Followign Israel's common tradition of commemorating national victories in war with songs, we read from the “Song of Deborah” that "Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah arose, arose a mother in Israel. . . . . Then the people of the Lord went down to the city gates. Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song!” (Judg 5: 6-8, 11-12, 31). This article is on the significant role that women are assuming as pastors in the charismatic churches of West Africa and the implications this has for Christian mission.

The charismatic churches belong to what in Europe and North America may be referred to as the neo-Pentecostal tradition. The term “neo-Pentecostal” was used at the outset of the charismatic renewal movement in the mainline churches in these Western countries. It will be used in this article as a blanket term for the Christian renewal phenomena which have proliferated and gained significance in West Africa within the last three decades. As I shall indicate in the course of this article, the neo-Pentecostal movement has manifested in various forms across West Africa. It is to their institutionalized form as “churches” in West Africa that we apply the term “charismatic.” This designation is significant because the churches concerned speak of themselves as “charismatic churches” or “charismatic ministries,” and this is how they are known in the sub-region.

This article draws on the case of Pastor Christy Doe Tetteh, founder and leader of the Solid Rock Chapel based at North Kaneshie in Accra, Ghana. In my interview with Pastor Tetteh in August 1996, she made references to occasions during her training in which colleagues referred to her as "a fireball in our midst." Her rise to fame and pioneering role as the first female founder of a charismatic church in Ghana is frequently referred to by admirers as being reminiscent of the role that Deborah played in leading Israel to victory over Canaan.

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Current Developments in Christian Growth

The observation by David Barrett (1970) that the "centre of gravity" of the Christian faith has shifted towards the southern continents has been reiterated in various ways by scholars interested in the theological and historical development of Christianity in the third world and its implications for Christian mission. There is no gainsaying the fact that this observation on the phenomenal upsurge of Christianity has been unfolding before our eyes perhaps even faster than was originally anticipated by Barrett.

Walter J. Hollenweger was one of the first to draw out the denominational demographic implications of Barrett's statistics by stating that by the year 2000 AD, Pentecostal Christians will number as many as all other Protestants together. He notes that "taken together with the general trends in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, this indicates that the numerical and perhaps also the spiritual centre of Christianity will shift away from white western forms to this new type of Christianity" (Hollenweger 1986: 3).

The Pentecostal Factor in Church Growth

In the global mission of Christianity, the churches of the third world are generally younger than those of the western world. Within third world countries themselves, the Pentecostal churches are also relatively younger than their traditional western mission counterparts, which includes both the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant churches. The implication of the recent phenomenal growth in third world Christianity then is that this growth has been most noticeable among Pentecostals.

At a time when church buildings in parts of the West are either closing down or metamorphosing into museums, restaurants, pubs, supermarkets, recreational centers, warehouses, mosques, and not in a few cases Buddhist and Hindu temples, the exact opposite is happening across Christian Africa. Cinema houses, dance halls, public assembly halls, beer bars and other such properties originally meant for commercial, secular or mundane uses have either been bought or rented for use as meeting places for new churches.

In Accra, the capital of Ghana, the Baden-Powell memorial assembly hall, the Veterans Association of Ghana hall, the Orion, Globe, Odeon and Regal cinema houses and a number of former drinking bars are all now the meeting places of various Pentecostal churches. Churches meet under each of the pavilions at the Ghana Trade Fair site in Accra. In Ghana's "twin-city" of Sekondi-Takoradi, the Western Region's capital, the Princess and Prempeh cinema houses and two unused Ghana Air Force hangars are all meeting places for churches, and the story is no different in other urban centers. Add to this