Kwame Sampson Oppong* (Cape Coast: Mfantisman Press, 2018), 21.

under the leadership of their chief, Nana Boahene Korkor, they moved from Suntreso to the Gyaaman District in the present-day Bono Region and settled at Seketia.⁵¹ Some time later, some members of the family migrated to Odumasi near Sunyani, Susuanso and Bantama in Kumasi.

Nana Boahene Korkor became the close friend of the then Dormaahene and gave his niece, Adwoa Twumwaa, to the Dormaahene as his wife. This act strengthened the bond between the Seketia chief and the Dormaahene. Years later, after the demise of Adwoa Twumwaa, her descendants moved from Seketia and settled at a place they named Kogyina (now referred to as Amanfoso) which is in-between Dormaa-Ahenkro and present-day Akontanin.⁵² The lack of drinking water at Kogyina compelled the people to move to their present-day location where they found plenty of water under the canopy of an “Akontan” plant.⁵³ The new location was named Akontanin because the water was found beneath the Akontan plant. Key ancient rulers of Akontanin include Nana Kwasi Kwawie, Nana Asare Korkor and Nana Yaw Abonsra.⁵⁴ Nana Yaw Abonsra’s farmland later developed into a village now referred to as Abonsrakrom in the Dormaa Municipality. Currently (as at 2021) the chief of Akontanin is Barima Tabiri Kumi Achiaw who is also the Akyempenhene of the Dormaa kingdom. The queen mother for Akontanin is Nana Ama Amponsah who is also the Akyempenhemaa of the Dormaa kingdom.

Socio-Economic Background

Ancient Akontanin attracted many migrants due to the availability of water and fertile land for farming activities. Thus, many people later joined the original inhabitants to expand the community. Most of the inhabitants undertook farming activities and cultivated crops such as corn, cassava, plantain and cocoyam, among others. The community

⁵¹ Appiah, *Indigenous Christian Missions in the Brong Ahafo Region*, 59.

⁵² Appiah, *Indigenous Christian Missions in the Brong Ahafo Region*, 59; Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 22.

⁵³ Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 22.

⁵⁴ Appiah, *Indigenous Christian Missions in the Brong Ahafo Region*, 60.

relied on rainfall to cultivate their crops and so it was not possible to undertake all-year-round farming.

Farming activities raised a lot of rich people in the Akontanim community, especially among the royal family. Members of the royal family became rich because they owned most of the farm lands. Few non-royals also owned lands. People who had no land of their own were required to do *Yɔmayɛnkyɛ* (“do and let us share”), a practice where one farmed on another person’s land and then shared the yield with the land owner based on an agreed ratio (usually 2:1 for the land owner and the farmer respectively). Another option was to serve as a laborer for the farm owner and then take the daily or yearly wage based on the arrangement made. In any case, ownership of land placed someone in an advantageous position to climb the economic ladder faster.

Farming activities in those days depended purely on human resources; most farmers were peasants. The more farm hands one had, the bigger one’s farm which translated into economic power. People became polygamous partly because they desired more children to boost their working capacity. Slaves were also bought to increase one’s labor force. The practice of buying slaves was common, especially among the royals.

Illiteracy was very high as there was no school in the community. Only a few people had the opportunity to attend school outside the Akontanim community. Akontanim society, like many other African societies, was mainly an oral society. Information was passed across generations through oral traditions. There is a proverb that states, “In Africa, when an old man dies, it is a library that burns down.” This proverb underscores the role of oral tradition and oral history in African cultures. The people of Akontanim learnt their history and other important facts through informal tutelage from their parents and other people in the community. Storytelling tradition was common in those days. By storytelling tradition, I mean the use of “voice and gestures to retell a tale to one or more listeners.”⁵⁵ Akan/African stories are

⁵⁵ Isaac Boaheng, “Reading Ruth as an Akan Story: A Proposal for an Alternative Akan Mother-Tongue Translation of Ruth 1.1,” *The Bible Translator* 72(3) (2021): 313–330, 314.

generally “woven out of the substance of human experience: struggles with the land and the elements, movement and migrations, wars between kingdoms, conflicts over pastures and waterholes, wrestling with the mysteries of existence, and life or death.”⁵⁶ At night, people came together to listen to stories from old people, especially old women.

Later, formal education was introduced to the people of Akontanim and some natives took advantage of it to be educated. Today, even though the oral tradition still prevails, formal education has become an effective way of learning. At the moment (December 2021) there are two basic schools at Akontanim— Methodist Basic School and Roman Catholic Basic school. The Methodist school was the first to be established in the Akontanim area.

Religious Background

The traditional religious beliefs of the people of Akontanim are not different from those of other Akan communities. Like all Akan, the primal religious worldview of traditional Akontanim society comprises the belief in the God (*Nyankopɔn*) who is the invisible immortal Creator of the universe. *Nyankopɔn* is both immanent and transcendent and provides humans and other creatures with their needs. There is no shrine or priest for *Nyankopɔn* because no human is deemed qualified to mediate between *Nyankopɔn* and humans. *Nyankopɔn* is therefore approached indirectly through other beings.

Eighteenth-century Akontanim society believed in the existence of many lesser gods/divinities (*abosom*; singular: *bosom*) who derive their existence and power from *Nyankopɔn* and work under his authority. Based on their ownership and/or role, *abosom* may be classified as (i). *aman-abosom* or *tete abosom* (tutelar gods who have been worshiped by the community since time immemorial) or *abusua-abosom* (family gods)— who are responsible for the welfare of the state, clans, villages, families and individuals and are worshipped at

⁵⁶ Bethwell A. Ogot, *My Footprints on the Sands of Time: An Autobiography* (Victoria: Trafford, 2003), 168.

these levels—and (ii) *abosom-abrafo* (executing gods) who are responsible for witch-hunting and are considered as judging people faster than the *aman-abosom*.⁵⁷ *Abosom* may also be classified, according to their origin, as *Atanɔ* or *nsuom* (water bodies), *wiem* (the sky), *aboɔm* (stones) or *wiram* (forest). *Abosom* are considered very powerful; yet, they lack universal competence and jurisdiction; each one has an area of specialization assigned to it by God.⁵⁸ *Abosom* are regarded as representatives of the invisible God on earth responsible for carrying people's requests to God and interpreting messages from God and the ancestors to the people.

Apart from the belief in *Nyankopɔn* and *abosom*, the Akan also believe in lesser powers such as *sasabonsam*, an evil spirit believed to reside in tall trees such as *odum* (*chlorophora excelsa*) and *onyina* (*ceiba pentandra*) *Mmoatia* (dwarfs), very short creatures with feet pointing backward which live in the forest, with powerful and good knowledge in herbal medicine, *abayie* (witchcraft) are spiritual entities with the ability to aid or harm humans.⁵⁹ According to Debrunner, "Both Sasabonsam and Mmoatia were believed to possess magical powers. They were thought to know the plants and objects that had healing powers and those that were harmful."⁶⁰ Traditional priests and healers used to meet these entities in the deep forest to seek knowledge about herbal medicine and magic.

Ancient Akontanim community had three main community *abosom* (deities), namely; Adampa, Tan Kojo and Dukuta. In addition, people kept personal/household deities and charms. The Tan Kojo deity was the god of war. Nana Siaw Kyeremeh recalled that during one of Akontanim's wars with the Fantes which was dubbed *Fantesa*, the priest of Tan Kojo deity prophesied victory for Akontanim but added

⁵⁷ Opoku Onyinah, *Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost* (PhD Dissertation: University of Birmingham, 2002), 47.

⁵⁸ T. N. O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: African Universities Press, 1987), 41.

⁵⁹ Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion* 43.

⁶⁰ Hans W. Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet, Pioneer Series* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1965), 11.

that they (the Akontanim people) would lose one eminent personality.⁶¹ They won the battle but lost the chief on their way home. This made Tan Kojo a very powerful and popular deity in Akontanim and its environs. Adampa and Dukuta were also powerful gods. People consulted these gods for various reasons. The practice of magic was also not uncommon during that period.

The people of Akontanim also believed and still believe that the land is governed by a venerable great telluric mother spirit, *Asaase Yaa*, who accommodates many other spirits found in trees, strings, rocks, mountains and some animals. As a deity, *Asaase Yaa* has some regulations which humans are required to observe. For example, Akontanim, like many Akan societies, observe *nkyida* (sacred days) on which the land is allowed to rest from farming and hunting activities. In addition, the community made sacrifices to *Asaase Yaa* at the beginning of the planting season to seek her permission for the land to be cultivated, and also to seek her favor for a good harvest. In Akontanim, Fridays were and still are *nkyida* and people are prohibited from going to the farm. The observance of *nkyida* was and still is a traditional way of preserving natural resources.

There was and is also the belief in ancestors (*nananom nsamanfoɔ*), that is, the spirit of dead people. With the belief that ancestors visit their living relatives, people sometimes kept food in their kitchen throughout the night for their visiting ancestors to come and “eat.” People committed themselves to their ancestors before embarking on a journey. When they returned in peace they offered sacrifices to their ancestors as a form of thanksgiving.

Conclusion

Opong lived in an era in which Ghanaian Christianity was undergoing reformation to incorporate African socio-cultural and religious worldviews. The Akontanim society in which Prophet Opong was born and raised has been sketched in this chapter. The society was

⁶¹ Nana Siaw Kyeremeh, *Interview by Author* (at Akontanim on 2nd December, 2021). Nana Siaw Kyeremeh is the Gyaasehene of Akontanim and a nephew of Sampson Opong..

characterized by beliefs and practices of African Traditional Religion. People became adherents to traditional religions by default. It took the intervention of God to take one out of traditional religion into Christianity. This is what the next few chapters will bring to the fore. In the next chapter, attention will be given to Oppong's ancestry, his life as a traditional priest and his conversion experience.



CHAPTER TWO

FROM *SEBIEWIE* TO *SEBETUTU*

Oppong was not born a Christian but a heathen. He was a dedicated adherent to African primal religion; he became a priest, healer and magician. How could such a person become a pillar in God's vineyard? This chapter deals with Oppong's journey from *Sebewie* to *Sebetutu*; that is, Oppong's journey from being a professional traditional priest and magician who used magic to destroy life to becoming a Christian prophet and evangelist who used divine power to destroy charms and amulets. The journey involved cycles of imprisonment, admonitory experiences, dreams of being free, actual release from prison, short acquaintances with Christians, return to traditional religious practices and then back to jail again. Before considering Oppong's *Sebewie-Sebetutu* spiritual journey, it is imperative to consider the ancestry, birth and early childhood of the Prophet. To understand his ancestry, there is the need to consider the slave-trade activities of King Samory.

King Samory and his Slave-Trade Activities

In 1957, a Swiss-German historian Hans W. Debrunner (who has been tagged Oppong's biographer) visited Prophet Oppong at Akontanim and in an interview gathered that Oppong's father was a Grushi slave who was captured by the fearsome king, an adventurer, warrior and slave trader, Samory (or Samori) and sold to Kofi Dom of Akontanim.⁶² Debrunner writes, "the father of Sampson Oppong was called Yaw Kyeremeh, a son of a Grushi chief from Upper Volta (modern-day Burkina Faso)."⁶³ Thus, Oppong's father was not from Akontanim but was a prince from one of the traditional communities in Burkina Faso.

King Samory, also known as Samory Touré (or Almamy Samore Lafiya Toure; 1830-1900) was born in the Milo River Valley

⁶² Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9.

⁶³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9. Samori's picture was retrieved from <https://alchetron.com/Samori-Ture> [Accessed on 15th December, 2021].

in the present-day Republic of Guinea. He joined the army in the 1850s to liberate his mother who had been captured during a raid. He became a gifted military adventurer through various military campaigns he undertook for local chiefs before setting up his kingdom. In the late 19th century, Samory built a kingdom extending from the Kankan region of Guinea. He won many battles and built a united empire called Mandinka, declared himself Faama (monarch) in 1874 and made Bisandugu (in present-day Guinea) the capital of his kingdom. His kingdom expanded until, at its height in the early 1880s, it extended from Guinea to the Upper Volta region (Burkina Faso) in the west and to the Fouta Djallon in the east. Samory resisted French colonial rule and opposed French plans to establish an empire in West Africa. In 1895, he corresponded with the then Asantehene; the Asantehene sought his assistance to recover the northern parts of the Ashanti kingdom which the British claimed ownership of.⁶⁴ The alliance between the Asantehene and Samory yielded a formidable force against the British army. The following is the picture of King Samory.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Jamie McGowan, *Conventional Signs, Imperial Designs: Mapping The Gold Coast, 1874-1957* (PhD Thesis: University of Illinois, 2013), 103, 104.

⁶⁵ The picture of Samory was retrieved from https://www.google.com/search?q=King+Samori&client=firefox-b-d&sxsrf=ALiCzsaAngsC953c5RgOEGXgVMrCZMTC7Q:1660661547014&source=lms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiz7eeszsv5AhVTuKQKHUlaA_MQ_AUoAXoECAEQAw&biw=1536&bih=739&dpr=1.25#imgsrc=tmcXFMynGot2dM [Accessed on 16/8/2021].



Fig. 2.1 King Samory

In his military conquest, he captured people, made some of them his subjects and sold others to become slaves to their owners. Debrunner described him as follows: “Samory was not only a slave raider but also a Moslem statesman and general who undertook his campaigns of conquest to spread Islam and increase his power. Samory partly financed these campaigns by selling prisoners into slavery.”⁶⁶ Wealthy people bought slaves to boost the human resources in their economic activities. Slave trade was, therefore, widespread in most African regions. Prophet Oppong’s father was one of the people that Samory conquered and sold as slaves. The next section focuses on the father of the Legendary Prophet.

Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong’s Parents

Among the wealthy Akontanim royals was one Opanyini Kofi Dom who brought Sampson Oppong’s father as his slave from then Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and renamed him Yaw Kyeremeh.⁶⁷ Debrunner notes that it was through one of Samory’s slave trade activities “that Yaw Kyeremeh, the father of Oppong came to ‘Bonoland’ in the village of Akontanim in the Dormaa state as a slave

⁶⁶ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9.

⁶⁷ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9; See also Appiah, *Indigenous Christian Missions in the Brong Ahafo Region*.

of a rich man in Akontanin by name Kofi Dom.”⁶⁸ Oppong’s father was not the only slave in Kofi Dom’s household; there were other slaves (both males and females) who also contributed to the agricultural activities of their master, Kofi Dom. Oppong’s father married one of such slaves who is identified as Ama Adufa.⁶⁹ Debrunner further notes that “like Oppong’s father, Ama Dufa⁷⁰ was a slave from the North at Kofi Dom’s household.”⁷¹ Oppong’s father had two more wives (besides Oppong’s mother, Ama Adufa); another slave girl and the other was from Akontanin.⁷² These two women were identified by Nana Siaw Kyeremeh as Ama Takyiwaa and Yaa Kyerewaa; yet, he could not indicate who was the slave, and who was the free woman.⁷³ The Gyaase family claim relationship with Prophet Oppong. It is likely that as time went on the family of Kofi Dom and those foreigners who were under his care intermarried and became one family which is the Gyaase family of present-day Akontanin.

⁶⁸ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9.

⁶⁹ It is important to note that the practice of renaming slaves was common in those days.

⁷⁰ The names Dufa and Adufa refer to the same person.

⁷¹ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9.

⁷² Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 10. One may find in some literature that Oppong’s father had an Ashanti wife. Information from his relatives do not substantiate that point. However, it should be noted that, in those days, a Bono woman could rightly be described as an Ashanti woman because Bono was part of Ashanti region. Therefore, it is probably the Akontanin woman who is sometimes referred to with the then generic reference “Ashanti” to yield the description “an Ashanti woman.” See Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 25 for more on this.

⁷³ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by Author*.



Fig. 2.2 Nana Siaw Kyeremeh
(Gyaasehene, Akontanim, 2021)



Fig. 2.3 Nana Afia Kraa
(Gyaasehema, Akontanim, 2021)

One can deduce that both slaves and free people lived peacefully in Kofi Dom's household. Slaves had appreciable freedom and worked freely and willingly for their master who in turn catered for their needs. With time, the slaves and free people intermarried and mixed up to the extent that no one is considered a slave or master today. Debrunner states that, "we must not imagine that Kofi Dom's slaves had a particularly hard life. He seemed to have treated his slaves with some dignity to the extent that Yaw Kyeremeh, the father of Sampson Opong, seemed to have been given an important position in the household of Kofi Dom."⁷⁴

The marriage between Yaw Kyeremeh and Ama Adufa was blessed with two children Yaa Gyabea and Opong Kwame (who later became Prophet Sampson Kwame Opong).⁷⁵ Opong told Debrunner "by my mother, my father had two children, myself (Kwame Opong)

⁷⁴ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Opong the Prophet*, 9.

⁷⁵ Nana Siaw Kyeremeh, *Interview by Author*.

and a daughter who died in childhood.”⁷⁶ Oppong, therefore, became the only child of his parents. Since Oppong’s only matrilineal sibling died in childhood, one can agree with Essiam that Oppong has no matrilineal relationship in present-day Akontanim.⁷⁷ The reason is that Akan practice matrilineal inheritance; meaning, the Akan trace their kinship through the mother’s line. Nonetheless, one can also note that one’s slave together with the slave’s properties and offspring, was considered as belonging to the slave owner. Thus, Oppong rightly belongs to the family of Kofi Dom. Oppong himself identified his parents with Kofi Dom’s family. Therefore, all who trace their lineage to Kofi Dom may also legitimately claim lineage to Oppong.

What were the circumstances surrounding the birth and nurture of Oppong? The next section takes care of this question.

The Birth and Early Life of Sampson Kwame Oppong

The Birth of Kwame Oppong (Pon Kwame)

Not much is known about the circumstances surrounding the birth of Prophet Oppong. The oral nature of ancient Akontanim society contributed to the lack of literature on the date of birth of the Prophet. None of the interviewees in this research could tell the actual date of Oppong’s birth. However, one can deduce from Oppong’s own assertion that he was born in 1884. In an interview with Debrunner (in 1957 at Akontanim), Oppong gave a clue about the year of his birth. This is what he told Debrunner: “When Prempeh I, King of Ashanti was captured by the British government, I was twelve years old.”⁷⁸ Given that Prempeh I was captured by the British colonial masters and sent to exile in the Seychelles Islands in 1896, one can conclude that Sampson Oppong was born in about 1884.⁷⁹

Oppong was born on Saturday (Bono-Twi: *Memeneda*) and so he was named Kwame, the Bono (Akan) name for a male child born on

⁷⁶ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 10.

⁷⁷ Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 25.

⁷⁸ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9.

⁷⁹ This is the same date that Nana Siaw Kyeremeh gave in an interview on 2nd December, 2021 at Akontanim as the year of birth of the Prophet.

Saturday. In the Akan religious context, the Almighty God is associated with Saturday. He is considered a Saturday “born” and so he is referred to as Tweduampon Kwame (“Dependable Kwame”). Giving birth to a child on this day brings great joy as the child is considered a source of blessing to the family due to its association with God’s “day of birth.” Oppong’s birth also brought joy to the family because among the Akan and indeed many African societies, every family desired male children. It was a common practice (in those days) for local midwives to assist in delivery. Ama Adufa (Oppong’s mother) had such assistance from an old woman (whose name cannot be traced). As it is in Akan, the child was named on the eighth day. He was given the name Kwame Oppong with the hope that he would be a great man in the future. The Akontanim people actually called him Pon Kwame.⁸⁰ The name Oppong depicts greatness and dependability. Kwame Oppong was therefore to become a great man of God, though not without difficulties. Physically, he was well-built and strong. Spiritually, he was to increase in strength as he exercised his endowments.

Kwame Oppong, the Traditional Priest (*Sebewie*)

Kwame Oppong was born to pagan parents at a time when traditional religion had engulfed the Akontanim community. As noted earlier, there were three key community deities; Adampa, Tan Kojo and Dukuta, aside from personal and family gods kept by different families and persons.⁸¹ The practice of magic was also common in those days.

People are easily influenced by their environment. Just as people end up becoming adherents of a particular religion simply because they were born into it, so Oppong also became an adherent of the traditional religion into which he was born. When Oppong was twelve years, he showed great interest in learning and practicing magic and traditional religion. His uncle⁸² was a traditional healer and

⁸⁰ *Pɔn* (Pon) is another form of Oppon (Oppong). The Prophet was known to his people as *Pɔn Kwame*.

⁸¹ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

⁸² This person was not Oppong direct uncle. Rather, he was the brother of one of Oppong’s step mother.

magician. He was among the few brave men who could go into the forest to meet “Satan” (*sasabonsam*) and dwarfs (*mmotia*) to seek magical and healing powers.⁸³ Oppong became his uncle’s favorite. Debrunner states, “Little Kwame Oppong became the favourite of his father’s Ashanti’s wife’s brother. His uncle was a kind of healer and magician who, in all his life, had a strong influence upon Kwame Sampson Oppong’s life.”⁸⁴ The uncle’s influence was the immediate factor that informed Oppong’s decision to practice magic and serve traditional deities. Oppong became his uncle’s disciple and when he grew up, he became a healer (*Oduyefo*) and a magician (*Nkonyayifo* or *Osumanni*) with many charms and amulets. Oppong told Debrunner that he possessed the following kinds of medicine (magical powers) or amulets (*aduro, suman*).⁸⁵

- i. *Amanfo*: This amulet protects its wearer from bullets and knives. Anyone who aims at shooting the wearer of this amulet would find the gun exploding in his hand. A knife held to attack the wearer of this amulet would break in the attacker’s hand. This amulet assisted criminals and thieves to undertake their activities.
- ii. *Nsuapem*: This amulet protects the wearer against his/her enemies. When the enemy sees anyone wearing such an amulet he/she (the enemy) would stand still like a statue.
- iii. *Wuramumu*: This amulet is shaped like a little pair of bellows. When one wears it and mentions the name of his/her enemy, the enemy’s stomach will expand and cause great pain.
- iv. *Penyan*: This amulet is used by traders to obtain customers.
- v. *Basaa*: This amulet, when thrown into the air, gets suspended to prove that the person is powerful and not to be trifled with.
- vi. *Ohye*: If one puts this medicine into the soup of a woman who scorns one’s love, she must die.

⁸³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 11.

⁸⁴ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 11.

⁸⁵ Gleaned from Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9.

- vii. *Afuto-sapu-gyina-makpe*: A powerful magic that will kill twelve enemies at one blow.

Oppong acquired these and many other charms that are not listed here. This made him not only powerful but also a fearful person among his contemporaries. These charms were collected from different places and each required rituals to maintain them. He told Debrunner, “I went on long journeys to obtain new and more powerful magic.”⁸⁶ The different charms/amulets listed above affirm the Akan belief in the existence of a myriad of evil spirits from which one always needs protection. For fear of being harmed by evil spirits, many people acquire different kinds of protective objects from traditional priests and magicians. Many people use their charms to hurt people; Oppong was not an exemption.

Oppong used *juju* (black power) for his gains. He used his supernatural powers on girls who rejected his love proposals. He would normally mention the name of the girl in question (three times) and then blow some air into a special gourd which contained his *juju* and cover it.⁸⁷ This act would then cause the lady to have a swollen stomach the next morning.⁸⁸ The lady may consult all herbalists but would not find a cure. Eventually, when the lady pleads with Oppong for treatment, he would not agree to treat her except if the lady agreed to have an affair with him.⁸⁹ After having an affair with the lady, Oppong would then open the gourd to release the air which was blown into it.⁹⁰ The movement of the air out of the gourd translated into the release of air out of the affected person’s stomach.

At Akontanim, Oppong and some young people formed a drama troupe which performed occasionally to entertain themselves and the entire community. As a magician, any time he saw a woman who had shunned his love advances dancing, he would use his magical powers to cause her cloth to fall off to expose her nakedness. He also

⁸⁶ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 9.

⁸⁷ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

⁸⁸ At times the same act caused half of the face of the lady in question to swell.

⁸⁹ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

⁹⁰ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

killed peoples' livestock (goats and sheep) supernaturally and then took the carcasses for meat. G. N. Haliburton recalls one of such activities which took place at Essiam, Akim Abuakwa where Oppong was alleged to have killed a goat of a chief using magical powers and in the evening of the day of the mysterious death, indicated his interest in the carcass during a drinking spree.⁹¹

Oppong had the power to disgrace people in public or to cause discomfort through supernatural means. For example, whenever he competed with a man for a woman, he caused that man to experience a long sensational irritation which demanded scratching of the body in public. He would normally inflict the itchy-skin disease on the man during a public dance and the man would not have his peace until he left the gathering. The woman would then automatically fall for Oppong because of the "strange" disease of the competitor.

Furthermore, Oppong involved himself in many anti-social activities aside from his negative use of supernatural powers. For example, according to Nana Kyeremeh, Oppong engaged in excessive drinking and frequent public fighting.⁹² This confirms Arthur Eustace Southon's assertion that "in his early days he had been much addicted to drinking and in consequence found himself one day in prison."⁹³ Oppong himself recalled that "he was a glutton, womanizer and a drunkard."⁹⁴ His well-built stature and magical powers made him very fearful of his opponents. His evil deeds earned him the accolade *Sebewie* ("one who uses magical powers to end or destroy life").

Oppong's evil and wicked activities prompted his friends and some other members of the Akontanim community to plot how to kill him. Some young boys organized themselves and beat him severely. For fear of being killed, Oppong left Akontanim for the Ivory Coast (now Cote d'Ivoire).

⁹¹ G. N. Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," *The Bulletin of the Society for African Church History*, 2(1) (1965), 88.

⁹² Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

⁹³ Arthur Eustace Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism, the First Hundred Years, 1835-1935* (London: Gargate Press, 1935), 150.

⁹⁴ Haliburton, *Sampson Oppong*, 19.

Oppong in the Ivory Coast Oppong the Labourer

After a few days of leaving his native Akontanin village, Oppong reached Ivory Coast in 1904 at the age of twenty (20). According to Debrunner, Oppong's movement to the Ivory Coast occurred after the British had abolished domestic slavery in the Gold Coast. He writes, "In the meantime (1896-1901) the British had occupied Ashanti and abolished domestic slavery. Thus, Oppong was free to go where he wanted."⁹⁵ Debrunner's assertion should not be seen as necessarily conflicting with the oral tradition that Oppong left Akontanin for the Ivory Coast because he feared for his life. The two traditions are not mutually exclusive. The author is of the view that Oppong left because of threats from his community; however, this movement became possible because the British government had abolished domestic slavery. It was at this time that the French government was looking for laborers for the construction of railways in the Ivory Coast. Therefore, his decision to move to Ivory Coast (and not any other location) might have been influenced by the availability of jobs in Ivory Coast at that time as well as the proximity of Ivory Coast to his Akontanin residence. Essiam shares this view and states: Oppong's misbehavior might have triggered a plot by the youth of Akontanin to eliminate him "and since he was free to move out of the town due to the abolishment of slavery he migrated to Ivory Coast which is closed to Akontanin."⁹⁶

In Ivory Coast, Oppong initially served as a laborer in a Railway co-operation. According to F. L. Bartels, Oppong's activities in Ivory Coast started in a town called Abonvine.⁹⁷ He was assigned duty to one of the senior staff. Later, Oppong's hard work earned him a foreman (supervisor) status, now in charge of a group responsible for providing firewood for the locomotive.⁹⁸ He became the "paymaster"

⁹⁵ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 14.

⁹⁶ Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 35.

⁹⁷ F. L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 188.

⁹⁸ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 14.

who received the wages of the members of his group and then paid each worker his due.⁹⁹ One day (in 1913), Oppong made off with the wages of all his colleagues and relocated to a neighboring village where he began spending the money on women and alcohol. He started his alcoholism and womanizing again and succeeded in winning the love of a police officer's wife with whom he had an affair. Later, when the woman discovered the source of Oppong's wealth, she reported him to the police. Oppong was arrested, arraigned before the court and thrown into prison. Oppong's imprisonment, therefore, was due to his misappropriation of funds.¹⁰⁰ However, his misappropriation of funds became known to the police through his affair with a policeman's wife. Therefore, both embezzlement and womanizing contributed to his imprisonment. Debrunner gives the following account by Oppong:

At the end of each week, I received the wages to pay the whole gang. One day, I made off with all the wages; this was quite a lot of money. In fact, I travelled to a village of a good distance away as I began spending the money. I had more than one drink and started to flirt with a pretty woman who seemed interested in me. But alas, she was a policeman's wife. She wormed the secret of [the source of]my money out of me and turned me over to the police. My feet were put in chains and thrown into prison.¹⁰¹

Oppong's own account, as recorded by Debrunner, suggests that both embezzlement and womanizing contributed to his arrest and subsequent imprisonment. This fact is important because some sources attribute his woes to embezzlement while others point to womanizing. Reading such accounts may lead to the erroneous conclusion that the accounts are conflicting when, in fact, they are complementary.

⁹⁹ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

¹⁰⁰ Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 188.

¹⁰¹ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 14.

Oppong the Prisoner

Oppong's prison experience in the Ivory Coast, which happened in 1913,¹⁰² marked the beginning of his journey to the cross. However, the seed of his conversion from traditional religion into Christianity, which was sown after his release from prison in the Ivory Coast only yielded fruit some period after his return to Ghana. Oppong stayed in prison, chained without food for several days. Whilst in prison, he met Moses, an elderly Fanti Christian with grey hair who devoted himself to prayer.¹⁰³ Moses prayed fervently for three days and was released from prison. As he was leaving the prison, Oppong asked him for money to buy food but he replied, "I have no money but that which I have I shall give you. I commend you into God's keeping."¹⁰⁴ This statement by Moses made Oppong very angry because he was extremely hungry and needed food.¹⁰⁵ Oppong's hunger and his pagan background made him see no importance in being commended into God's keeping.

After Moses left the prison, Oppong was left alone. In the night he thought about Moses' commendation and prayed "God of Moses have pity on me."¹⁰⁶ That night he had a dream in which two Europeans came into his cell and cut his chains with a hacksaw; one of them said "I am the God of Moses, burn your magic things and beat the gong-gong for me (i.e., proclaim my Word)."¹⁰⁷ Happy that he had finally been released from chains, Oppong only woke up to realize that it was just a dream. Frustrated by his confinement, Oppong swore that should he be released, he would serve Jesus and would not drink alcohol again. As Southon puts it "weary in confinement, he made a double vow that if released, he would serve the Lord Jesus Christ (of whom he then knew scarcely more than His name), and he would never again touch

¹⁰² Andrew F. Walls, "Sampson Oppong," *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* edited by Gerald H. Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 507.

¹⁰³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 15.

the intoxicating drinks which had caused his downfall.”¹⁰⁸ Whether Oppong really meant what he vowed or not, his life after his release from prison will tell.

The prison officers used to send Oppong out together with other prisoners to cut the grass around the houses of their European masters while in chains. One of such days, while cutting grass around the houses of the Europeans, to his surprise, the French District Commissioner came toward him and showed him compassion, saying:

Oppong, you are still young. You have been foolish, and you will pay for it. But the railways authorities have your welfare at heart and are willing to give you another chance. Luckily, you did not steal from a private person. You will escape lightly. As a sign of the confidence I have in you, I shall set you free and let you stay in my house with my people until this time next week, when the sentence will be passed in your case.¹⁰⁹

Saying this, the Commissioner filed through Oppong’s chains just as he saw in his dream. Oppong was released three days later and he secretly escaped through the forest and came back to the Gold Coast (Ghana).

While the above story is well documented and may not be disputed, I also received another prison story from Nana Kyeremeh as follows:

While in cells Oppong recollected all his previous bad deeds, repented of his sins and then asked God for forgiveness. He prayed as follows: “My God, I have offended you immensely in all my life. I have realized my sinful nature and therefore repent from all my evil ways. It is my prayer that you send your angels to come and release me from the cells this very night.” After this, he had a sound sleep. On the second night, Oppong Kwame, heard a voice while he was asleep, telling him to rise up and go. He asked “Who are you?” The voice replied “I am the God of Moses.” Rise up and go for you have been released through your prayers. He rose up and to his amazement, the

¹⁰⁸ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 150.

¹⁰⁹ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 15.

chain fell off. On arriving at the prison gate, he found that it had been opened without the gatekeeper. He, therefore, left the prison.¹¹⁰

According to Nana Kyeremeh, it was after this that Oppong decided to come back to Ghana. In both stories, Oppong's return to Ghana followed his release from prison. Both accounts also admit that Oppong had a dream while in prison and the dream connects to his release in one way or the other. Furthermore, each account says Oppong returned to Ghana after what happened. Further still, in each account, Oppong encountered the God of Moses. In spite of the remarkable similarities between the two accounts, it is difficult to fully reconcile them because the circumstances leading to his release differ remarkably. In my view, it is possible that Oppong was imprisoned twice or even more while in Ivory Coast. Therefore the two stories could be different stories from two different imprisonments. The miraculous breaking of the chain in one account and the physical breaking of the chain using a hacksaw in another account, strongly suggests that the accounts refer to two different events or that one of the stories is invalid. Should it be the case that one story is invalid, I will prefer Debrunner's version as the true story considering the fact that it was documented earlier than Nana Kyeremeh's account. On the other hand, if they refer to the same event, then Oppong's prayer as given by Nana Kyeremeh might have ended with the petition "God of Moses have pity on me" in Debrunner's version. Whatever the case may be, each story has something to contribute to one's appreciation of Oppong's life.

After his release from prison, Oppong, while in the forest trying to find his way, saw a thick and dark cloud that overshadowed him until he fainted. A voice like the one he previously heard in prison in the dream called him and instructed him to go and preach the Word of God. But Oppong asked, "How can I preach as I can't read?" The voice then replied, "I shall give you the knowledge to do my work."¹¹¹ After this Oppong soon gained consciousness and found his way to a certain

¹¹⁰ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

¹¹¹ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

village. In all this, Oppong did not give his life to Christ. Oppong forgot about the manner in which God delivered him, the dream he had, and the vow he made and returned to his old ways of practicing his magic. Debrunner states that “he prepared new and more powerful magic, medicines and amulets.”¹¹²

Oppong Back in Ghana At Akyem Tafo

Oppong’s arrival in Ghana coincided with the period in which cocoa production was great and laborers were needed to help in its processing. According to Debrunner, from Ivory Coast, Oppong went to Akyem Tafo to work on a cocoa plantation.¹¹³ Bartels also indicates that from Ivory Coast Oppong went to Akyem Abuakwa, about sixty miles north of West Accra.¹¹⁴ Merging the two accounts, one can conclude that Oppong went to Akyem Abuakwa (of which Akyem Tafo is a part and Kibi, the traditional head) after his return from the Ivory Coast. Thus, he went to the Akyem Abuakwa state, specifically to Akyem Tafo or he went to Tafo in the Akyem Abuakwa state.

The Akan have a maxim which could be translated as “the way an animal cries, when caught in a trap, is different from when freed.” Oppong’s attitude after entering Ghana confirms this saying. Despite his miraculous rescue by God and his own vow to serve the Lord, Oppong refused to repent. Instead, he got himself deep into magic and possession of charms again. He gained a reputation as a sorcerer, preparing magic “medicines” and charms intended to harm, which he sold for economic gains.

At Akyem Wankyi (Bompata)

He later moved from Tafo to Akyem-Wankyi near Bompata (in Asante-Akyem) where he served as a laborer for a certain Christian woman who was a member of the Basel (Presbyterian) Church at Bompata. During the Christmas period, Oppong attended church service with the

¹¹² Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 15.

¹¹³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 15.

¹¹⁴ Bartels, *The Root of Ghana Methodism*, 188.

woman. He did not go to church because he believed in Christ but went out of curiosity. According to Debrunner, “the celebration of Christmas and the whole worship service seem[ed] ... something new to Kwame Oppong.”¹¹⁵ Most of the congregants viewed him as a magician and became suspicious of his presence. Oppong heard the nativity story of Jesus Christ for the first time. Rev. Mante’s sermon touched him so much that he defied all odds, gave an offering, walked straight to the minister and wrote his name as a catechumen (new convert) in the Bompata Presbyterian Church.

According to Oppong, the woman offered to teach him the Lord’s Prayer. Oppong was however asked to weed her farm before starting the class with the woman. He attended the catechetical school for some time and then stopped because he was mocked by children due to his slow learning rate. Besides, the children in the village made fun of him for attending Christian classes. Moreover, devoting his time to the learning of catechism prevented him from having enough time for his magical practices which fetched him money; he, therefore, became broke economically. Oppong told Debrunner:

My enthusiasm was enormous. My mistress offered to teach me the Lord’s Prayer if I got rid of all weeds on her farm. I did. The farm was weeded as if it had never been weeded before. I went to classes for catechumens for a time but I soon grew tired of them. I had never been to school and I was asked to learn to read and write so that I could read the Bible. Learning to read took long and the children laughed at my efforts. Moreover, I missed the income that magic had formerly brought me.¹¹⁶

Eventually, Oppong stopped attending church activities altogether, and subsequently left the place and secured new powers for making money.¹¹⁷ He nearly became a Christian at this point but was pulled back by certain factors. The reason one would conclude that he was still not a Christian is not simply because he stopped the catechumen classes but that he craved magical practices while still under Christian

¹¹⁵ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 15.

¹¹⁶ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 18.

¹¹⁷ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 18.

instruction. The consequence was that he went deep into magic right after stopping the classes. From his own account, the economic hardship that came upon him during the period of being a catechumen is a major reason why he gave up.

At Osiem

Oppong then moved, with his charms and magic, to Osiem (near Tafo in the Eastern region) where he resided for two years. At Osiem his magical prowess gained prominence and he became a very powerful and fearful person. In those days, it was common for people to gather at the night to play all sorts of games as a form of entertainment. Such entertaining activities included storytelling, singing, drumming and dancing, among others. One evening some people (including Oppong) gathered to dance under the moonlight. A young man danced and won the admiration of many ladies who applauded him. It came to Oppong's turn, but when he danced no lady appreciated his skills. The crowd rather told him to go away because they hated his sorcery activities. In reaction, Oppong cast a spell at the place where these ladies used to bathe. Consequently, the ladies contracted ugly skin rashes. The community became very angry and decided to deal with Oppong. Oppong left the place to have his peace.

At Nkronso

Oppong moved to Nkronso near Apedwa where he met a Christin woman, Maame Akuokuo¹¹⁸, who was his co-tenant and a member of the Abibipim church. Maame Akuokuo's favorite saying was "If God is on your side, who do you have to fear?" She was very prayerful and in her prayers, she mentioned the name "Jesus" a lot. One day Oppong went to church with Maame Akuokuo. The sermon for the day was based on Exodus 20:13: "You shall not murder" (NIV). The preacher preached strongly against killing through the practice of magic and

¹¹⁸ Debrunner recorded this name as Akuokuo. My interactions with Oppong's family and my knowledge about Akan names suggest to me that the name could be Akuokuo or even Kuokuo. Whatever one's opinion about this, the story remains intact and does not lose its authenticity or value.

other means. Oppong got furious and then left in the middle of the service.

Oppong became angry with the woman due to her frequent mention of “Jesus” in her prayers. Consequently, he attempted to kill this woman by evil means. He mentioned the woman’s name three times over his deadly padlock and then closed it with the expected effect that the woman would die instantly with blood oozing from her nose. The *juju* failed. Oppong made another attempt to kill the woman by giving her poisoned soup. Oppong recounted to Debrunner, “I went to the forest and got hold of some poisonous herbs. I put these into Maame Akuokuo’s soup and then hid in a corner and watched her praying over her soup and eating it. I was forced to laugh. ‘Go on, pray’, it will not help you. I shall kill you. The woman replied, ‘My boy, you can’t do me any harm, I am Christ’s.’”¹¹⁹ Oppong still thought once the woman ate the poisoned food, she was bound to die. He believed in magic more than the power of the Almighty God. His remark “‘Go on, pray’, it will not help you. I shall kill you” attests to this fact. Maame Akuokuo, on the other hand, trusted in the power of God for her rescue. This was the clash of powers. Maame Akuokuo prayed over the food and ate it and nothing happened to her. She claimed to be indestructible because she belonged to Jesus, the Christ. The incident impressed upon Oppong, yet, he did not accept Christ and his salvation. He continued with his magical practices.

Oppong’s Conversion Experience

One day a young boy contracted Oppong to kill his (the boy’s) uncle for him so that he could inherit the uncle’s property and marry the uncle’s wife as well. Oppong collected some personal items of the intended victim including a piece of his sponge and prepared to undertake the task using these items for the required rituals.¹²⁰ The Akan believe that such items as sponges, underwear, handkerchief,

¹¹⁹ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 19-20.

¹²⁰ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 21.

sandals and others, have a close connection with the user's soul and so can be used to cause harm to the person.

Oppong went to the forest one Thursday to perform the necessary rituals for the task using the collected items as a means of reaching the man's soul. The rituals involved fastening the man's soul to the ground and overpowering it until he died. In the process, he suddenly heard a voice which called thrice "Oppong Kwame, stand up!" He turned to find the caller and having fallen into trance, found a chain from above which he was ordered to hold so as to know who called him. He held it and was taken to a large square in heaven, where he met some people robed in white gowns. Angels showed him all his bad deeds one after the other and made him aware that he would suffer for them if he does not repent before dying. He was commanded to burn all his magical apparatus and proclaim God's wrath against fetishism.¹²¹ Cephas N. Omenyo affirms that Oppong "was said to have had a vision in which he was instructed to carry a wooden cross to preach, and to burn all lesser deities."¹²² He saw all his magical apparatus heaped together, together with the sheep and chicken he had unlawfully acquired by magic.¹²³ God appeared to him in a form of a tall, glorious and noble man and said, "I am the God of Moses; who freed you from prison in the Ivory Coast. Why are you still living in sin? Why have you, been stubborn and disobedient to my word? I am sending you."¹²⁴ Oppong saw all the people he had previously harmed through his evil powers. Even the sheep he had killed supernaturally appeared to him, kicked him and urged him to make a public confession of his sins to facilitate the conversion of people like him.¹²⁵

Oppong asked the man, "Where are you sending me to?" The man who claimed to be the God of Moses answered "Burn all your

¹²¹ Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2006), 71.

¹²² Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 71.

¹²³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 22.

¹²⁴ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 22.

¹²⁵ Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," 91.

fetishes, take up my cross and preach about it to the entire world.” Oppong gave an excuse saying, “I am a sinner and illiterate. I do not know how to read the Bible.”¹²⁶ God replied, “Do not be afraid, I will be with you; from now on you will be called Sampson.”¹²⁷ Thus, it was God who named Kwame Oppong, “Sampson” in the context of his deep-forest-conversion experience. The glorious man (God) also showed Oppong a large pool of blood, being the innocent bloodshed by some kings. As their punishment, these kings were made to drink the blood; but no matter how much they drank, the blood never got finished. The man told Oppong, “Although they say they acted in ignorance, they still have to atone. God alone has the Power.”¹²⁸ Oppong was also instructed to carve out a wooden cross and use it in his ministry. This cross became his companion throughout his ministry. Thus, an illiterate and ex-convict, Oppong was called into the Christian ministry through an encounter in a vision, when he did not have any appreciable knowledge of the Christian faith.

After his experience, Oppong lay still in the forest as though he was dead. Early the next morning, the people in the village went into the forest to look for him and when they eventually found him, they brought him home. After he recovered from the shock, Oppong began to confess his sins. His strange behavior made people think he had a mental problem but he insisted he was not mad. He gathered his magical apparatus and burnt them, saying, “I have found one who is stronger than you [the magical apparatus]. God has called me into his service. Now I am burning you.”¹²⁹

Oppong, the Changed Person (*Sebetutu*)

Oppong’s conversion took place in 1917 when he was in his early thirties—about thirty-three years.¹³⁰ He was baptized by the Rev.

¹²⁶ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 22.

¹²⁷ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 22.

¹²⁸ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 22.

¹²⁹ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 23.

¹³⁰ Walls, “Sampson Oppong,” *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 507; Haliburton, “The Calling of a Prophet,” 91.

Ofosuhene of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church. In obedience to God, he took up his cross, made of bamboo sticks, and went about proclaiming God's wrath on "fetishism." Walls asserts "He began itinerant preaching, calling for the destruction of fetishes and abandonment of magic and witchcraft... He confronted powerful chiefs and disturbed the colonial authorities."¹³¹ Oppong's disturbance of the colonial authorities should not be understood in terms of a direct disturbance of the colonists; rather, it simply refers to instances where he was reported and arrested due to his missionary activities. If he ever disturbed colonial authorities then he did so spiritually through his prophetic ministry; he did not attack, confront or disturb them physically in any way.

Oppong's ministry was characterized by visions and prophecies about the fate of sinners who refused to repent. One such vision came to him when he was summoned by the king of Akyem Oda, Nana Attafuah whilst proclaiming the gospel.¹³² Oppong said he saw a circle of kings looking very miserable. For W. J. Platt, this vision echoes the vision of miserable kings that Oppong saw in the context of his conversion experience.¹³³ Other chiefs/kings who heard this and other stories regarding Oppong's encounter with chiefs/kings feared him a lot.

As was characteristic of prophets of his days, Oppong wore a long (black or white) khaki robe/gown which had a large cross in the center and a cross on the chest. The black robe was for preaching and the white was for preaching and relaxing.¹³⁴ Like a Nazirite, he refused to shave his hair. The two gowns have been captured in the photographs below.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Walls, "Sampson Oppong," *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 507.

¹³² Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," 94.

¹³³ W. J. Platt, *An African Prophet* (London: SCM Press, 1923), 84-86.

¹³⁴ Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 722.

¹³⁵ The author took these photographs on 3rd Decemeber, 2021.



Fig. 2.4a Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong's White Gown (front view)



Fig. 2.4b Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong's White Gown (back view)



*Fig. 2.5a Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong's
Black Gown (front view)*



*Fig. 2.5b Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong's
Black Gown (back view)*

Oppong developed an uncompromising approach to his former profession, the practice of fetishism and repeatedly called for the destruction of all personal deities and the relinquishment of all magic and witchcraft.¹³⁶ His constant call for the destruction of native deities and traditional religious paraphernalia earned him the accolade *Sebetutu* (destroyer of native charms/personal deities).¹³⁷

The title *Sebetutu* comes from two Akan words “*sebe*” (charms/amulets) and “*tutu*” (uproot). The word *tutu* is the plural of *tu*; the first is used when the items to be uprooted are more than one and the second is used when a single item is to be uprooted. The Akan translation of Colossians 2:15 offers a helpful explanation of this imagery. The Bono-Twi version reads: “*Na waatu mpanyinnie ne tumidie agu ayi be adi akyere pefee ya badwam adi be so nkunim asennua he so.*” (lit. “And he has uprooted principalities and powers and has revealed them clearly in public as means of having victory over them”). The text quoted above employs the metaphor of a tree that has been uprooted to depict how Jesus dealt with principalities and powers through his death on the cross. The word *waatu* (“he has uprooted”) highlights the powerlessness of demonic forces in the post-resurrection era. In a predominantly farming community like Oppong’s, people are fully aware that a plant cannot survive when uprooted. Therefore, to name someone *Sebetutu* implies that he uproots demonic powers and makes them lifeless and powerless just as one uproots a tree and makes it wither and eventually die.

Prophet Oppong’s Understanding of his Call into Ministry

Prophet Oppong’s style of preaching was informed by two key factors, namely; his perception of his calling and his background as an “illiterate” traditional priest converted to Christ. Prophet Oppong believed that he was a prophet called by God to deliver divine oracles

¹³⁶ Nana Kyeremeh, *Interview by author*.

¹³⁷ Rt. Rev. Emmanuel Asare-Kusi, *Interview by author* on 10th December, 2021 at Abesim.

to people. When asked by Debrunner about his call into the prophetic ministry, Oppong quoted Isaiah 29:10-15:¹³⁸

¹⁰ For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. ¹¹ And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: ¹² And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. ¹³ Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: ¹⁴ Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. ¹⁵ Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? (KJV)

A careful examination of this text would help place Oppong's calling and ministry into the right perspective. The traditional rabbinic and Christian view is that the Prophet Isaiah wrote the book of Isaiah.¹³⁹ However, critical scholarship dating from the eighteenth century has shown that the book of Isaiah was written by more than one person.¹⁴⁰ Some of the critical scholars divide Isaiah into chs 1-39 (called proto/first Isaiah) and chs 40-66 (called deutero/second Isaiah) while others divide it into three chs 1-39; chs 40-55 and chs 56-66, the last

¹³⁸ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 26.

¹³⁹ William S. Lasor, David A. Hubbard and Frederick W. Bush. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 281.

¹⁴⁰ Margaret Baker, "Isaiah," In J. D. G. Dunn and J. W. Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 489.

book referred to as trito/third Isaiah. Whatever position one takes, the text under consideration falls under the first part of Isaiah, proto Isaiah. This part is considered as covering pre-exilic time with the other two sections covering exilic and post-exilic periods respectively.

The Hebrew particle *ki* (translated “For”) at the beginning of verse 10 may express a causal connector (for example, REB has “for,” and FRCL says “Because”) or an emphatic marker (for example, “Truly” or “Indeed”). Some versions such as GNB, NIV and GECL omit it altogether. A contextual study of the text indicates that “For” introduces the explanation for the spiritual condition of the people.¹⁴¹ Thus, the first view—a causal connector view—seems more plausible. Yahweh has poured on the people of Israel a spirit of deep sleep because of their willful sinful behavior. In other words, their spiritual condition is Yahweh’s judgment of their behavior. The “deep sleep” metaphor signifies a “state of extraordinary unconsciousness” (Gen. 2:21; 1 Sam. 26:12) and the time for “visions of the night” (see Job 4.13; 33.15).¹⁴² This association provides a link to verses 7 and 11. The people are in deep sleep such that they are unaware and completely unable to respond to what is happening around them. This has been “poured on” them as divine punishment. The people’s refusal to listen to the prophetic voice triggered divine punishment in the form of indifference and moral weariness of the people.

In verses 11-12, the Prophet states that the people could not even understand his message from God because the divine message is like a book that cannot be read, either because the book itself is sealed (v. 11) or because nobody is literate enough to read it (v. 12). The nation had the privilege of receiving divine revelation given to it; yet, it was either unwilling or unable to respond to the truth revealed. If the ordinary person who could not read wanted to have information from a book, the person would approach those who can read to extract the information for him/her. Unfortunately, those who could read were not

¹⁴¹ John L. Mackay, *Isaiah Chapters 1-39* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2008), 609.

¹⁴² Mackay, *Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, 609.

able to read God's message because, for them, it is sealed. The "literate" had no spiritual capacity to open the seal to discover God's message.

In verse 13 God condemns hypocrisy in religion (as in 1.10-20; especially v. 13). The hypocritical attitude comprised drawing near to God with their lips and honoring God with their lips but having their hearts far removed from him (v. 13). The word "heart" refers to a person's whole inner being covering the thoughts, will and emotions (cf. 6:10). There is a Bono (Akan) saying that "*Ɖe wode w'ano do nwere a, bi nwɔ wo*" ("A person who uses his/her mouth to clear thorns is not hurt by any of the thorns"; that is, "it is easier said than done"). Therefore, people easily say they love God but do not practice what God tells them. Lip service is not acceptable in authentic Christianity. Here, the writer makes the point that while it is possible to conceal inner motives from humans, it is not possible to conceal them from God (cf. 1 Sam. 16:9). God also accuses the people of showing reverence for him based on human wisdom and standards. Mackay asserts that the people knew that it was proper to show reverence for God, "but it was not spontaneous respect welling up from deep within them and translated into transformed lives."¹⁴³ This situation might perhaps reflect the imperfect nature of the religious reforms that Hezekiah had undertaken. Hezekiah himself was committed to God, but it seems his people were not completely reformed.

In verse 14, God gives his reaction to the insincere worship of his people. The word "Therefore" at the beginning of the verse introduces the conclusion drawn from the previous verse. The writer uses the word "wonder" three times (cf. 9:6; 25:1) for emphasis. The Hebrew root for "wonder" means extraordinary things God does for the benefit of his people. The writer uses "behold" to urge the audience to pay close attention to what he will do. The declaration "I will proceed to do" suggests that God had previously acted in this distinctive way, generally in connection with the redemption of his people (cf. Exod. 3:20; Josh. 3:5; Judg. 6:13; Psa. 72:18; 78:4). This divine intervention is expected to remedy the people's current situation of spiritual

¹⁴³ Mackay, *Isaiah Chapters 1-39*, 611-612

superficiality and hardness of the heart. The statement “the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (v. 14) underscores that divine wisdom will make the wisdom of those who previously claimed to be wise useless and incapacitated. The limitations of such people will be obvious.

In verse 15 the Prophet pronounced doom on those who “seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD.” The people were warned of the impending divine judgment. The expressions “go deep” and “in the dark” connote activities done in secret. Even though people might think their activities are hidden from the public, God has seen all and will bring them to public view.

The society in which Prophet Oppong worked was similar to the writer’s society. There were class distinctions as some people continued to make wealth while others wallowed in poverty. Spiritual blindness was evident in the worship of idols by many people in the Ghanaian society. God had raised people to speak to these issues but the people had not listened to them. It was in this context that Prophet Oppong was called to preach and bring people to Christ. Those who considered themselves wise included traditional priests, chiefs and the literates. Indeed, Oppong made the wisdom of the supposed wise useless through the demonstration of divine power. He brought the wicked deeds of these people to light. Those who resisted being converted fled to the forests.

Prophet Oppong’s Understanding of his Preaching/Prophetic Ministry

Prophet Oppong was known for his prophetic ministry. His prophetic ministry, however, was meant to reach people with the gospel. Therefore, like ancient Israel prophets, Prophet Oppong’s prophetic ministry had both forthtelling and foretelling dimensions. He applied God’s word to the happenings in his society and also gave predictions

about life. One of the favourite *Abibindwom* of the Prophet captures his view about the preaching ministry. The lyrics read as follows:¹⁴⁴

*Eii mebɔ dawuro mede makyere aman oo,
Eii dawurobɔni a mebɔ dawuro mede makyere aman oo;
Adikanfoɔ aka aka na wo nkorɔfoɔ wante aseɛ a;
mebɔ dawuro mede makyere aman oo;
Asempakafoɔ aka aka aka na wo nkorɔfoɔ wante aseɛ a;
mebɔ dawuro mede makyere aman oo*

English translation

Eii! I will proclaim [the Word] to nations;
The herald, I will proclaim [the Word] to nations;
Those ahead of us have proclaimed it repeatedly but your
people did not understand;
I will proclaim [the Word] to nations;
Evangelists have proclaimed it repeatedly but your people did
not understand;
I will proclaim [the Word] to nations

Based on the above lyrics, the following facts can be deduced about Prophet Oppong's perception of the preaching ministry. Prophet Oppong regarded himself as a herald of God's word. He uses the metaphor of the gong-gong beater (*dawurobɔni*) to explain his role in the Lord's vineyard. In traditional Bono (Akan) societies, the gong-gong beater plays the gong-gong to deliver an important message to the people. Most of such messages come from the chief. For example, the chief can use the services of the gong-gong beater to inform his subject about a new law in society. The gong-gong beater delivers the message to the people on behalf of the chief. Drawing from this background, Prophet Oppong considered himself as *Nyame-dawurobɔni* (God's gong-gong beater), a person who delivered God's message to the people. As God's messenger, the Prophet was fully aware that he would

¹⁴⁴ Nana Afia Kraa sang this song to the author at Akonatnim on 2nd December, 2021. It is one of the many lyrical compositions by the Prophet.

account to God for all that God instructed him to do. Therefore, he knew he had to do exactly what he had been commissioned to do. Knowing that he was God's messenger was necessary to kill any seed of pride in him. The messenger takes no glory for himself but gives it to the master who sent him/her.

Furthermore, the Prophet considered the preaching ministry as a proclamation of God's word without any addition or subtraction. Such a task requires a divine calling. The preaching ministry is not for the preacher but for God. Therefore, one should not enter without receiving the divine call. In Prophet Oppong's case, his calling came through a series of dramatic events which started long ago and ended with the deep-forest experience (explained earlier in this book). He preached with courage and demonstrated the power of God to his audience. He rebuked sin and called people to repentance. He demanded a drastic change in life from his audience, arguing that "the Holy Spirit cannot dwell in filth (sin)."

The line "I will proclaim [the Word] to nations" is Prophet Oppong's promise to God that he would do what God has asked him to do. It also suggests the enthusiasm with which the Prophet carried out his prophetic/preaching ministry. There is no record that Prophet Oppong's ministry went beyond the borders of Ghana. Therefore, to say that he would proclaim God's word to nations is either a hyperbolic assertion or an assertion that underlines Oppong's vision of engaging in a transnational ministry. For example, he might have had the vision to go on preaching tours in the neighboring Ivory Coast, Togo or Burkina Faso. On the other hand, the word "*aman*" (translated "nations") may also refer to various traditional states in Ghana; for example, Bonoman (Bono-state); Mfantiman (Mfante/Fanti-state) or Asanteman (Asante/Ashanti-state). If that is the sense in which the Prophet used the word "*aman*" then he achieved his vision because he preached to most of the "*aman*" in Ghana, especially among the Akan. In any case, the Prophet's ministry had an international influence as his ministry motivated the emergence of the Pentecostal movement in Ghana and other parts of Africa.

More so, Prophet Oppong's acknowledgment of the ministry of those who came before him (including the missionaries and Prophet William Wade Harris) is shown in the line "Those ahead of us have proclaimed it repeatedly." Unfortunately, the people had failed to respond to the message delivered to them so many times. This situation recalls Isaiah 29:10-15 where the people were accused of refusing to listen to the repeated oracles from the prophet. Both Isaiah's and Oppong's audience were blinded to the truth despite numerous divine interventions aimed at "healing" their blindness.

Prophet Oppong's Style of Preaching

Prophet Oppong had a powerful voice. According to W. Schafer—the Basel missionary who was stationed at Dormaa-Ahenkro at the time of Oppong's ministry—Oppong's powerful voice made him audible from afar. He summarized Oppong's message as: "Don't believe in fetishes. Burn all your magic things. If you do not change your ways God will let fire rain down upon your village."¹⁴⁵ Schafer goes on to describe Oppong's preaching as follows: "Oppong was always most successful when he preached out of the doors. He generally spoke in the largest square available. As soon as he began speaking there was utter silence. At the beginning, the crowd was curious to hear what the man would say of whom they have heard so much and who had made such an immense impression. Soon the listeners were laughing at the way Oppong was making fun of the history of their own tribes."¹⁴⁶ Schafer continues, saying Prophet Oppong "spent most of his time telling stories about the various tribes, about fetishism and about magic and he knew well how to make these look ridiculous. Once he heard the laughing crowd on his side, he took hold of it with weird fanatical, hypnotic, and demonic power. The fear he puts into them all was immense. He would speak for two hours without a stop and only as he approached the end when he urged the crowd to get rid of their fetishes."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ As cited in Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 6.

¹⁴⁶ As cited in Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 30.

¹⁴⁷ As cited in Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 30.

Based on Schafer's assertion, the following points can be noted and outlined. First, Prophet Oppong preached at strategic points, locations where many people can be accommodated and at the same time attract an audience. If the Prophet ministered today, he would have organized his crusades at large stadia.

Secondly, Prophet Oppong was a man of great charisma, evidenced in the complete silence observed by his audience at the beginning of his sermons. Everybody was eager to listen to his message because news about his ministry had spread across the length and breadth of the country.

Thirdly, most of Prophet Oppong's audience initially got disappointed at the message they heard from him. They were expecting to hear the preacher quote one Bible verse upon the other. On the contrary, they heard Prophet Oppong tell stories about various tribes. These were the things they heard from their traditional chiefs at public occasions like festivals. They did not expect such stories from one who claimed to be God's messenger. At that time, Christianity was dominated by Western theology, liturgy and preaching style which was systematic and logically arranged. The Prophet, therefore, pioneered the use of known stories from the Akan context in developing a Christian sermon. For example, drawing from the Dormaa (Akan) concept of kingship, Prophet Oppong could say God is a sovereign and universal king who must be revered far more than the traditional king. This message indirectly means that in situations where the traditional demands conflict with the gospel, God must be obeyed, not the human ruler. This is a very tactical way of dealing with the issue of Christians living in the world but not being of the world. On the issue of traditional practices such as the offering of sacrifices as means of reaching the Almighty God through lesser divinities, the Prophet could easily link it to the perfect and complete sacrifice offered by Christ which makes any traditional sacrifice irrelevant for human salvation. Having been a traditional priest himself, Prophet Oppong was in the best position to expose the deception of "fetishism." As a former traditional priest, the Prophet had in-depth knowledge about traditional sacrifices. Before his conversion, he convinced his people that traditional sacrifices were

legitimate means of reaching the Almighty God. As a Christian preacher, he could now make a case for the completeness, perfection and finality of Jesus' sacrifice. He now taught that traditional sacrifices only foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. The Prophet's theology of the efficacy of the atoning sacrifice of Christ forms the foundation for many African theologians who came after him. Kwame Bediako's comment on Hebrews 1:3b concerning the *Odwira* festival seems to have been informed by Prophet Oppong's view of the atonement: "Jesus ... secured eternal redemption for all who cease from their own works of purification and trust in him and his perfect *Odwira*; that is Christ himself, (the Twi here— *ɔde n'ankasa ne ho*—being more expressive than the English versions), who has become our *Odwira*. The *Odwira* to end all *odwiras* has taken place through the death of Jesus Christ."¹⁴⁸ The point is that the yearly purificatory sacrifices offered at the *Odwira* and all other traditional sacrifices have been fulfilled and transcended by the once-for-all perfect *Odwira* sacrifice offered by Christ through his death on the cross. Concerning the mediatorial role of traditional priests, the Prophet exposed their ineffectiveness. Bediako's quote below is apt in this regard.

The quality and achievement and ministry of Jesus Christ for and on behalf of all people, together with who he is, reveal his absolute supremacy. As One who is fully divine, he nonetheless took on human nature in order to offer himself in death as a sacrifice for human sin. Jesus Christ is unique not because he stands apart from us but because no one has identified so profoundly with human predicament as he has, in order to transform it...This unique achievement renders all other priestly mediations obsolete and reveals their ineffectiveness.¹⁴⁹

Fourthly, after Prophet Oppong had used stories to catch the attention of his audience, making fun of "fetishism" and magic, he took

¹⁴⁸ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2000), 33.

¹⁴⁹ Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, 28-29.

hold of his audience. Here, I disagree with Schafer's assertion that Prophet Oppong "took hold of it with weird fanatical, hypnotic, and demonic power." The Prophet was a converted person who did not use any other source of power than Christ. Schafer's claim is typical of the comment that early missionaries made about indigenous charismatic figures. Wrong observation and/or wrong analysis usually led to wrong conclusions. From my point of view, the Prophet had the ability to sustain the attention of his audience. That is a mark of a good preacher. Apart from his voice, he would have used eye contact to sustain their interest. To sustain people's interest for two hours, as Schafer estimates, required great effort. He must have been a good orator to "speak for two hours without a stop."

Fifthly, Prophet Oppong's sermon put fear in his audience. This fear was that of hellfire. The gospel message must include the sinful nature of humanity, God's wrath upon the sinner which will lead to the eternal death of the sinner, God's remedy for this sad situation of sinful humanity and the demand for repentance. These components must be balanced. Unfortunately, some preachers place so much emphasis on God's wrath and the issue of hell and eternal punishment that their audience "repents" but not genuinely. They only claim to have repented because of the fear of hellfire. Preachers with such sermons may get a large number of people claiming to have converted; yet, in a short time, those people are found in their old ways. Prophet Oppong's sermons seemed to have highlighted the issues of hell above the needed level. As Schafer puts it "The fear he puts into them all was immense." He seemed to have relegated grace a bit. This is not strange because coming from his background as a traditional priest the concept of grace is limited. It was in the context of putting fear in his audience that he invited them to accept Christ and his salvation. The acceptance of Christ involved repentance, confession and the destruction of any fetish object in one's possession.

Prophet Oppong's theology was a theology of relevance, one that addresses the needs of one's audience. His ministry was an attempt to decolonize the Western missionaries' missional praxis in Ghana. He demonstrated how Africans could make meaning of the Christian

gospel within their socio-cultural context. The Prophet's ministry emphasized faith healing, fasting, and exorcism of evil spirits. He understood the African situation and connected his message to the African worldview. His ministry revealed key shortfalls of Western missionary theology in the light of the worldview of indigenous Christians. Prophet Oppong's ministry, therefore, facilitated the integration of gospel and culture. He demonstrated this in his expression of Christian spirituality that addresses issues of demonic activity, poverty, disease and death as well as the salvation of the soul.

Conclusion

Oppong's journey from being a fetish priest to being a priest of God has been the subject of this chapter. Born into African Traditional Religion, Oppong could only become a Christian through divine intervention. Oppong's conversion underscores the fact that God finds some who, by all appearance, are not looking for him at all. He started as a great traditional priest and healer who used magic to torment people and cause great pain to others. He continued in this way until God touched him and made him a herald for the Gospel. From the time of his conversion, Oppong would be a thorn in the flesh of the ungodly. He moved through the thick forests of Ashanti to preach the word of God and to demand repentance from his audience.

CHAPTER THREE

PROPHET SAMPSON KWAME OPPONG'S MINISTRY IN ASHANTI

Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong worked in the Eastern, Ashanti (including today's Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono and Bono East regions) and Central regions, leading many people to faith in Christ. His ministry in today's Ashanti, Bono and Bono East regions was outstanding. In this and the next chapter, I present key aspects of Prophet Oppong's ministry in these regions. This chapter focuses primarily on the Prophet's ministry in the Ashanti region in the context of the Methodist Church Ghana. His ministry at Bompata is discussed first.

Ministry at Bompata

The first place in Ashanti that Prophet Oppong preached after his conversion experience was Bompata, the place where he had earlier attended Catechumen classes under the tutelage of Rev. Mante of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Those who knew him contemplated whether he was the one or not. The people of Bompata looked at the Prophet with contempt, saying to themselves "Is this not the ambassador of the devil?" The Prophet ignored people's perceptions about him and preached the gospel of repentance. Many traditional priests got converted, surrendered their traditional religious charms and amulets, and had them burnt. He is said to have earned £2.10 which he gave to one Rev. Opoku, the then Presbyterian minister at Bompata to support the ministry. After some time, he left Bompata to spread the gospel to other places.

Ministry at Obogu

Prophet Oppong moved from Bompata to the Obogu district and during his ministrations at the village of Banko, he accused a woman of being a witch. The woman disputed it and declared her readiness to do anything to prove her innocence. In response to the denial, Prophet Oppong asked her to catch hold of his cross. Prophet Oppong told Debrunner that immediately after the woman took hold of the cross, the

witchcraft within her manifested and caused her to run off into the forest.¹⁵⁰ When the issue was reported to the District Commissioner at Juaso, the Commissioner arrested Prophet Oppong and broke his cross. The Prophet was given a five-month jail sentence. Later, the Governor of the Gold Coast himself came to Juaso, examined Prophet Oppong's case and endorsed the Commissioner's judgment; so Prophet Oppong had to serve the sentence pronounced earlier by the Commissioner.¹⁵¹

Prophet Oppong claimed to have received a "stone of revelation" from God whilst in prison at Juaso. He told Debrunner, "The District Commissioner had broken my cross.¹⁵² To console me, God showed me a flat stone in the prison, by whose help the whole Bible was revealed to me from Genesis to Revelation."¹⁵³ Nana Siaw Kyeremeh, in an interview, showed a flat stone like the one that Oppong used for his ministry. However, few other people from Oppong's family seem to doubt whether this stone is the original stone the Prophet used. Nana Afia Kraa indicated that it is not easy to determine the exact identity of the stone because it was normally wrapped in a white cloth and only the Prophet had access to it. In any case, there was the general view that the Prophet read the Bible from a certain flat stone. The mysterious stone the Prophet Oppong left behind, as one from which he read the Scriptures, is shown below.

¹⁵⁰ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 24.

¹⁵¹ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 24.

¹⁵² The Prophet made a new cross after he left the prison.

¹⁵³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 24.



Fig. 3.1 Prophet Oppong's mysterious stone

Prophet Oppong connected the use of this mysterious stone to Revelations 2:17, which states “and I will give him a white stone....”¹⁵⁴ He usually looked at “the holy stone” (wrapped in a handkerchief), mentioned a Bible quotation and read the text perfectly without errors. The Prophet’s use of this stone in his ministry attracted media attention. This is the way the 27th October 1923 issue of a local newspaper, *The Gold Coast Leader* described this unique gift during Prophet Oppong’s preaching tour to Cape Coast: “This man, an uneducated peasant... carried a wooden cross and a stone wrapped in a handkerchief. From looking at the stone, he cites with great exactness and precision every text from the Book of Life. He surprised Cape Coast.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, the stone became a divine tool to cater to Oppong’s illiteracy. This does not mean that formal education is not necessary for Christian ministry. Rather, it

¹⁵⁴ Walls, “Sampson Oppong,” *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 507.

¹⁵⁵ Cited in Haliburton, “The Calling of a Prophet,” 94. His visit to Cape Coast revived many churches along the coast. His visit was also meant to introduce himself to the then missionary head office of the Methodist Church.

means when God calls someone into ministry, he deals with the person's inadequacies so that he/she can function well in the vineyard. This reminisces God's provision of a spokesperson (Aaron) for Moses to deal with the latter's impeded speech (Exod. 4:14-16).

Ministry at Bekwai

Prophet Oppong's ministry also took him to Bekwai (Asante-Bekwai). He organized a crusade and realized one pound and one shilling from the program and gave the money to the Methodist Church to support a manse building project.¹⁵⁶ The District Commissioner at Bekwai got Oppong arrested because he wanted the money to be put into the Bekwai Treasury.¹⁵⁷ Upon his command, his bodyguards beat Prophet Oppong and broke his (new) cross into pieces. The Prophet was also imprisoned for six (6) months.¹⁵⁸ Whilst in prison, Prophet Oppong used to preach the gospel at night. Later, people went to the chief and the Commissioner and testified that he is a good man and so he was released.

A few days after his release from prison, Prophet Oppong was invited to the Bekwai chief's palace. At the palace, the Prophet refused to sit on the seat offered to him because God had revealed to him that the seat was on top of a large hole covered with a carpet. He told the chief that he will not sit because he has been invited there to be trapped but God has revealed their plan to him. On that day, Prophet Oppong left Bekwai for Fanteland (Central Region). He preached in many churches and cause great revival in many societies in the Fanteland. Later, the Prophet returned to the Ahsanti Region to continue his missionary work.

¹⁵⁶ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 29.

¹⁵⁷ Nana Siaw Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong* (Unpublished document), 6.

¹⁵⁸ Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 6.

Ministry at Kumasi and its Environs

Before coming to Kumasi, Prophet Opong had worked at many places. However, there is every indication that the Prophet's ministry came into the limelight when he worked in Kumasi and its environs. In Kumasi, Prophet Opong lived at Fanti-New Town, where it is believed that he built a house.¹⁵⁹ It was Rev. H. Bart-Plange of Bekwai who introduced him to the Methodist Missionary in Kumasi.¹⁶⁰

The background of Prophet Opong's missionary enterprise in Kumasi and its environs is crucial for appreciating the Prophet's impact on Methodism in Ashantiland. Methodism was first planted in Ashanti through the efforts of Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman when he visited Kumasi. Rev. Freeman's efforts initially yielded fruits as he got converts who met regularly for fellowship with Asantehene Kwaku Duah sometimes in attendance.¹⁶¹ Later, Freeman's efforts became fruitless when the Asantes regarded him as a useful intermediary between them and Maclean; when Maclean was replaced by other officials, the Asante Christians got into difficulties.¹⁶² The tribal wars affected the growth of Methodism in Asante; when "the Methodist mission suffered much from the Asante's wars and alarums between 1862 and 1874," most of the members got dispersed, and the stations, with the chapels and mission houses, for the most part, were destroyed.¹⁶³ In addition to tribal wars, the Asantes had a misconception about formal education which also affected the growth of Christianity (and for that matter Methodism) in Ashanti. One Asantehene Kofi Karikari said in 1874 "You must understand that we will not select children for education, for Asante children have better work to do than to sit down all day idly to learn, they have to fan their parents, and do other work which is much better."¹⁶⁴ This view about the school system continued to affect the growth and expansion of the church until the

¹⁵⁹ Nana Siaw, *Interview by Author*.

¹⁶⁰ Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," 93.

¹⁶¹ Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 37.

¹⁶² Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 106.

¹⁶³ Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 176.

¹⁶⁴ Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 180.

defeat of the Asantes in 1874.¹⁶⁵ The recurrent Ashanti-Fanti wars under the British protectorate affected Christian missionary efforts in Kumasi until 1901 when the Asantes (Asahntis) were totally subdued by the British. The defeat of the Ashantis by the British opened the Ashanti region and other parts of inland Ghana for Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and Roman Catholic missionary endeavours.¹⁶⁶ The Asantehene allowed preachers to preach occasionally in the streets but did not allow the erection of mission stations.¹⁶⁷

In 1910 Rev. W. G. Waterworth, a Wesleyan Methodist missionary and an African ordained minister, came to Ashantiland to revive the Methodist movement which had experienced very slow growth in Ashanti over a long period. His communicants were just over a thousand in all of Ashantiland and even most of these people were Fante settlers, traders and government officials who probably got converted before moving to Ashanti. Waterworth's ministry made no significant impact on the Methodist church in Ashanti region. There were political, religious, and economic reasons for Waterworth's failure. Politically, the Ashantis had been defeated in wars with the British in 1874, 1896, and 1901. The Ashantis saw Christianity as the religion of the victor (the British); accepting Christianity means accepting colonial religious imperialism. Again, Christianity was considered a colonial strategy to have an economic advantage over the colonized (Ashanti in this case).

In the midst of the insurmountable difficulties in preaching the gospel in Ashanti, Prophet Oppong came in to help. In 1920, he visited Waterworth at his residence in Kumasi. Southon recounts: One day "in 1920, there appeared the man called by God to break the power of fetishism in Ashanti who walked into the Mission House in Kumasi. He wore a long black robe with a red cross on either shoulder and a large red cross in the centre. In one hand, he carried a bamboo cross and in

¹⁶⁵ Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 201.

¹⁶⁶ Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 116.

¹⁶⁷ Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, 116.

the other a flat oval stone.”¹⁶⁸ Prophet Oppong’s picture below roughly depicts Southon’s description given above.¹⁶⁹



Fig. 3.2 Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong

¹⁶⁸ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 149.

¹⁶⁹ This picture was retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson_Oppong [Accessed on 16/09/2022]. I have seen some writers who have mistaken Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong for one Nigerian prophet, Prophet Daniel Abodunrin, the Nigerian prophet who was eaten by lions in Ibadan Zoo in his quest to demonstrate God’s power over the lions. Different videos and write-ups are found on the internet attributing Prophet Oppong’s picture to Prophet Abodunrin. There are other pictures of both prophets available to me. A critical observer sees major differences between Prophet Oppong’s picture mistaken to be Prophet Abodunrin’s picture and the other picture of Prophet Abodunrin. The family members of Prophet Oppong have confirmed that the picture above is that of Prophet Oppong. One physical evidence is that the size of the mouth of Prophet Oppong as depicted in the picture in contention is smaller than that of Prophet Abodunrin found from this site: <https://amazingtimesgh.com/2021/09/22/30-years-ago-prophet-daniel-abodunrin-was-killed-by-lions-when-he-tried-to-recreate-the-story-of-daniel-in-the-bible/>.

It is important to note that Opong himself went into the mission house without anybody's invitation. This probably happened a few days after Rev. Bart-Plange introduced him to the missionaries in charge of Kumasi. His visit to the mission house without anybody's invitation underscores his determination to work for God, whether he is welcomed or not. This determination by Prophet Opong and some other indigenes ensured the survival of the Christian faith in Ghana and other parts of Africa.

Prophet Opong's ministry had been a talk of the town and his name had been a household name. People had given a vivid description of Prophet Opong to Rev. Waterworth which made him identify the Prophet without the need for an introduction. Thus, Southon observes that "There was no need for an introduction. Waterworth knew him immediately from the description given by scores of people. He was Sampson Opong, the [Bono] prophet, who had for several months been preaching a fiery call to repentance in many towns in the heart of the Ashanti forest."¹⁷⁰ Waterworth welcomed Prophet Opong and partnered him in ministry as the two embarked on evangelistic campaigns together. Southon reports, "Waterworth and the Prophet then set off together and for three weeks they travelled through the forest. A dozen a day Opong gave his message, and the missionary who had become almost heartbroken over the apathy of former audiences, saw the people break down before the cross in hundreds."¹⁷¹ The willingness of Rev. Waterworth to partner with Prophet Opong in ministry is commendable. Many early Western missionaries used indigenes as interpreters, but it is not common to find a missionary partnering with an indigenous preacher as this white missionary did.

Prophet Opong preached several times a day. His way of preaching was compelling. His preaching largely consisted of telling stories about various tribes, about magic and fetishism, and he was a master at making these look ridiculous. Prophet Opong's ministry also

¹⁷⁰ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 149.

¹⁷¹ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 150.

involved a spiritual battle between God's power and evil powers. Traditional priests who failed to succumb to divine power fled from their towns and hid in the forest.¹⁷² As reported by Debrunner, the Prophet often told prospective converts, "Don't believe in fetishes [religious objects]. Burn all your magic things. If you do not change your ways, God will let fire rain down upon your village."¹⁷³ His act of contesting with and destroying evil powers and traditional deities and shrines makes him "a real prophet cast in the mould of Elijah." His messages echoed Elijah's word to the prophets of Baal "'Shout louder!' he said. 'Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened'" (1 Kings 18:27 NIV). Prophet Oppong used this verse to challenge traditional priests to a contest and each time he was victorious. He told his audience about the power of God and how God graciously rescued him from Satanic possession and obsession. The Prophet "described many of his wrongdoing in his Canaan days and in his preaching stressed the depth from which God had delivered him."¹⁷⁴ His own testimonies moved his audience and led many of them to Christ. As he delivered his sermons, many people who previously heard the missionaries preach but did not repent repented and gave their lives to Christ.¹⁷⁵

A key to a successful missionary enterprise is the conversion of societal leaders such as chiefs, queen mothers, linguists, and traditional priests. The conversion of such people proved the authenticity of the Christian faith to the indigenes and led many others to Christ. Through Prophet Oppong's ministry, "Chiefs and people alike turned from idols to serve the living God. Numbers of priests joined the seekers after the truths, burning their fetishes and the secret symbols of their trade."¹⁷⁶ The opinion leaders who got converted influenced the "ordinary" people to accept the faith too. Thus, Oppong's ministry had a rippling effect. He made the needed

¹⁷² Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 150.

¹⁷³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Haliburton, *Sampson Oppong*, 19.

¹⁷⁵ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 150.

¹⁷⁶ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 150.

breakthrough in the evangelistic task of the Methodist Church in Ashanti.¹⁷⁷

It is on record that between the years of 1921 and 1922, Prophet Oppong's ministry propelled the membership of the Methodist Church in Asante from 1,607 to 4,342; the adults under instruction for membership also increased tremendously; the number of stations increased from 9 to 72 with a staff of 66 paid African workers. According to Walls, over 10,000 baptisms followed in two years, and the Methodist structures could not cope with thousands more seeking Christian instruction.¹⁷⁸ It is important to note that Prophet Oppong himself did not baptize people but allowed the clergy to do so.¹⁷⁹ He realized, like Paul, that his primary calling was to preach and not to baptize. Rev. Harry Webster (the then Chairman of the Methodist Church in the Gold Coast) met Prophet Oppong in Kumasi "dressed in a long white gown, carrying a wooden cross, and crowned with a garland of flowers."¹⁸⁰ In 1923 alone, the Methodist Church won 20,000 souls through his ministry.¹⁸¹ This incredible soul-winning ministry of Prophet Oppong is described by Rev. Webster in these words: "Chiefs and people have confessed their faith in Christ in such numbers that, for the moment, my colleagues are at their wits' end to find wither accommodation or teachers. They have enrolled over a thousand during the past week."¹⁸²

Clearly, the response of the indigenous people to Prophet Oppong's ministry was quite different from their response to the white missionaries. In all Oppong converted about one hundred and ten thousand (110, 000) people to Christ of which at least 60,000 remained in the Methodist Church by the end of his ministry, which far exceeded the modicum of success achieved by European missionaries.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 71.

¹⁷⁸ Walls, "Sampson Oppong," 507.

¹⁷⁹ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 72.

¹⁸⁰ Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," 92.

¹⁸¹ Walls, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 507.

¹⁸² Webster cited in E. Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 67.

¹⁸³ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 6; see also Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, *Biblical, Traditional, and Theological Framework for Understanding*

Omenyo puts it this way “Oppong’s ministry in Ashanti was short-lived. Yet, according to a Methodist missionary, he led One hundred and ten thousand people to Christianity, including a number of chiefs.”¹⁸⁴ The number of converts he made for the Methodist Church far exceeds what the expatriate missionaries achieved. The astronomical growth in membership motivated the Methodist Church to open new congregations in today’s Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono and Bono East Regions.

The Impact of Oppong’s Ministry on Methodism in Ashanti

Prophet Oppong’s ministry had a multi-dimensional impact on Christianity in Ashanti, in particular on the Methodist community.

Church (Numerical) Growth and Church Planting

The first impact is church growth. Through the missionary enterprise of Prophet Oppong, many people accepted the Christian faith. His ministry led to unprecedented numerical growth in the Methodist Church Ghana, especially in the Ashanti district where many non-believers believed the Christian gospel, repented and burnt their amulets and magical charms. As people saw great miracles, signs and wonders, they could do nothing than turn to Christ. His ministry served as the turning point in the Ashanti people’s reception of Methodism.¹⁸⁵

Before Prophet Oppong's ministry, the Adum Methodist church was the main church serving the Kumasi people. Prophet Oppong’s ministry yielded the establishment of Methodist churches at Asawasi, Bantama, Kwadaso and New Tafo to serve those who stayed far from Adum. In an interview with James Wood and Benjamin Nsiah (former

Christian Prophetism in Ghana Today (Eugene, OR: WipfandStock, 2019), 31; Sarah N. Nkansah, “The native evangelist” (2013) [Accessed online at: <http://blaklane.blogspot.com/2012/02/welcome-to-lane.html> on 8/12/2021]; Casely B. Essamuah, “Ghanaian Appropriation of Wesleyan Theology in Mission 1961-2000,” *Methodist Missionary Society History Project* (Salisbury: Sarum College, 2004), 30.

¹⁸⁴ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 71.

¹⁸⁵ Susan Hanson, *A History of Pentecostalism in Ghana (1900-2002)* (Accra: Heritage Graphix, 2002), 56.

stewards of Adum Wesley Society), Isaac Kwaku Boahene recorded that “Oppong’s ministry brought so many people into Church and through that, the Methodist Church at Adum was able to open more branches, such as Asawasi, Bantama, Kwadaso and New Tafo societies ... for members who stayed far from Adum to attend.”¹⁸⁶ His ministry might have led to the establishment of a Society at New Adwampong in the Santase Circuit. The Society is named after the Prophet.¹⁸⁷

Church Infrastructural Development

Prophet Oppong’s ministry also yielded infrastructural development. The spiritual revival that his ministry brought coincided with a trade revival, and the generosity of new converts was unprecedented. The increase in membership and donations to the church transformed church infrastructure from temporal bamboo structures to large and more permanent structures, cement-faced solid walls and corrugated iron roofs. For example, Prophet Oppong’s ministry necessitated the construction of a large chapel in Adum, Kumasi, to accommodate the thousands of converts who had joined the church.¹⁸⁸ Boahene writes “Oppong’s ministry had a multi-dimensional impact on Christianity in Asante, in particular in Methodist community a large Church was built at Adum, Kumasi, to accommodate the thousands who had come into the Church through Oppong’s ministry.”¹⁸⁹

Educational Institutions

Wesley College

Many schools were opened as the converts clamored for schools. For example, the large number of converts that the Prophet won for the Methodist Church in Ashanti also informed the 1924 Synod’s decision to establish the Wesley College (now Wesley College of Education),

¹⁸⁶ Isaac Kwaku Boahene, *The Causes of Decline in Church Membership: A Case Study of De-Graft Memorial Methodist Church, Asawasi–Kumasi* (Long Essay: Christian Service University College, 2015), n.p.

¹⁸⁷ This information was obtained from Rev. Daniel Gyasi Nimako

¹⁸⁸ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 33.

¹⁸⁹ Boahene, *The Causes of Decline in Church Membership*, n.p.

the nation's first post-secondary institution of higher learning, in Kumasi.¹⁹⁰ John Pritchard, paraphrasing Bartels, asserts "Mindful of the lost opportunity in Appolonia a few years earlier, it was decided to open Wesley College for the training of teachers and catechists in Kumasi, instead of in the south as had originally been the intention."¹⁹¹ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye asserts that, Prophet Oppong's ministry in Ashanti was so marked that the 1924 District Synod decided to establish the Wesleyan Training College in Kumasi; the initial plan was to establish the school on the coast where the majority of native Christians lived.¹⁹² In fact, the College had already started on 9th April 1918 at Kemp, Aburi as Wesley Training Institution to train catechists and teachers to "build up the Church, filling the minds of the converts with Christian ideas, and leading the members to a full Christian experience."¹⁹³ This institution was moved to Kumasi where the need to train people for ministry had grown unprecedentedly due to Prophet Oppong's ministry.

Wesley College was opened on 3rd March, 1924 by Governor Sir Gordon Guggisberg. Some key missionaries who spearheaded the project and served as educators include Reverends L. B. Greaves, S. G. Williamson and T. A. Beetham.¹⁹⁴ At the time of its migration from Aburi to Kumasi, Wesley College "consisted of a student body of twenty-six; five were training to become ministers, twelve teachers, and nine catechists."¹⁹⁵ Thirty-six (36) additional student teachers were enrolled to join the twenty-six (26) from Aburi.

The College became the center that produced Christian corps of "catechists and teachers adequate to the rapid development of the work" of the Church.¹⁹⁶ The College emerged from the experiment of

¹⁹⁰ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 33.

¹⁹¹ John Pritchard, *Methodists and their Missionary Societies 1900-1996* (London: Routledge, 2016), 78.

¹⁹² 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." PhD diss., University of Cape Coast, 2009), 45.

¹⁹³ Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 192.

¹⁹⁴ Bengt, Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 722.

¹⁹⁵ Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 195.

¹⁹⁶ Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 188.

the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), to train highly qualified Church workers locally instead of sending them to Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone. A section of the College is shown below.¹⁹⁷



Fig.3.2 Wesley College of Education (S. H. Amissah Building), Kumasi

Ministerial Training Facilities

Later, the Freeman Centre was also established on the same piece of land on which Wesley College is located.¹⁹⁸ In addition to the Wesley College meant for the training of men and women for teaching and ministerial purposes, the Trinity College (now Trinity Theological Seminary, located in Accra)—which is the premier and leading ecumenical tertiary theological institution in Ghana—started in Kumasi in November 1942 at Wesley College. It was established under three

¹⁹⁷ This picture was retrieved from <https://www.google.com/search?q=wesley+college+kumasi+&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEwjm3eeF3NL5AhVNSxoKHQQ6A1UQ2-cCegQIABAA&sq> [Accessed on 19th August, 2022].

¹⁹⁸ The Wesley College and the Freeman Centre are on the same piece of land but they are separated by a road.

denominations, namely; Methodist Church Ghana, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Prophet Opong's ministry, may, therefore, be considered as one of the factors that prepared the grounds for the establishment of Trinity College. Consequently, Opong's ministry opened doors for many Ashantis to join the Methodist ministry.¹⁹⁹ With the above ministerial training facilities in Kumasi, the Asante people could now join the ministry and get the right training.

Essamuah identifies "the opening up of Asante by roads and railways, the hunger for and the opening of schools, the government's belated understanding policy toward the Asante chiefs and people, and also the realization by the Asante people that the gospel was not the singular preserve of the Fante and other coastal people" as additional factors that contributed to the growth of Christianity in Ashanti.²⁰⁰ Yet, he is quick to conclude that "while all the factors certainly contributed, it was the ministry of Opong that made the Ashanti kingdom part of Christianized Ghana. Thus, Freeman's dream was fulfilled in ways different than he had expected and by means more marvelous than he could have imagined."²⁰¹

Conclusion

Prophet Opong worked in Ashanti from about 1918/19 till 1924 when he was invited by the Dormaahene to come back to his native town. From this time till his death, he remained in his native town and worked as a prophet/preacher. As indicated in the preface, most books on the Prophet ignore his ministry in Bonoland. The next chapter focuses on his ministry in Bonoland to fill the literature gap.

¹⁹⁹ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 33.

²⁰⁰ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 33.

²⁰¹ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 33.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROPHET SAMPSON KWAME OPPONG'S MINISTRY IN BONOLAND

Prophet Sampson Oppong's conversion and early missionary activities took place outside his hometown. Later, the Prophet returned to the Bonoland where he also worked for a number of years. This chapter accounts for his ministry in Bonoland starting from 1924. It begins with the circumstances that led to his return to Bono and continues with key aspects of his ministry, especially his miraculous acts.

Dormaaahene Invites Prophet Sampson Oppong to Return to Bonoland

Prophet Sampson Oppong's evangelistic activities in Ashanti and other parts of the country became well known. Many people rushed from far and near to catch a glimpse of his miraculous activities and in the process, they got converted. The then Dormaaahene (king of the Dormaa kingdom), Henepanyin Oppong Yaw heard about the Prophet and saw him during a visit to Kumasi. He learnt in a conversation with one of his sub-chiefs that the Prophet was a native of Akontanim. On his return, the Dormaaahene summoned the then chief of Akontanim, Nana Yaw Adu, to his Abanpredease Palace at Dormaa-Ahenkro. After the meeting, the Dormaaahene asked Nana Yaw Adu to discuss with Prophet Oppong's parents to see how the Prophet could return to his native town to help spread the gospel there too. Upon his return from Dormaa-Ahenkro, Nana Adu discussed with Opanyin Yaw Kwan (the successor of Prophet Oppong's father) and his brother Opanyin Kwasi Asare to send a delegation to Kumasi to look for the Prophet and bring him back home.

Prophet Oppong's brothers Kwame Amponsah and Kojo Kumi who had recently returned from palm-wine tapping at Mmeranso Nkwanta were delegated to go and search for the Prophet and come

home with him.²⁰² In Kumasi, they found it difficult to find Prophet Oppong as the Ashanti people did not want him to leave them because they desired to benefit more from his ministry. Eventually, the message about his brothers' visit reached him and he ordered that his brothers should be allowed to come and see him. On seeing them, the Prophet went and embraced them, shouting their names and they also called his name. Soon, the message reached the Asantehene that some people had come from the Dormaa kingdom to take the Prophet away. In response, the Asantehene sent a delegation to inquire about Oppong's background (hometown) and upon realizing that he is a true native of Akontanin, the Asantehene asked the people to allow the Prophet to go back to the Dormaa kingdom.²⁰³

Ministry at Takyiman and Wenchi

Prophet Oppong left Kumasi in 1924 and went to Takyiman before moving to Akontanin. In Takyiman, Oppong preached and won many souls for the Methodist Church. God used him to perform many miracles and to give many prophecies. Through his ministry, God blessed a childless couple with a child. Also, a dead child was brought back to life through his ministry.

The Prophet extended his missionary work to Wenchi, in the savanna lands of the Bono area. He helped the Methodists to open a central station at Wenchi. This central station later served churches established in Sunyani and Berekum as ministers from Wenchi had pastoral oversight over churches in these and other places. According to Boahene "Methodist work in the Wenchi area proceeded but slowly, but through the Oppong's prophetic ministry in the area many were brought into the Church and Methodist work was able to succeed there and in other areas."²⁰⁴

Among his converts at Takyiman was Opanyin Gyan who was a palm-wine tapper. Opanyin Gyan was a native of Wamfie. The Prophet exhorted Opanyin Gyan to stop his palm-wine tapping business

²⁰² Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 7.

²⁰³ Koduah, *Brief History of the Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 25.

²⁰⁴ Boahene, *The Causes of Decline in Church Membership*, n.p.

and become a preacher for God. Opanyin Gyan responded to the gospel call and then offered himself for baptism classes. Eventually, Opanyin Gyan took the name “Abraham” during his baptism. Prophet Oppong encouraged Opanyin Gyan to return to Wamfie and start a Methodist Church there.²⁰⁵ Opanyin Gyan obeyed and return to Wamfie to establish the Wamfie Methodist Church which became the first church in the then Dormaa district.



Fig. 4.1 Wesley Society (Wamfie) established by Opanyin Abraham Gyan and others

It is alleged that the then Takyimanhene, Nana Yaw Krammo, did not want the Prophet to preach and so the king did not give him the freedom to operate. Prophet Oppong reacted to the king’s action by telling him that he would perish with his own sword. This was considered a murderous threat and so the case was reported to the Wenchi District Commissioner who banished Prophet Oppong from the area because he considered the Prophet’s pronouncement as disrespectful and contemptuous and as something that warrants

²⁰⁵ Very Rev. Robert Oppong, *Interview with Author* on 3rd December, 2021 at Akontaninim.

banishment.²⁰⁶ From Takyiman, Oppong went to his native town, Akontaninim.

Prophet Sampson Oppong Arrives at Akontaninim

On his way to Akontaninim, Prophet Oppong sent a word to his people to send a delegation to meet him at Asuotiano to help him carry his properties. A delegation was sent to meet him and a large durbar was organized at Akontaninim to welcome him. At that time, there was no church at Akontaninim, the Prophet's hometown. On his return to Akontaninim, he realized that his native people were still unbelievers. They still worshipped the traditional deities, Tan Kojo, Adampa and Dukuta. He was troubled in his heart that his people had been blinded by fetishism.

Prophet Oppong started preaching—including dawn broadcasting and house-to-house preaching—and won a few people. His people (who knew his early life) would likely have doubted his claim to be a Christian just as Paul's audience at first doubted his conversion and call. He established the Akontaninim Methodist Church, served as the caretaker and trained other lay people to join him in leading the church. Essiam identifies some of the founding members of Oppong's Methodist Church as follows: Kwame Appiah, Kwasi Kra, Kojo Kumi, Kofi Gyabaah, Kwame Kwan and Yaw Ntow (Bible reader for the group), Kwame Amponsah (Oppong's cook), Jacob Appiah, Adwoa Amponsah (*Abibinnwom* singer), Elizabeth Kyeremaah, and Maame Kyeiwaa.²⁰⁷ The Prophet constructed a hut with wood and bamboo to serve as a place of worship.²⁰⁸ This was the second Methodist Society established in the then Dormaa district, the first being the Wamfie church. The numerical strength of the Akontaninim church rose tremendously and some of his converts also became itinerant preachers. After some time, a permanent place of worship was constructed. The church was later named after the Prophet as Prophet Sampson Oppong Memorial Church (see the photograph below).

²⁰⁶ Appiah, *Indigenous Christian Missions in the Brong Ahafo Region*, 69-70.

²⁰⁷ Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 53.

²⁰⁸ Nana Afia Kraa, *Interview by Author* (At Akontaninim on 2nd December, 2021).



Fig.4.2 Prophet Sampson Oppong Memorial Methodist Church-Akontanim

Selected Miracles of Prophet Sampson Oppong

Like Old Testament prophetic figures, the ministry of Prophet Sampson Oppong was characterized by signs and wonders. However, these miracles only served as means to getting people to accept Christ rather than serving as an end in themselves. In the context of the ongoing discourse, a miracle refers to extraordinary occurrences that are not explicable by natural or scientific laws and are therefore attributed to God's power. Some of the major miracles associated with the ministry of Oppong are highlighted below.

The Fofieda Miraculous Downpour at Akontanim

Once at Akontanim, Prophet Oppong decided to preach the Word of God on one *Fofieda* (a sacred Friday), a day that the priests of Tan Kojo, Adampa and Dukuta deities also decided to perform publicly. The

Fofieda is a traditional holiday on which people are prohibited from going to farm or from leaving the village/town for economic ventures. A large number of people gathered at the community center to witness the performances by the traditional priests. The chief priests of each deity began to dance and perform religious rituals amidst drumming, singing and dancing.

The location where the traditional priests held their activities was not far from Prophet Oppong's preaching post. Soon after the traditional priests began their performances, Prophet Oppong arrived at his spot with some of his followers. On seeing the merrymaking of the priests, he laughed and assured his people that God was going to visit them in power and glory.²⁰⁹ This was a clash between the priest of God Almighty and the traditional priests. Some of his followers wanted to leave but he encouraged them to stay and witness God's power which was about to be manifested. The Prophet told his people that God was about to end the traditional performances through a heavy downpour.

Prophet Oppong raised an *Abibindwom* which he sang for a while and prayed. By this time the traditional event was getting to its climax. Clouds started forming; but he assured his people that even though it would rain and bring the traditional activity to an end, they should remain calm because the rain would "leap over" them.²¹⁰ He had demarcated his preaching post with his long cross and given the assurance that no rain would fall in that area. Immediately the song ended, he prayed that God should visit them in power and glory. Before he ended his prayer there was a heavy downpour which brought the indigenous rituals to an end.

The chief priests did all they could to stop the rain but to no avail. Just as Prophet Oppong promised his followers, the rain "leaped over" the place where he and his people had gathered to listen to the word of God. This battle between the Almighty God and the priests of Tan Kojo, Adampa and Dukuta reminisces the Mount Carmel battle in which Elijah defeated several priests of Baal (1 Kings 18). The *Fofieda*

²⁰⁹ Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author*.

²¹⁰ Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author*.

miracle served as a great evangelistic tool that led many people in Akontanim and its environs to Christ.

Praying for Rainfall in the Dry Season

It is generally believed in Akontanim that Prophet Oppong could also pray for rain to fall, even during the dry season. It has become a common saying in Akontanim (even up to the time of conducting this research) that whenever the rains are not forthcoming, the people say that “*Se anka diyifoɔ Pon Kwame wɔ ha a, anka ɔbeɔ mpaɛɛ ama nsuo atɔ*” (“If Prophet Oppong were alive; he would have prayed for rains to fall”). Nana Afia Kraa recalled one of such miracles at Akontanim during a dry season. According to Nana Kraa, it was a dry season and all the nearby sources of water (rivers, streams, and lakes) had dried up.²¹¹ The only source of water left for the community was deep in the forest, far away from Akontanim and people had to queue for a long time before having the opportunity to fetch water from this stream.²¹² Nana Kraa added that, she and her mother had queued and spent the whole night at the stream and had just come back home with two buckets of water.²¹³ Prophet Oppong, moved by the difficulties that the community was going through, gathered some Christians to pray for divine intervention.

The Prophet raised the following song:

*Bue bue ɔsoro ntokuro oo fa wa nhyira ma yen;
Bue bue ɔsoro ntokuro oo fa wa nhyira ma yen oo;
Yen Agya Onyame eii, Sebetutu Nyankopɔn eii
Awurade, bue bue ɔsoro ntokuro oo fa wa nhyira ma yen oo;
Boa yen ɔsoro boafɔɔ boa yen,
Sampson Nyame eii
yen ne wo nam a ampa ara a yen ne apem nam;
Awurade sukɔm erekum wo mma oo,*

²¹¹ Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author.*

²¹² Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author.*

²¹³ Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author.*

*Awurade beyi yen firi mu oo,
me Nyame eii, boa yen asoro boafɔ boaa yen,
Sebetutu Nyame eii,
yen ne wo nam a ampa ara a yen ne apem nam;
yen ne wo nam a yensuro hwee
yen ne wo nam a yen nsuro hwee;
sukɔn rekum yen a yensuro hwee a
yen ne wo nam yensuro hwee!*

English translation

Open the gates of heaven and bless us;
Open the gates of heaven and bless us.
God, our Father, the God of *Sebetutu ei*,
Lord open the gates of heaven and bless us.
Help us, heavenly Helper help us,
the God of Sampson,
when we walk with you we walk with a thousand.
Lord! Your children are dying of thirst,
Lord come and rescue us,
my God, help us, heavenly Helper help us.
The God of *Sebetutu*,
when we walk with you we walk with a thousand.
When we walk with you we do not fear anything;
When we walk with you we do not fear anything,
even if we thirst we do not fear anything;
When we walk with you we do not fear anything

After singing this song, Prophet Oppong prayed and it rained heavily that people had enough water reserved for future use. One person who helped to sing some of the Prophet's *Abibinnwom* is Maame Grace Anane, a relative of the Prophet's wife and a member of the Akontanin Methodist Church. Her picture is shown below.



Fig.4.3 Maame Grace Anane, a relative of Prophet Oppong's wife

A word about the song will help readers to appreciate the Prophet's theological thoughts. The Prophet acknowledges God as the source of all blessings including the blessing of rainfall. In the Bono (Akan) worldview God is the Giver of rain and sunshine. He may open the gates of the heavens for rainfall or close them for people to experience drought. In the Akan worldview, different deities have power for different blessings. However, from the Christian perspective, God has the power to bestow all blessings. Therefore, the fact that the Prophet is asking God for rain does not mean God cannot offer other blessings.

Also, the Prophet uses the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter personal name of God, YHWH (translated "Lord") to underscore the sovereign nature of the Almighty God. The Prophet does not use the expression "the God of Israel" as such a reference may suggest that YHWH's is a local deity like Adampa, Tan Kojo and Dukuta who have limited authority and area of operation. Prophet Oppong highlights the sovereignty of YHWH for some good reasons. First, it is a polemic

against any attempt to domesticate YHWH as a local deity who can be appeased by sheep and goats. Secondly, it is meant to make the point that YHWH's power transcends the supposed powers of idols who are believed to control certain aspects of life. It is YHWH who controls the periods of drought and rain. Thirdly, if YHWH is sovereign, then the Akontanim people must adopt and maintain monotheistic religion and reject any form of idolatry. The point is that the cosmic deity YHWH, who controls rains, is the one who is worthy of worship.

In addition, one finds the Prophet reminiscing such expressions as “God of Abraham”, “God of Isaac” and “God of Jacob”. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the patriarchs of Israel. By using the expression “*Sebetutu Nyame*” (The God of *Sebetutu*), the Prophet considers himself a patriarch of Christianity in Ghana. That the Prophet is a pioneering Ghanaian prophet is not in doubt. The expression also expresses the Prophet's determination to serve God (together with his family). The power of God is also underlined by the assertion that walking with God is like walking with a thousand people and so there is nothing to fear when walking with God.

Praying to stop Rainfall in the Rainy Season

In addition, the Prophet could also pray to stop the rain from falling.²¹⁴ The Methodist church organized an annual Camp Meeting at Wamfie. In those days camp meetings were organized under sheds. As the program was going on, clouds began to form and the wind started blowing. The people were worried because they knew the rains would disrupt the occasion. Prophet Oppong told them that it is good that it was going to rain because farmers need the rain for their activities. However, it is also necessary that the Camp Meeting goes on. He then assured the church members that God will let the rain “pass over” them. He prayed and when the rains came down the place where the camp meeting was taking place was not affected.²¹⁵ Two other such miracles

²¹⁴ Very Rev. Robert Oppong, *Interview by Author*.

²¹⁵ Very Rev. Robert Oppong, *Interview by Author*.

are believed to have happened at Nsoatre and Nsuhia during Camp Meetings.

Raising the Dead at Akontanim

Biblical examples of prophets raising people back to life are not lacking. One can cite the case of Prophet Elijah reviving the son of the widow of Zarephath from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24). Elijah is reported to have prayed fervently till God brought the child back to life. Elisha also raised the son of the Shunammite woman back to life (2 Kings 4:8-37). Similarly, Prophet Oppong's ministry saw the raising of the dead back to life. There was a woman named Rebecca Amponsah (also known as Adwoa Nyamekye) whose father was the cook and a very close associate of Sampson Oppong.²¹⁶ The story has it that when Rebecca was young she fell sick one day and died at Akontanim. The Prophet had travelled but had a revelation that something terrible had happened and so he hurriedly came home only to see Rebecca's corpse laid in state.

Upon his arrival, Prophet Oppong told the family members to calm down because Rebecca was "only asleep and would get up."²¹⁷ He sent the corpse to the Methodist chapel and prayed fervently until Rebecca's life was restored. Rebecca lived after this and died on 24th September, 2010. She was a member of The Sampson Oppong Memorial Methodist Church, Akontanim.²¹⁸

Victory over a Traditional Priest at Amasu

From Akontanim Prophet Oppong went to other parts of the Dormaa district to preach and plant churches. On one of his tours to Amasu, the Prophet came into contact with a traditional priest who was performing publicly. The priest was surrounded by a large crowd who believed in his traditional powers. Upon seeing this, Prophet Oppong was greatly troubled and asked himself why people continue to follow powerless

²¹⁶ Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author*.

²¹⁷ Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author*.

²¹⁸ Nana Afia Kra, *Interview by Author*.

gods. Arriving at the spot he prayed loudly “*God of Moses, my God, I have come into contact with Satan, I pray that you cause him to repent and accept the good news.*”²¹⁹ Immediately, the Lord visited the priest and caused him to enter his shrine and bring out his god, black power (*juju*) and all his amulets to be burnt. Prophet Oppong burnt the items and led him to Christ. Needless to say, this incident brought many traditionalists (in and around Amasu) to Christ.

Opanyin Kwaku Nsiah, Yaw Kyeremeh and John Peprah were among Prophet Oppong’s converts at Amasu. They joined the Akontanin Methodist Church because there was no Methodist Church at Amasu at that time. Later, they travelled to Kumawu and whilst there, they joined the Methodist Church. They realized that the service at Kumawu was the same as that at Akontanin. This made them believe what Prophet Oppong had been teaching them at Akontanin. On their return, they sought the Prophet’s consent and assistance to establish the Amasu Methodist Church.²²⁰

Miraculous Disappearance of a Buffalo at Kantanka

It is believed that Prophet Oppong went to Kantanka, a village near Berekum to preach the gospel. He first visited the chief who instructed the gong-gong beater to summon the people for the Prophet’s ministration.²²¹ The people gathered after some hours and the Prophet began to preach. No sooner had Oppong started preaching than a message came that a hunter had killed a buffalo (*trɔmo*) which required the people to go and search for it so that they could skin and share. Every person left the scene to have a share of the meat; only one woman remained to listen to the prophet.²²² Surprisingly, the people found no buffalo when they arrived at the spot where it was reported to have been killed. They searched as thoroughly as they could but found no dead buffalo. After a long search, they returned empty-handed.

²¹⁹ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 11.

²²⁰ Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 24.

²²¹ Nana Afia Kraa, *Interview by Author*.

²²² Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 11.

The following day, the woman, who (on the previous day) had remained before Sampson Oppong to listen to the Word of God, went to her farm only to find the dead buffalo lying on her farm.²²³ She came back and reported the incident to the people who trouped to her farm in search of the buffalo but again, did not find it. The two times sudden and miraculous disappearance of the buffalo made the people report the case to the chief who then asked Prophet Oppong about the incident. Prophet Oppong said that God had given the animal to the woman as her reward for listening to the gospel; therefore, she should not have invited the other people to join her in processing the meat. The chief pleaded with Prophet Oppong to intercede for the people for “loving” buffalo meat more than the Word of God.²²⁴ The Prophet pleaded with God on their behalf and the animal was miraculously released to them. He spent two weeks and all known traditional *juju* men in Kantanka and its environs converted to Christ and then brought all their *juju* and amulets to be burnt. This was a demonstration of the powerlessness of traditional deities. A great number of other people—those who were not traditional priests—also got converted through this incident.

Mysterious Journey to Nsoatre

Nsoatre, a town midway between Berekum and Sunyani, was noted for traditional powers (*juju*). The people were so much interested in *juju* that no one could go there and preach the Christian gospel. Prophet Oppong went to Nsoatre in 1946 to preach the gospel.²²⁵ According to Nana Afia Kraa, the Prophet asked the people who he was to travel with to start the journey so that he could pray and later join them.²²⁶ In those days, people travelled on foot and so Prophet Oppong’s followers started the journey on foot, taking several hours before reaching Nsoatre. To their surprise, the Prophet mysteriously went ahead of them and so by the time that they arrived, he had started preaching. The fact that there was no other road by which he could have travelled along to

²²³ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 11.

²²⁴ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 11.

²²⁵ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 11.

²²⁶ Nana Afia Kraa, *Interview by Author*.

Nsoatre without their notice, made this issue a great miracle. He preached to the people and invited them to accept God's salvation. Many traditional priests repented and brought their idols and other traditional apparatus to be burnt. There was a great revival at Nsoatre and its environs. This was the first time that a prophet of God preached at Nsoatre to cause such a great spiritual awakening.

Conclusion

Certainly, *Sebetutu* was a great man of God who performed various miracles to confirm the validity of his encounter with Christ. He used his miracles as means of reaching people with the Gospel of Christ. This fact has an important lesson for contemporary ministers. The ultimate goal of ministry is to make converts who are truly committed to Christ. All other aspects of ministry are secondary, though important for holistic ministry. The Prophet's ministry compares well with the ministry of John Wesley in England. In the next chapter, I discuss this issue.

CHAPTER FIVE

SEBETUTUIISM AS A WESLEYAN MOVEMENT

Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong's ministry had some similarities with Wesley's ministry though they worked in different contexts; this might have informed the Methodists' decision to accept his ministry. Jones Darkwa Amanor, asserts: "The Basel Mission regarded Oppong as a fetish priest and would not let him preach in their Churches. But the Methodists were less inclined to distrust an emotional revival, and were able to make use of the movement as a basis for more enduring evangelical work."²²⁷ Prophet Oppong had the Wesleyan zeal and worked to revive the church in a way similar to the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century. The Prophet had a personal transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit just like John Wesley. Both resolved to bring others to the faith they had found. Kwamena-Poh adds that both Oppong and Wesley "won converts by using appeals to fear and pity, with threats of hell fire, promises of Heaven, wild emotional oratory, and hymn singing." As noted earlier, the Methodists might have employed the services of Oppong because they considered him a type of Wesley. In this chapter, attention is given to key aspects of Oppong's ministry which makes it parallel to Wesleyanism. The term "*Sebetutuism*" refers to the entirety of Prophet Oppong's (*Sebetutu's*) ministry and the religious movement this ministry established.

Sebetutuism as a Renewal Movement

Methodism sprang up in England as a renewal movement with charismatic features, within the Church of England during the eighteenth century. Methodism was a renewal movement in that it emphasized personal and social holiness (sanctification). For early Methodists, Christian holiness was necessarily social, that is, it was essentially relational with regard to perfect love for God and neighbor.

²²⁷ Jones Darkwa Amanor, "Pentecostalism in Ghana: An African Reformation" <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj13/amanor>, accessed (20th May, 2018)

The Holy Club (later named Methodist) which Charles Wesley founded in Oxford together with his friends was a movement primarily against carelessness, self-indulgence and indifference.

Like Wesleyanism, *Sebetutuism* was a holiness movement. Members of this movement were to abstain from unholy practices such as alcoholism, fornication, witchcraft, sorcery and magic, among others. Prophet Oppong, like Wesley, taught that the Holy Spirit is holy and so can only dwell in holy beings; therefore Christians are to be holy both in private life and public life.

Though *Sebetutuism* was a very large movement, Prophet Oppong had no intention to establish his own church. Rather, the Prophet's goal was to revive the existing church and the society at large. He preached and got many converts, but asked ordained ministers to baptize them. Similarly, Wesley's goal was "Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the church; and to spread Scriptural holiness over the land."²²⁸ In order to make the Christian message have social value, both Wesleyanism and *Sebetutuism* insisted that Christian holiness should not be privatized but rather lived out in the Christian community. Both of these movements preached that outward holiness is the inner outworking of the Holy Spirit living in the believer. Prophet Oppong's ministry brought a great revival in Ghanaian Christianity. Ogbu U. Kalu defines revival as "a response to the character of Christian living and a message that may reflect the impact of secular forces as people seek answers from the religious sphere."²²⁹ Prophet Oppong and his contemporaries ushered in new Christian spirituality. He "attacked the symbols of traditional religion and nominal Christianity with the same hostility as missionaries, but

²²⁸ Wesley, "Remarks on a Defence of Aspasio Vindicated", *Works*, Jackson, ed., 10:351.

²²⁹ Ogbu U. Kalu ed. *Africa Christianity: An Africa story, perspectives on Christianity series 5(3)* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, publication of Department of Church history, 2005), 285.

demonstrated their engagement with signs and wonders.”²³⁰ The picture below shows the Prophet in his preaching gown.²³¹



Fig. 5.1 Prophet Sampson Oppong in his Preaching Gown

Sebetutuism and Church Growth

Any movement that yields spiritual renewal most likely yields numerical growth. Prophet Oppong’s zeal and fiery preaching touched off a mass spiritual awakening in Ashanti and other parts of the country and resulted in unprecedented numerical growth of the Methodist Church. He won converts wherever he preached. Soon stories reached the Wesleyan Synods of the results of Prophet Oppong’s ministry: “whole communities assembling themselves on Sundays, waiting,

²³⁰ Graham Duncan and Ogbu U. Kalu, “*Bakuzufu: Revival Movements and Indigenous Appropriation in African Christianity,*” In *African Christianity: An African story* edited by Ogbu U. Kalu pp. 278-308 (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 285.

²³¹ This picture was obtained from the Sunyani Diocesan Office.

waiting, waiting for someone to come along who would tell them ‘the meaning of the new aspirations and strong desires’ which possessed their hearts.’²³² “In the experiences of the indigenous prophets and their followers, renewal took place in the form of personal, often dramatic, conversions, miraculous acts demonstrating the power and the manifestation of Pentecostal phenomena, embodying charismatic and spiritual gifts into Christian practice.”²³³

The impact of Prophet Oppong’s ministry on the growth of Methodism in Ashanti was highlighted in chapter three. Rev. Waterworth calculated that a Methodist community of 32,000 in Ashanti in 1915 rose to 105,000 by 1922.²³⁴ Back in his native Bonoland, Prophet Oppong continued to work hard to expand God’s Kingdom. He organized crusades at different places and aided the conversion of many people to Christ. At Akontanin, the Prophet established a Methodist Church in 1925 and led the society as the caretaker. He constructed a chapel for the church. Earlier, it was noted that the Church was later named after him as Prophet Sampson Oppong Memorial Church. He also donated his house to be used as a mission house for the church (see pictures below). This “mission” house was used until the church constructed one.

²³² Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 188.

²³³ Amos Jimmy Markin, *Transmitting the Spirit in Missions: The History and Growth of the Church of the Church of Pentecost* (Eugene, OR: WipfandStock, 2019), n.p.

<https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=3gqSDwAAQBAJ&pg=PT29&dq>

²³⁴ Pritchard, *Methodists and their Missionary Societies 1900-1996*, 78.



Fig. 5.2a Prophet Oppong's house which was used as a mission house for the church until a mission house was built (front view).



Fig. 5.2b Prophet Oppong's house which was used as a mission house for the church until a mission house was built (back view)



Fig.5.3 Mission House built by the Akontanin Methodist Church

Sampson Oppong’s ministry projected the numerical strength of Ghana Methodism such that in 1930, the Methodist Church not only had the highest population in Ghana but was also the most widely spread mission church in terms of geographical coverage (see the statistics below).²³⁵

| Denomination | Membership |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Wesleyan Methodist | 99,207 |
| Roman Catholic | 85,087 |
| Presbyterian Church | 50,167 |
| Anglican Church | 18,459 |
| Evangelical (Ewe) Presbyterian Church | 14,637 |
| Salvation Army | 9,396 |
| A.M. E. Zion | 5,478 |
| Seventh Day Adventists Church | 1,077 |
| Other churches | 400 |

²³⁵ These figures were given by Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah, Address to the 2017 Fellowship of the Kingdom and Retreat of the Methodist Church Ghana held at the Pentecost Convention Centre, Gomoa Fetteh.

In 1935, when the Methodist Church in Ghana celebrated her centenary, Prophet Oppong was in Cape Coast for the occasion. He acquired the centenary medal (shown below) which was found in his gowns.



Fig.5.4a Centenary medal (showing the centenary celebration)



Fig.5.4b Centenary medal (showing the head of Rev. John Wesley)

Sebetutuism and the Development of Abibinnwom

“Methodism was born in song”, says the preface of *The Methodist Hymn Book*. This assertion is common among Methodists and it is an established fact that the early Methodists never stopped singing. J. R. Watson however argues that though Methodism is characterized by singing, it was “the youthful idealism, seriousness and a determination

to be different” that gave birth to the Methodist movement.²³⁶ The early Methodists “sang hymns in their morning devotions, but such singing was a part of a complex life of worship, study and practical Christianity.”²³⁷ The art of singing was key to the planting, spread and survival of the Methodist faith. John and Charles Wesley as well as other early Methodists wrote many hymns for the Church that achieved key salvific purposes.

Methodism was introduced into Ghana with its hymn-singing character, among others. Ghana Methodism adopted hymn singing and translated English hymns into Ghanaian languages. The English hymn and liturgy, among others, were however quite foreign to members of the Ghana Methodist Church. This led to the search for an indigenous way of worship rooted in Ghanaian life and thought. Attempts at contextualizing Methodism for the Ghanaian society led to the incorporation of *Abibindwom* into Ghana Methodism. Most *Abibindwom* are not documented and they are usually composed spontaneously in response to an event, a sermon, or a prayer. These songs are characterized by their repetitive pattern, high level of audience participation and a series of calls and responses.²³⁸

There is scholarly uncertainty regarding how *Abibindwom* emerged in Ghanaian Methodism. The possible roots of *Abibindwom* are *anansesem* (Akan traditional storytelling), songs of Akan traditional military groups (*asafo* companies), or *adenkum* (calabash) festival songs.²³⁹ The singing of *Abibindwom* offers people (especially women)— who might not be able to engage in academic theological discourses— the opportunity to express their theological thoughts in their mother-tongue. It is a form of mother-tongue theologizing that

²³⁶ J. R. Watson, “Music, Hymnody and the Culture of Methodism in Britain” In *The Ashgate Research Companion to World Methodism* edited by William Gibson, Peter Forsaith and Martin Wellings (London: Routledge, 2013), np.

²³⁷ Watson, “Music, Hymnody and the Culture of Methodism in Britain”, np.

²³⁸ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 133-134.

²³⁹ Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, 135. An example of *Adenkum* festival is *Akwambo* which is celebrated at the beginning of the new year, and which includes thanksgiving and purification rituals.

covers themes such as the nature of God, the birth, life and atonement of Christ, Christian discipleship, eschatology and others.

Prophet Opong led early Methodists at Akontanim in singing *Abibindwom* to prepare people for sermons, revive souls, evangelize unbelievers and build people's faith. They sang these songs at their services, at dawn broadcasts and at other events. Many souls were won and added to the Akontanim Methodist Church through the singing of *Abibindwom*. One of *Abibinnwom* that was sang to introduce the Prophet to preach goes like this:

Oman mma eii yen dee yeatu ahum oo;
Oman mma eii yen dee yeatu ahum oo;
Oman keseɛ Nyame ato nsa afre yen;
Hwan na ɔne mo sɛ?
Israel a yeawie;
Oman mma ee yen dee yeatu ahum oo

English translation

People of this nation, we have found something very precious
People of this nation, we have found something very precious
A great nation that God has called
Who is like you?
Israel is favored
People of this nation, we have found something very precious

The above song was composed by the Prophet during one of his crusade tours. I offer a brief analysis of this *Abibindwom* as follows. The song identifies the disciples of Christ with the nation Israel which was elected by God to serve as a divine tool for making God's will and purpose known to other nations. Israel is depicted as a great nation, not because of its large population but because God was with them. In terms of population, Israel was not that great. But the presence of God made them very powerful. The Prophet is, therefore, underscoring the fact that even though God's disciples may not be large in number, the divine presence with them makes them a great people.

The Prophet uses the expression “*yen dee yeatu ahum*” (“as for us, we have found a precious thing”) to underscore that the nation has found something precious, which is definitely Christ. Whoever finds Christ has found a precious treasure. In the Akan context, “*ahum*” refers to something precious such as gold. The Prophet, therefore, uses “*ahum*” metaphorically to underline how precious knowing (or having) Christ is. The point is that people are searching for a lot of things which they consider precious. However, those who find Christ are those who really are blessed and happy in life.

The rhetorical question “Who is like you?” is meant to draw attention to Israel’s favorite position among all other nations. Thus, *Israel a yeawie* (“Israel is favored”). The song, therefore, prepares the audience to expect great miracles from God which they had heard characterized the ministry of the Prophet. The most significant of these miracles was the repentance of sinners. After singing the above song, the Prophet began his preaching with a fearful and loud voice, focusing on the history of the listeners and later connecting their history to the salvation message of Christ and his cross. Apart from this song, the Prophet composed many other *Abibinnwom* most of which are still sung today.

Sebetutuism and Socio-economic Development

Wesleyanism showed a high concern for both the spiritual and material wellbeing of all (especially, the underprivileged). Wesley understood salvation as having both spiritual and physical dimensions. Methodism holds that God’s material and physical care and provision for his people are very real aspects of his love toward humankind.²⁴⁰ Wesley developed an interest in ministry to the poor, prisoners, widows, orphans, and slaves. Wesley believed that Christian “giving” should be governed by the principle of equality so that “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little” (2 Cor. 8:15 NIV). He charged to the rich: “Be ye ready

²⁴⁰ Charles Yrigoyen Jr, *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism* (Bloomsbury: T&T Clark, 2014), 225.

to distribute to every one according to necessity.”²⁴¹ His economic principle was: “Gain all you can; save all you can, and give all you can.”²⁴² Though such a step will not make all equally wealthy, it will help sustain the poor. In short, Wesley’s ministry was meant to yield socio-economic impact in addition to spiritual renewal.

Like Wesley, Prophet Oppong had a strong conviction that Christianity must have both spiritual and physical ramifications. Like the Apostle Paul, Prophet Oppong did not want to burden the communities in which he worked. Therefore, as an itinerant preacher, Prophet Oppong engaged in manual work to cater for his personal needs. After his missionary tours, the Prophet retired to his native town (Akotanim) where he cultivated a large cocoa farm as his contribution to Ghana’s cocoa production output.²⁴³ In addition, he cultivated crops like cassava, yam, corn, plantain and cocoyam. He distributed part of his foodstuffs to the needy and also gave part to teachers to motivate them.

Prophet Oppong was aware of poverty among his people and was determined to help alleviate it. He donated a piece of land at Akotanim to the Akotanim Methodist Church to cultivate cocoa. The church’s cocoa farm was to boost her finances and to provide the church with funds to help the needy in society. The Prophet helped the needy with whatever he had and taught the church to do the same. He healed the sick and exhorted them to accept Christ. The healing dimension of Prophet Oppong’s ministry is Christologically grounded. Jesus’ healing ministry is evident in biblical accounts in which he healed deafness and dumbness (Mark 9:25), convulsion (Mark 1:26; 9:20; Luke 9:39), blindness and deafness (Matt. 12:22), and lameness (Acts 8:7), among others.

Though the Prophet did not receive formal education, he made efforts to give the people access to formal education. A key aspect of the Prophet’s missionary policy was to ensure that schools are built

²⁴¹ Emmanuel Asante, *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship* (Kumasi: Wilas Press, 1999), 104.

²⁴² Asante, *Theology and Society in Context*, 130.

²⁴³ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 14.

wherever his ministry led to the establishment of churches. Earlier, it was noted that the fruits of the evangelistic ministry of the Prophet led to the establishment of the Wesley College of Education in Kumasi. In those days, schools played a key role in evangelism. Teachers evangelized students and made a lot of converts out of them. At Akontanim, Prophet Oppong spearheaded the establishment of the Methodist Basic School.²⁴⁴ He took part in the construction of the school building and constructed a well specifically for the construction needs and afterward, for use by the teachers in the school.

Prophet Oppong also constructed a well (see fig 5.5) to serve the needs of the Akontanim community and its environs, especially during the dry season. Every member of the community benefited from these wells. He foresaw the construction of a clinic at Akontanim as well as the construction of Akontanim road; he prophesied about these developments.



Fig 5.5 A well constructed by Prophet Oppong (for the Akontanim community)

²⁴⁴ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story of Prophet Sampson Oppong*, 15.



*Fig 5.6 A well constructed by Prophet Oppong
(for the construction of Akontanin Methodist School)*

The second well (shown in fig 5.6) was constructed purposely for the construction of Akontanin Methodist Basic School. Teachers were given priority to fetch whenever there was a queue at the well. This was meant to motivate teachers posted to Akontanin Methodist Basic School.

Sebetutuism and Lay Participation in Ministry

Early Wesleyanism was characterized by a high concern for the lay ministry. Based on the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, every believer was considered a partner in God's ministry. Everybody was expected to manifest one or more gifts within the body of Christ. As a result, the Methodist movement was fully alive with spiritual energy and power. On many occasions, Methodist meetings were associated with ecstatic manifestations as indications of the moving of the Spirit similar to what had happened in the book of Acts. This was a real case of the democratization of charisma.

Even though Methodism was planted in Ghana in 1835, the life and services of the laity in Ghanaian Methodism date as far back as 1st October, 1831. Before the arrival of Rev. Joseph Dunwell, some group of people who became the founding members of Ghanaian Methodism had organized themselves for the study of the Scriptures. It was the request from these early African Pioneers for Bibles from the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) which eventually led to the formation of the Methodist Church on 1st January, 1835.²⁴⁵ The success of Ghanaian Methodism cannot therefore be accounted for without mentioning the efforts of the pioneer lay leaders like Joseph Smith, William De-Graft, Peter Brown, among others.

The lay initiative that led to the planting of Methodism in Ghana was replicated in Prophet Oppong's ministry. The role of the laity in the establishment and growth of Methodism in Akontanim and neighboring communities was outstanding. As noted earlier, the planting of the Methodist faith at Wamfie and Amasu was the work of lay people who were converted through Prophet Oppong's ministry. They resolved to study the word of God as the best rule for Christian living. The laity continued to offer great services after the establishment of these societies. The evangelism drive of these members led to the growth of the church. Over the past ninety-seven (97) years of existence of the Akontanim Methodist Church (as at September, 2022), the society has been under the pastoral leadership of resident ministers for only thirteen (13) years. The Society was led by lay people (under the oversight of non-resident ministers) for the remaining eighty-four (84) years. Rev. Henry De-Graft Appiah (now Very Rev.; see his picture below) was the first resident minister for the Prophet Sampson Oppong Memorial Church. He worked at Akontanim from 2005-2007. Therefore, though Prophet Oppong respected the ordained ministry and acknowledged that certain activities are reserved for them, he encouraged lay participation in evangelism, church planting, church leadership and development.

²⁴⁵ Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, 9.



*Fig.5.7 Rev. (now Very Rev.) Henry De-Graft Appiah,
the first resident minister for the Prophet Sampson Oppong
Memorial Church, Akontanin*

Sebetutuism and Mother-tongue theologizing

Wesley inherited the Reformers' tradition that theology must be done in one's mother-tongue to enhance understanding. To this end, Reformers promoted mother-tongue Bibles. Martin Luther translated the Bible into the German language in a way that made it easily accessible to ordinary German. Wesley read the Bible and theologized it in his native English language. He read the Bible privately in Greek and Hebrew to have a deeper understanding. However, in his public ministry, he read the English version. He theologized using English

philosophy, idioms and cultural forms to make his message accessible to his English audience.

Similarly, Prophet Opong (being an African) read the Bible from his “holy stone” in the Akan dialect. He proclaimed God’s word using the Akan dialect (both Bono-Twi dialect and Asante-Twi dialect) and thought-forms to address the contextual needs of his audience. African Christian theology may be oral, symbolic, or written. Oral theology refers to “the interpretation of the biblical message through sermons, teachings, prayers, discussions, songs, witnessing and any oral communication.”²⁴⁶ Symbolic theology is the expression of one’s conceptions about God expressed through artifacts, drama, symbols (cultural symbols), rituals, colors, dress, church furnishings, and worship styles. Written/academic theology is a technical and systematic document reflection about God usually for the consumption of academics. Oral and symbolic theologies are more meaningful in Africa because of the oral nature of most African societies. The Prophet emphasized oral theology.

Unlike, the white missionaries who read the English Bible, Sebetutu’s biblical texts were quoted in the Akan language, making it easier for his Akan audience to understand. In addition to the stone, Prophet Opong also had Bibles which were used basically by his close associates. He also learnt to read and write but only managed to become semi-literate. The Bibles he used are shown in the picture below. His improvised pulpit is also shown below.

²⁴⁶ Richard J. Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective* (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1987), 28.



*Fig.5.8 Prophet Oppong's Bibles
(One English, one Asante-Twi and the other Fanti)*



Fig.5.9 Prophet Oppong's Improved Pulpit

Prophet Oppong ministered at the time when foreign missionaries were still working in Ghana. These missionaries used Ghanaian interpreters to translate their message to their audience. Indeed, both the missionary preacher and the interpreters were educated, people. The act of theologizing was almost the prerogative of the educated. Western-brewed theological tradition equated Christian theology with professional scholarly publications on people's reflections about God. Theologians are then rated based on their ability to interact with past and present philosophers and theologians. Against this backdrop, Rahner writes, "A theology is not technically theology when the experience about God had not been systematically, critically

and scholarly interpreted or articulated.”²⁴⁷ However, contrary to the Western understanding of theology, the African context demands non-technical and less sophisticated theology.

Going by the Western standard that guided the Western missionaries of his time, Prophet Opong was not even qualified to theologize. Nonetheless, the Prophet defied all odds and preached in his Akan mother-tongue. His message was, therefore, better understood by his predominantly Akan audience. The Pentecost experience (Acts 2, especially vv. 6-8, 11) underscored the relevance of every dialect in God’s missionary enterprise. In the light of Pentecost, Kwame Bediako argues that:

The happenings on the day of Pentecost, as recounted in the second chapter of the Acts of Apostles ... give an important Biblical and theological warrant for taking seriously the vernacular languages in which people everywhere hear the wonders of God. The ability to hear in one’s own language and to express in one’s own language one’s response to the message one receives must lie at the heart of all religious encounters with the divine realm. Language itself becomes, then, not merely a social or a psychological phenomenon, but a theological one as well. Though every human language has its limitations in this connection, yet it is through language, and for each person, through their mother tongue, that the Spirit of God speaks to convey divine communication at its deepest to the human community.²⁴⁸

The relevance of mother-tongues in missions is also highlighted by J. D. K. Ekem in his assertion that “The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable materials for interpretation, study Bibles and

²⁴⁷ Rahner as cited in Eze Ikechukwu, *Being a Christian in Igbo Land: Facts, Fictions and Challenges* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2013), 247.

²⁴⁸ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Orbis Books, 1995), 60.

commentaries.”²⁴⁹ Christian mission may therefore not succeed without taking into consideration the linguistic context of the target audience. This is so because language is not just a cultural tool but a theological tool as well.

Prophet Oppong’s ministry underlines the fact that a Spirit-directed Christian mission must break linguistic barriers to make God’s message assessable to all people. The linguistic barrier that foreign missionaries had to break was not a problem for the Prophet. Through the use of his mother-tongue, Prophet Oppong’s ministry had an impact on the “ordinary” person, whether educated or not. Ministering at a time when illiteracy in Ghana was very high, academic, philosophical and technical theology could not make any meaningful impact. Prophet Oppong’s ministry not only demonstrated that there is no superior language but also encouraged other natives to join the preaching ministry using their native dialect. The use of mother-tongue “on one hand, [rooted] the Christian faith in Africa cultures, and on the other hand, [strengthened] the universality of the Christian faith by the way it enriches the universal Church throughout the world,”²⁵⁰

Prophet Oppong’s emphasis on oral theology motivated such theologians as Kwame Bediako, and John D. K. Ekem to contend for the inclusion of oral theology in academic discourses about African theology. Even though he did not establish his own church, the Prophet’s work served as a clue to what indigenous missions should be. The work of Prophet Oppong and other indigenous missionaries led to the establishment of indigenous churches, that is, churches that are “self-governing, self-propagating, self-financing and self-theologizing.”²⁵¹ Some of these churches include the African Faith Tabernacle Church, The Greater Grace Temple of the Apostolic Faith, The Living Grace Ministries, The Apostolic Continuation and the Bethel Prayer Ministry. He did not intend to establish his own church

²⁴⁹ John D. K. Ekem, “Interpreting ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ in the Context of Ghanaian Mother-Tongue Hermeneutics” *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 10(2), (2007): 47-52, 47.

²⁵⁰ Ndjerareou cited in Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 88.

²⁵¹ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 307

but perceived himself as a prophet raised by God to make people turn to Christ. To recap, Prophet Oppong's use of the Akan mother-tongue made his message easily accessible to his predominantly Akan audience.

As an Akan the Prophet sometimes dressed in typical Akan cloth and wore his native sandals. The picture below, showing old Prophet Oppong in his Bono-Ntoma, was obtained from the Sunyani Diocesan Office.



Fig. 5.10 Prophet Oppong in his traditional Bono-ntoma



Fig. 5.11 Prophet Oppong's ahenemma (traditional Bono sandals)

Sebetutuism and the Cross

Wesleyanism had a Christological focus. Christology is the study of the person and works of Christ. Every authentic strand of Christianity needs to center on Christology. John Wesley and his group preached about Christ and exhorted others to emulate Christ. In fact, the history of Methodism cannot be written without accounting for the cross and its significance. The Wesleyan emphasis on the cross is also evident in Methodist hymns. The Prophet had a Christocentric focus in his (oral) theology which is an important requirement for any kind of Christian theologizing. Though he did not attend any theological institution, his encounter with the risen Christ placed on him the burden to preach Christ, and his salvation. He preached symbolically and verbally. In Africa, where illiteracy rate is high, the relevance of symbolic theology cannot be overstated. He wore a cross in his gown, as means of drawing people's attention to the relevance of the Christ-event (the death of Christ on the cross) in God's salvific plan. In addition, he had two crosses, one long and the other short. He held a long cross as he walked around and a short cross as he preached.



Fig.5.12 Prophet Oppong's short Cross



Fig.5.13 Rev. Dr. Isaac Boaheng in Prophet Oppong's black gown with the short cross in his right hand

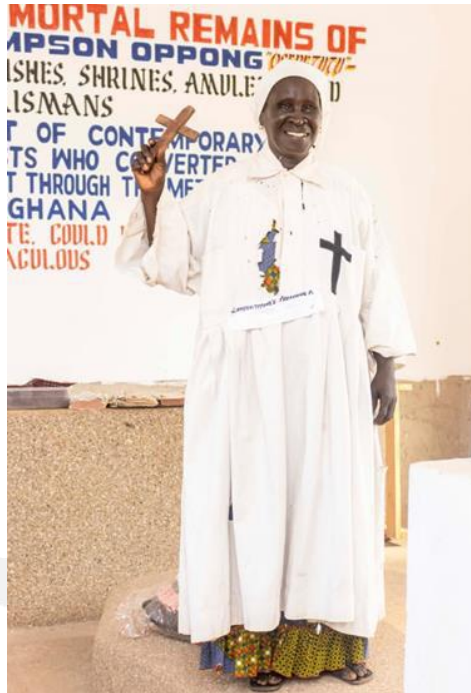


Fig.5.14 Mad. Grace Anane in Prophet Oppong's white gown with the short cross in his right hand

Sebetutuism as Motivation for Ministry

Though there is no existing recording regarding Prophet Oppong's establishment of "a school of ministry", there is evidence to show that his ministry has directly or indirectly raised many ministers of God in the Dormaa kingdom, especially at Wamfie and Akontanim. It can be recalled that Opanyin Abraham Gyan, who established the Wamfie Methodist Church, was a disciple of Prophet Oppong. The Wamfie

Methodist Church is the oldest Methodist Church in Dormaa traditional area. Currently, there are a number of prophets, evangelists and ministers in the Wamfie and Wamanafo circuit of the Methodist Church Ghana, who might have drawn inspiration from Oppong's ministry. The following ministers of the Methodist Church Ghana also came from Wamfie, Wamanafo and Akontanin: Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Asare-Kusi, bishop of the Koforidua diocese; Rt. Rev. Fred Ansu (immediate past bishop of the Wenchi diocese); Very Rev. Peter Yaw Acheampong; Very Rev. Robert Oppong (a supernumerary residing at Wamfie); Rev. Jonathan Amankwaa Oppong; Rev. Paul Appiah and a number of prophets. In addition, the ministry of the Prophet has inspired most of his immediate family members to convert from other religions such as Islamic religion and African Traditional Religion to Christianity.²⁵²

Just as people draw inspiration from Prophet Oppong, so many people draw inspiration from Wesley. Wesley inspired many people to become missionaries, pastors, and evangelists. The Methodist Church in which Prophet Oppong ministered was established through Wesley's missionary efforts, though Wesley died an Anglican ministered. The foregoing underlines the charisma with which the two personalities worked. Their charismatic leaderships encouraged their followers to give their all to Christ and also be partakers in the ministry of the word. To sum up, despite working in different contexts Wesley and Prophet Oppong had similar influences on their societies.

²⁵² Nana Afia Kraa, *Interview by author*.

Prophet Sampson Oppong's Mausoleum

For his evangelism and soul-winning for God and the expansion and spread of Methodism in Ghana, the Methodist Church Ghana has built a mausoleum at Akontanin in his name. In 2005, during the tenure of office of Bro. Lawyer William Orleans Oduro (then Sunyani Diocesan Lay Chairperson and now the Lay President of the Methodist Church Ghana), Bro. Oduro chaired a committee that nominated Prophet Oppong to be honored by the Methodist Church Ghana. The result of this nomination was the construction of a mausoleum at Akontanin.

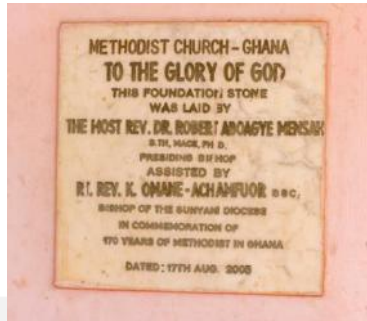


Fig. 5.15 Foundation stone for the construction of Prophet Sampson Oppong's Mausoleum

The laying of the foundation stone for the mausoleum coincided with the 170th anniversary of the Methodist Church in Ghana.

On Wednesday, 17th August, 2005, the Bishop of the Sunyani Diocese led the church to lay the foundation stone. Key people among the participants included: The Most Rev. Dr. Robert Aboagye-Mensah (the then Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana), The Rt. Rev. Omame Acheamfour (the then Bishop of the Sunyani Diocese), Very Rev. David Donald Donkor (the then Synod Secretary of the Sunyani Diocese), Very Rev. Samuel Mensah (the then superintended minister of Wamfie Circuit), and Bro. Lawyer William Orleans Oduro.

The service began at exactly 9:00 am with the singing of Methodist hymn 677:

1 We love the place, O God,
Wherein thine honour dwells;
The joy of thine abode
All earthly joy excels.
2 It is the house of prayer,
Wherein thy servants meet;
And thou, O Lord, art there
Thy chosen flock to greet.
3 We love the word of life,
The word that tells of peace,
Of comfort in the strife,
And joys that never cease.
4 Lord Jesus, give us grace
On earth to love thee more,
In heaven to see thy face,
And with thy saints adore.

Stating the purpose of gathering, The Rt. Rev. K. Omane Achamfour recounted Prophet Oppong's contributions to the development of Methodism in Ghana, particularly in Ashanti and Bono areas. He indicated that Prophet Oppong's achievements (in the preaching and prophetic) ministry can never be forgotten or overlooked in the history of the Methodist Church Ghana. He continued, "Therefore, the Church has now decided to honor him by building a mausoleum in his honor to serve as a tourist site. This will then draw believers from far and near who have heard about Prophet Sampson Oppong (popularly known as Sebetutu) to come and visit the place to have a look at the major archival documents related to his ministry."²⁵³

After this, Mr. Emmanuel Yaw Kyeremeh, a member of the Akonatnim Gyaase royal family, a member of the Methodist Church and the successor to Prophet Oppong, told the gathering about the

²⁵³ Cited in Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story*, 18.

family background, the birth and early life, the call and ministry of the Prophet. According to Nana Kyeremeh, the following prayer was said afterward:

Almighty God, Ruler of all things in heaven and on the earth, Give every good gift, inspire us to commit ourselves to the building of this mausoleum we intend to put up in this place and give us the wisdom and courage to complete it to the honor and glory of your name. Guide and protect all who will labour to construct this mausoleum, and grant that they may honor you in their work.

May we be faithful stewards of everything you have entrusted to us, that this mausoleum may be a sign of your love to all the world, in the name of Jesus Christ the Chief cornerstone of all things in heaven and on earth. Amen!

Almighty and everlasting God, by whom the foundation of the earth was laid and in whom everything attains its fulfillment, mercifully grant your presence to us as we gather here to lay the foundation stone of a house to be built for your glory. Guide us and strengthen us by your continual help, that as this work begins, continues and ends in you we may glorify your holy name and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

The laying of the foundation stone was done by The Most Rev. Robert Aboagye-Mensah with the assistance of the Sunyani Diocesan Bishop and some artisans present. The laying of the foundation stone was accompanied by these words:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we lay this stone for a building to be erected here and dedicated to the glory of God and service of His people. No other foundation can anyone lay than that already laid, which is Jesus Christ. In this place, may true faith be inspired and flourished. May the fear of God and love for the brethren and for service prevail. Here, may the inspiration for service and soul-winning continually be felt and songs of praise and adoration be raised

in honor of our King. May true Christians wish to reach the unreached with Gospel, now and forever. Amen!²⁵⁴

The prayer continued as follows, according to Nana Kyeremeh's account.

Almighty and everlasting God who has built your holy church on earth upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, we humbly ask you to confirm the foundation stone we have laid with your blessing. Establish this foundation stone and prosper the work to which we have set our hands. Defend from every harm those who labor with their hands and this Mausoleum that there would be no accident or loss of life. Grant that the work which has now begun, may be carried out without hindrance and brought to a happy in your own time and when this house being built to your glory is completed and stands in strength and beauty, let your glory dwell in it forever.

May the people who will visit this mausoleum receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and become soul winners, testifying to your love and service to the world. This we ask through Jesus Christ, Our Lord who lives and reigns with you, O Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen!²⁵⁵

After this, the congregation was made to pledge their support and commitment to the project by saying the following prayer: "In the name of Jesus Christ, we commit ourselves to the building of this mausoleum, and we pledge our support and encouragement to all who labour for its completion. As we pray our substance and all we do to the glory of God for the service of the church and the world, and the coming of his kingdom. Amen!"²⁵⁶

The building of the mausoleum continued until it was completed and dedicated. In the mausoleum are the Prophet's tomb,

²⁵⁴ As recorded in Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story*, 18.

²⁵⁵ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story*, 18.

²⁵⁶ Nana Kyeremeh, *The True Story*, 19.

Bibles, native sandals, gowns, cross, mysterious stone, and rocking chair, among others.



Fig. 5.16a Prophet Sampson Oppong's Mausoleum (Front view)



Fig. 5.16b Prophet Sampson Oppong's Mausoleum (Side view)

It is a place that many people visit for religious purposes. Any time the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana tours the Sunyani Diocese, the Mausoleum is a place he would visit, among other places.

In 2017 for example, the Most Rev. Titus Awotwe-Pratt (the then Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana) visited the Mausoleum and held a brief service at a durbar at Akontanin. The Presiding Bishop met a large crowd of people coming from different parts of the Sunyani Diocese. The Most Reverend was welcomed by Rt. Rev. Kofi Asare-Bediako (then Bishop of the Sunyani Diocese) and Mad. Grace Amoako (then Lay Chairperson of the Sunyani Diocese), ministers of the Methodist Church Ghana stationed in the Sunyani Diocese and many other people. The picture below depicts how the Presiding Bishop was welcomed.²⁵⁷



Fig. 5.17 Most Rev. Titus Awotwe-Pratt (left), Rt. Rev. Kofi Asare-Bediako (middle) and Mad. Grace Amoako (right)

John Wesley on March 2, 1791, in the home when he was eighty-eight (88) years. A week later, early on the morning of March 9, a small group of people gathered at the tomb where his body was laid to rest. They began a service at around 5:00 am and this helped keep the gathering intimate. The epitaph on his tomb reads in part: He

²⁵⁷ The author took this picture during the Presiding Bishop's visit.

“witnessed in the hearts and lives of many thousands.” This underscores that God’s provision for his work will last for future generations. Wesley has a lot of monuments erected to remember him. The point is that both Wesley and Prophet Oppong left traditions that must be preserved in diverse ways.

Prophet Sampson Oppong Retreat Centre

Upon the assumption of office, The Rt. Rev. Daniel Kwasi Tannor (the present bishop of the Sunyani Diocese) prioritized evangelism and discipleship. Key ingredients of effective discipleship include effective teaching, the study of the word of God and prayers. In view of this, the Bishop instituted a program dubbed “Diocesan Crusade” which is organized at the diocesan and zonal/circuit levels. The Bishop also instituted “The Jesus Club” to raise funds to help, especially in chapel building projects. Important to the present discussion is the diocesan retreat that usually takes place at Akontanim.



*Fig.5.17 Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong Retreat Centre
(Oblique view; as at August 2022)*

Bishop Tannor began this program soon after he assumed office to provide an environment where Christians (especially Methodists) can go outside their regular chapel environment to focus on God and issues with great intensity. It is a day’s retreat program that is scheduled to

take place three or four times a year—one each for each of the three zones in the



*Fig. 5.18a Cross section of participants of December 2021
Diocesan Prayer Retreat at Akontanim*



*Fig. 5.18b Cross section of participants of December 2021
Diocesan Prayer Retreat at Akontanim*

Bishop Tannor is currently leading the Sunyani Diocese to build a retreat centre in honor of the Prophet. This is what the Bishop said about the relevance of the project: “Socially it will bring people from far and near to interact with the Akontanim community. Economically, the retreat centre will increase economic activities in Akontanim and its environs as people visit the centre. Spiritually, people will have their spiritual renewal and breakthrough through various programs that will be organized at the centre.”²⁵⁸

Conclusion

The relevance of *Sebetutism* and its impact on Ghanaian Christianity have been discussed in the light of Wesley's ministry. The Prophet left

²⁵⁸ Rt. Rev. Daniel Kwasi Tannor, *Interview by author* on 3rd December, 2021 at Akontanim.

a great legacy that needs to be developed and promoted in order to make Christianity meaningful and relevant to Africans. In the next chapter, I consider selected aspects of the Prophet's life in the light of the life of Sampson of ancient Israel.



CHAPTER SIX

PROPHET SAMPSON KWAME OPPONG: A TYPOLOGY OF BIBLICAL SAMPSON?

Names are very important in any given human society. Each person has a name for (at least) identification purposes. In both African and Hebrew cultures, names are considered as revealing the bearer's nature and character. In the Ancient Near East, as in Africa, names are not only meant for identification but also for disclosing a person's attributes and characteristics.²⁵⁹ The Hebrew name Jacob (meaning a deceiver or supplanter), for example, fits Jacob's deceptive behavior in life (see Gen. 27:36). In the New Testament, the name Jesus signifies his very nature and essence as the Savior of the world (Matt. 1:21). There is, therefore, the need to choose names carefully only after serious analyses and reflections. One can, then, understand why an Akan originally named Abeberese ("a sufferer") or Diawuo ("the murderer") may change his/her name to Kesse ("something big"), Osikani ("wealthy person") or Odeneho ("one with absolute authority"). Why did God name Kwame Oppong "Sampson"? What impact did this name have on the ministry of Kwame Oppong? Is Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong a type of the biblical figure Sampson? This chapter will deal with these and other questions.

Sampson in the Bible

Historical Background

After Moses' successor, Joshua, passed away, Israel was ruled by a series of leaders known as the *shoftim* ("judges"). The "judges" were people vested with the authority to rule.²⁶⁰ The period of the judges lasted for approximately 350 years, from 2516-2871 (1245-890 BCE). This period became the dark period for Israel in that the generation that

²⁵⁹ Keith Sherlin, *Evangelical Bible Doctrine: Articles in Honor of Dr. Mal Couch Couch* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2015), np.

²⁶⁰ Boaheng, "Reading Ruth as an Akan Story," 320.

followed Joshua's generation fell into lawless and faithless lives. The author of Judges summarized these times by declaring, "There was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). The people ignored God's standards that had been handed down to them through their forebears. Sampson was a product of that age, but his parents were faithful to God. He was the seventh judge, and ruled his people for 20 years, from 2811-2831 (951-931 BCE). He is one of the most famous judges in ancient Israel. The account of Sampson's story is recorded in Judges 13-16. Although little is recorded regarding his role in leading the Jews, the text gives an account of many stories of his great strength and his various skirmishes with the Philistines.

The Birth of a Mighty Leader

God announced the birth of Sampson to his parents during the time when the Philistines were oppressing the Israelites (Judg. 13:1). The angel of the Lord visited them on their farm (in the small town of Zorah) and told them that they would give birth to a son who would be raised as a Nazirite (Judg. 13:5, 7). The word "Nazirite" comes from the Hebrew word *nazar* which means "to abstain from" or "to consecrate oneself to". The Nazirite was a sacred person whose separation or consecration was signified by his uncut hair and his abstinence from wine. Initially, the term applied to a person who was endowed with special charismatic gifts with which he performed specific divine assignments. Later, it was applied to a person who had voluntarily taken a vow to undertake special religious observances for a limited period of time, the completion of which was marked by the presentation of offerings (Num. 6; 1 Macc. 3:49; Acts 21:24). Being a Nazirite, Sampson was to serve as an example to Israel of commitment to God.

From the tribe of Dan, Sampson was born to Manoah and Zealphonis, in their old age, after they had been childless for many years. The name Sampson (Hebrew: *Shimshon*) derives from the term *shemesh u'magen* ("wall and protector") or *shemesh* ("sun"), each root foreshadowing the might of the child in the future. Sampson was to be a mighty sun who would protect his people.

Sampson's Ministry

Sampson is the iconic biblical example of phenomenal physical strength described as “the iron man of the ancient world.”²⁶¹ As noted earlier, he followed the proscriptions of Nazirite life, which included not drinking alcohol nor trimming his locks among other things. Even in his early youth, Sampson displayed remarkable physical strength. With his bare hands, he killed a young lion that pounced on him (Judg. 14:5-6).

The Philistines were a nation of marauders living in the west of the Promised Land. They were constantly harassing the Jews. For forty (40) years, Israel suffered terribly under the heavy Philistine hand until, finally, Sampson took a stand (Judg. 13:1). One day, he gathered three hundred (300) foxes and tied them together (Judg. 15:4) and sent them through the grain fields with torches in their tails to destroy the crops of the Philistines. He once broke the ropes with which he had been tied up (Judg. 15:14). He also carried away the massive gate of the Philistine city of Gaza when the Philistines thought they had trapped him behind the city walls (Judg. 16:3). Sampson was the fulfillment of Jacob's blessing to his son Dan, Sampson's ancestor: “Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan will be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward. “I look for your deliverance, Lord” (Gen. 49:16-18 NIV).

The Fall and Death of Sampson

In spite of his great physical strength, Sampson was a foolish man. He took vengeance on those who used devious means to find answers to his riddles (Judg. 14). He failed to acknowledge that vengeance is the lord's (Deut. 32:35; Judg. 15:6-7). He had a weakness which manifested through his relationship with a pagan woman. When he grew up he fell in love with one of the daughters of the Philistines. He

²⁶¹ J. Trigilio Jr. and K. Brighenti, *Women in the Bible for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2005), 211.

insisted on marrying her, in spite of his parent's objection and in spite of God's prohibition of the Israelites from marrying foreigners (Judg. 14:1-4).

He finally got married to Delilah, a woman from the valley of Sorek (Judg. 16:4). Delilah was bribed by her people to find out about the source of Sampson's strength. She tried several times and finally succeeded and knowing that Sampson's strength was rooted in his uncut hair, in accordance with his identity as a Nazirite, Delilah had someone shave off Sampson's locks and then began to torment him. Sampson woke up and initially thought that he could "go out as at other times and shake (himself) free" (Judg. 16:20) but could not do so because "the Lord had left him" (Judg. 16:20b).

He lost his power and was taken captive (Judg. 16:21). The Philistines gouged out his eyes, brought him to Gaza, and bound him with bronze shackles. Sampson was made to ground at the mill in prison. He had lost everything—his strength, family, confidence, and sight. Sampson was a shadow of his former self.

Sampson was given a new beginning as "the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved" (Judg. 16:22). Sampson's power did not lie in his hair; rather he was strong because God was with him. This is evident in the way God used him again even without his hair. The Philistines gathered to celebrate the victory of their god, Dagon, over God and his champion, Sampson (Judg. 16:23). They called for Sampson to be brought out for their entertainment (Judg. 16:24-25a). Sampson leaned again on the pillars of the house (Judg. 16:27) and prayed that God granted him strength and leaned with his weight on the pillars, causing the house to fall upon all who were there (Judg. 16:28-30). Sampson died with the Philistines, killing more in his death than in his life (Judg. 16:30).

The Fall of Prophet Sampson Oppong

Unfortunately, the Prophet who made an immense impression on the Ghanaian religious landscape fell along the line. Southon describes the fall as follows: "the came the tragic fall of the prophet himself, and if the movement not been truly inspired by God it would have collapsed

with the discrediting of its leader.”²⁶² Southon makes the very important point that though the Prophet was discredited after his fall, his movement continued to have a great impact on Ghana Methodism. The survival of *Sebetutuism* as a movement in spite of the founder’s fall is suggestive that it was God who called the Prophet to establish this renewal movement. This position as expressed by Southon in the above quote contradicts any claim that the Prophet used evil powers or any manipulative means in taking hold of his audience. The fact that he fell should not necessarily lead to the conclusion that he was not from God.

Suggested Factors behind the Fall of Prophet Sampson Oppong

Prophet Oppong’s fall was due to both external and internal factors. This section outlines some of the factors attributable to the Prophet’s downfall.

Emotionalism

The first factor that might have led to the Prophet’s fall is emotionalism, the undue indulgence in or display of emotion. Southon attributes Prophet Oppong’s fall to the undue exhibition of intense emotionalism, resulting in his inability to maintain personal disciples. This is how Southon puts it: “Then came the tragic fall of the prophet; Himself perils lie in these strange movements called ‘prophetism.’ Intense emotionalism characterizes such movements, and when the emotions are unduly excited, reasons and willpower are temporarily dethroned.”²⁶³ The exhibition of intense emotionalism is common with Christian prophetism. The prophetic ministry is (in a way) an experiential ministry based on emotions. Once a person is carried away by emotions, critical thinking is sometimes relegated and so one may go to the extreme of doing what is unacceptable. In contemporary ministry, one may cite the case of prophets who become so carried away by their emotions that they end up exhibiting unethical behavior.

²⁶² Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 150.

²⁶³ Southon cited in Debrunner, *The Story of Sampson Oppong the Prophet*, 31.

Enemies from within

Another factor behind Prophet Oppong's fall was the bad influence of his uncle. The contribution of Prophet Oppong's uncle to his downfall confirms the Bono (Akan) saying that "*Se aboa bi beka wo a, na ofiri wo ntoma mu*" (lit. "An insect that bites you is from within your cloth"). That is to say, the people who will harm you are those close to you, or your destroyer is right next to you. According to Southon "Sampson Oppong's evil genius was his maternal uncle, a fetish priest who stubbornly revisited the appeals and persuasions of his nephew."²⁶⁴ It was the same uncle who trained him as a traditional priest. From Southon's account, Oppong, having seen the light of the world (that is, Christ) exhorted his uncle to accept the gospel of salvation. Instead of his uncle accepting Christ, he engineered the fall of the Prophet by taking advantage of the Prophet's weakness. Southon writes "He [the uncle] knew the prophet's former weakness for drink and he knew of his vow which made alcohol his new taboo."²⁶⁵

Thus, Prophet Oppong's uncle capitalized on his known weakness and then devised evil means to make him powerless in a similar way that Delilah made the biblical Sampson powerless. Southon captures this aptly: "With satanic cunning, he now set to work to make the prophet break that taboo, knowing that if he could succeed in doing so, Sampson Oppong would lose his power as surely as the biblical namesake lost his when through the cunning of Delilah, he too broke his vow."²⁶⁶ Oppong's failure to reject the bottle of wine his uncle offered him became the beginning of another turning point in his life. As Southon puts it, Oppong's uncle "succeeded, and a bottle of crude trade spirit robbed Sampson Oppong of the mighty indwelling Spirit of God whose power he had wrought so mightily."²⁶⁷ The Holy Spirit refused to manifest in the Prophet because the Spirit, being holy, does not dwell and operate in a filthy environment.

²⁶⁴ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 150.

²⁶⁵ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism* 150.

²⁶⁶ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism* 150.

²⁶⁷ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism* 151.

Unfaithfulness to a Personal Vow

One can recall that during his second call, Oppong vowed not to have sexual intercourse with any woman, not to shave his hair or shave his beard, and not to drink alcohol, among others. Oral tradition has it that a lady named Yaa Asantewaa became the Delilah of Prophet Oppong. She used evil means to seduce the Prophet to have sex with her. The Prophet yielded to the temptation and had sex with Asantewaa. The next morning a voice asked him to open his box containing his personal belongings, he did and realized that all his properties had turned into ashes. He lost most of his ministerial/spiritual gifts. Prophet Oppong's unethical sexual relationship with Asantewaa yielded the birth of Twum Kwadwo who died in infancy.²⁶⁸ A key lesson is that people must try and keep their vows because failure to do so may bring undesirable consequences.

Pride and Indiscipline

As noted earlier, Prophet Oppong worked very hard for the expansion of Ghana Methodism. Unfortunately, Methodist Church could not contain him within her structures. Prophet Oppong's fall is sometimes attributed to his character of pride and indiscipline. Rev. W. Whittle, a Methodist missionary who witnessed Prophet Oppong's ministry, said Oppong refused to submit to ministerial discipline "in certain matters."²⁶⁹ Haliburton said he was not willing to accept Methodist discipline, especially because it was pressed upon him by Fanti ministers; Oppong is said to have had a deep-seated hatred for Fanti people who were dominant in Ghana Methodism, both among the laity and the clergy.²⁷⁰ In Southon's view, pride prevented Oppong to come back when he was given the chance to do after his fall.

A second chance was given Him, and in his own soul, he had the assurance that if he would humble his pride and confess his secret sin, he would be forgiven and restored to be used again

²⁶⁸ Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 64.

²⁶⁹ Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," 95; also cited in Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 72.

²⁷⁰ Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," 33.

by the merciful God. But pride now proved an even deadlier sin than drink. Sampson Oppong hardened his heart and refused to humble himself. He forgot the warnings of [one] greater than himself, the Apostle Paul, that it is possible for a man to be used to the saving of others and in the end be rejected through hardness of heart; that if a man has a faith strong enough to move mountains, beggar himself, be ready even to endure persecution unto death, but has no love it is all valueless.²⁷¹

While some people believe that Oppong was a person with deep-seat pride and indiscipline, and that caused his downfall, Omenyo asserts that people's perception of the Prophet as someone who does not respect ministerial discipline might be due to his "consciousness that his call and authority came directly from God" and not human.²⁷² He further notes that it is common for charismatic figures who work within established ecclesiastical structures to be accused of being indisCIPLINED.²⁷³

Criticisms of Oppong's Ministry

Some missionaries described his medium of receiving messages by the use of an oval stone as superstition. It was common for early European missionaries to consider indigenous means of doing Christian ministry as superstitious. In the case of Oppong, his oval stone, which according to him had a divine origin became a tool for his condemnation. E. W. Thomson, for example, "felt that Oppong was 'on the brink of a very dangerous superstition, which might pass from innocent ignorance into the conscious deceiving himself and others.'²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Haliburton considered Oppong as "a prophet, one specially inspired and sent by God, and endowed with superhuman powers, including prescience."²⁷⁵

²⁷¹ Southon, *Gold Coast Methodism*, 151.

²⁷² Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 72.

²⁷³ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 72.

²⁷⁴ Cited in Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 72. Omenyo's paraphrase of Thomson's view is what I have quoted.

²⁷⁵ Haliburton, "The Calling of a Prophet," 95.

Usually, traditional priests who convert to Christianity are viewed with suspicion; Oppong was not an exception.²⁷⁶ The Methodists also accused him of deceiving his followers, just as the Presbyterians had earlier accused him of hypnotism. His use of crude language or profanity led to the accusation by the Basel missionary, W. Schafer accused of him being a fraud, engaged in witchcraft and sorcery through subjective visions. The Basel missionaries were suspicious of him and rejected his services. They still regarded him as a fetish priest and would not let him preach to their congregants.

Restoration and Rededication

Having realized his sins of alcoholism and others, Prophet Oppong prayed for forgiveness. Later, the Methodist Church heard about the issues and prayed for the restoration of his gifts. According to Haliburton, “after his fall, Sampson Oppong was restored to grace. He was a respectable speaker at Methodist Services in Brong Ahafo and a special preacher at Camp Meetings, the last being October, November, 1959.”²⁷⁷ Based on this quote, Essiam rightly concludes that “although Oppong was put under discipline and lost his powers as a prophet of God, the Methodist Church did not throw him away but engaged his service till his health faded and was unable to walk.”²⁷⁸ After his restoration and rededication, Oppong continued to work for God but was not as powerful as he used to be.

Comparing the Biblical Sampson and Akontanin Sampson

First, both figures were commanded to abstain from alcohol and other things. They were set apart by God for ministry. Secondly, both figures had extraordinary strength to fight the enemies of God’s people and deliver them from bondage. Sampson of the Old Testament possessed

²⁷⁶ Francis Normanyo. “Scramble for Sacred Space: Pentecostalism and African Traditional Sacred Practices,” *The Bible, Cultural Identity, and Missions* edited by Daniel Berchie, Daniel Kwame Bediako, Dzedzorm Reuben Asafo pp. 135-150 (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 136.

²⁷⁷ Haliburton, “The Calling of a Prophet,” 2.

²⁷⁸ Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest* 66.

physical strength with which he conquered nations that rose against Israel. The same Spirit who empowered Old Testament Sampson also empowered Prophet Oppong to destroy idols and evil powers.

Every person doing the work of God is capable of falling no matter the person's level of anointing. Like the biblical Sampson, Sampson Oppong had a virus in his system. His problem was not the lack of divine power to perform the assignment God gave him. He had a virus that sabotaged him and turned his strength into weakness and destruction. The virus comprised alcoholism, womanizing and involvement in wicked traditional religious practices.

Marital life

Prophet Oppong at a later age married Elizabeth Oppong (aka Yaa Koi), a native of Abuakwa in Kumasi. The Prophet's marriage to Yaa Koi happened after his fall. Prophet Oppong and his wife lived at Akonatanim. They gave birth to a male child and named him Samuel Kofi Oppong. The child died at age five. They did not have any children again. Madam Elizabeth, however, had some children before marrying Sampson. The Prophet built another house and stayed there with his family. The house has the following inscription: Prophet Sampson Oppong (Osebetutu) *Wobisa wo fie, wommisa wo sika*; Akontanin B/A. *Nyamebkyere*. The house was later renovated by the Methodist Church to reach its present state.



Fig.6.1 Renovated Prophet Oppong's House, Akontanin

Madam Elizabeth once accused Oppong of having an affair with her daughter (Prophet Oppong's step-daughter). The Prophet said the allegation was not true, and when the wife insisted he had committed the incestuous act, he said if the allegation is false, his wife would suffer for it. It is believed that the wife suffered before her death because of the false allegation. Oppong spent most of his time on his farmland with his wife and cultivated a larger cocoa farm. In his old age, Oppong bought a rocking chair in which he relaxed, especially in the afternoon and evening.



Fig.6.2 Prophet Oppong's rocking chair

The Death and Funeral of Sampson Oppong

Before his death, Prophet Oppong had a difficult time. In his old age, he had a large sore on his leg which defied treatment. Oral sources say he rejected orthodox medicine for fear that his leg might be amputated.²⁷⁹ Haliburton confirms this assertion by saying, “he refused amputation of a diseased leg and died.”²⁸⁰ He died peacefully on Tuesday 23rd March 1965 at age 81 at his Akonatnim residence. In an interview with Essiam, Opanyin Yaw Duku said the Prophet predicted the date of his own death and it happened exactly on that date.²⁸¹

Prophet Oppong’s death was communicated to the Methodist Church Ghana through the Bishop of the Sunyani Diocese. A committee (comprising members of the Prophet’s family and the Methodist Church) was formed to plan the funeral rites.

On the day of the funeral while Oppong’s body was laid in the state a miracle occurred. Oral sources have it that the Prophet’s cross was made to lean against the walls of the chapel in which his body was laid in state. After the officiating minister had asked that the body be put in the coffin, a clap of thunder was heard, and a bright path was seen in the sky (by those outside the chapel). Suddenly, the cross on the wall fell down, whirled round for some time and settled on the Prophet’s coffin. After expressing their shock for some time, the people proceeded to bury the man of God near the Church he established.

²⁷⁹ Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 67.

²⁸⁰ Haliburton, “The Calling of a Prophet,” 2.

²⁸¹ Cited by Essiam, *The Prophetic Voice that Shook the Forest*, 67.



Fig.6.3 Tomb of Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong

In front of the tomb is a monument showing the bust of the Prophet. The bust depicts adult Prophet Oppong dress in his preaching vestment wearing a hat.



Fig.6.4 Bust of Prophet Oponng (side view)



Fig.6.5 Bust of Prophet Oppong (front view)

A Posthumous Award to the Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong

The Methodist Church Ghana later gave a posthumous award to Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong. On 11th May, 2006, a delegation of the Gyaase family of Akontanin, led by Oppong's successor, Opanyin E. Y. Kyeremeh, and Margaret Kumi (then Gyaasehema) were invited to receive the award at an annual Synod of the Sunyani Diocese. The award included a Holy Bible and a soul-winning certificate.

Conclusion

Prophet Oppong's downfall tells us that no one is immune to sin. It is, therefore, important that Christians acknowledge their weaknesses and then strive to overcome them. It is better to avoid going to places where you know you can easily fall into temptation. Ministers must avoid being alone with the opposite sex in a room. The anointing of God will not drag you from such places; you need to make effort to run away. These are valid conclusions from the fall of the mighty Prophet. God showed him mercy and restored him; not all people may be restored when they fall. It is therefore important to stand firm.



FINAL WORDS

Overall, Oppong's ministry underscores that God can use anyone as an instrument for the propagation of the gospel no matter the person's background. In the Bible, God called men such as Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah and others for his work. These and other people, when called, felt they were unqualified for the divine assignment. God, however, equipped them for his task. From a human perspective, Oppong was not qualified to work for God; yet, God used him greatly. The abilities of Sampson Oppong, who was not formally educated, to preach and read the Bible may have encouraged the uneducated to believe that one could be used mightily by God without having formal education. This, however, does not mean formal (theological) education is not important for Christian ministry.

Oppong's ministry was in line with the Church's call to serve God and not to serve mammon. His passion for ministry was not motivated by material gains, fame or honor. Unfortunately, some contemporary pastors have replaced this long tradition with the love for wealth, fame and honor rather than true spirituality. As J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu rightly notes, today's church is "committed not to the core business of mission or the things of the Spirit as defined by the Cross, but carnality that manifests in foolish jesting, ecclesiastical pomposity, and the exploitation of the Gospel for economic gain."²⁸² For this reason, prosperity preaching abounds in which it is taught that believers cannot suffer and that if a person is suffering then he/she is not a true believer. A discussion of Oppong's ministry is a call to the cross. Christians must take up their cross and follow Christ on daily basis.

²⁸² J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Jesus our Immanuel* (Accra: African Christian Press), 140.

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