The Church in Africa faces many challenges. While some such challenges are political and social, others are religious. The major contemporary religious challenge is religious pluralism. This is due to the proliferation of various New Religious Movements on the continent.

The Church in this presentation refers to the oldest churches in Africa. These are the Christian denominations founded by Missionaries. They are popularly known as Mainline or Historic or Orthodox Churches. They include churches such as the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Churches, the Methodist Church and the Anglican Church. We will focus on these because of their privilege of age. Moreover, it is these churches that face the challenge of most new religious movements. That is movement from within Christianity and outside. In Ghana, which will provide most of the examples for our discussion, the New Religious Movements draw about 95% of their members from the Mainline Churches. Our focus on the Mainline Churches does not, however, mean that the other Christian denominations are not part of the Church of Christ.

New Religious Movements according to Beckford and Levasseur (1986:29) are "...organized attempts to mobilize human and material resources for the spreading of new ideas and religious sensibilities." Generally, the term is a broad term that covers a post second world war proliferation of movements of religious ethos and ambience. Though a worldwide phenomenon of rich variety, they bear a family resemblance in spite of their different roots and ethos. Most of the movements identified with the phenomenon have previously attracted the designations of cults, sects, deviations, etc. As Rajashekar (1987:X) points out, all these terms are valueloaded in a negative way. The term New Religious Movements (NRM) is, however, of neutral value. As a valuefree term, it is phenomenologically suitable and enables the study of movements as they really are without preconceived notions and prejudices. This does not rule

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Exchange 27,1
out the sub-designation of NRMNs as sects, cults, etc., if their features fit such definition. It is only fair that movements be studied first before being so designated.

We will first indicate the variety and types of New Religious Movements that the church faces. We will draw our examples from Ghanaian experience. We will then discuss the challenges that these movements pose to the Church. Then we will review the reactions of the church to these movements. We will finally make some observations regarding how the Church could face the challenge of the New Religious Movements.

A Typology of New Religious Movements

There are a variety of New Religious Movements in Africa today. Using Ghana as an example, we may classify these movements into five main groups. We base our classification mainly on the roots and origins of the belief systems of these groups. Some of these relate to the major religious traditions of the world. These are:

- New African Traditional Religious Movements
- Oriental New Religious movements and Western psycho-therapeutic (new age) movements and Esoteric self improvement societies of Eastern ethos
- New Religious Movements from the African Diaspora
- Islamic New Religious Movements
- Christian New Religious Movements

New African Traditional Religious Movements

New African traditional movements are movements that arose within the matrix of Traditional Religions. Most of these movements emerged as a result of the encounter of African religion and culture with Christianity and Western civilization. Many of them are "vitalistic". That is to say they borrow selected elements from Christianity but remain essentially traditional. They also fit into Hackett’s (1991:145) classification of "individualization" movements. By this she means that the cults serve religious and psychological needs of members in times of sickness, death and misfortune. A good example of such movements is the genre of movements that have come to bear the name of the most popular of them, Tigare. These spread across West Africa especially from 1914 and reached their peak in the 1950s. Field (1940, 1948, 1960, 1971) and Christenson (1954) among others have documented these movements. They are at times designated as "Medicine drinking cults". This is because