ARTICLES

“Missionaries without Robes”:
Lay Charismatic Fellowships and the Evangelization of Ghana

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Scholars who track and interpret the historical development of Christianity in Africa typically highlight the phenomenal growth in numbers, the diversity of fellowships and denominations, and the impact that the faith is having on the peoples of the continent. In a recent publication, for example, Paul Gifford notes the impact of Christianity on Africa when he quotes Adrian Hastings: “Black Africa today is totally inconceivable apart from the presence of Christianity, a presence which a couple of generations ago could still be not unreasonably dismissed as fundamentally marginal and a mere subsidiary aspect of colonialism.”

It is pertinent to point out that although there has been a general upsurge in Christian activity, especially in the two-thirds world, the growth has been most noticeable within the Pentecostal/charismatic strand of Christianity. Walter Hollenweger drew attention to this growth when he observed that by the year 2000, the population of Pentecostal Christians will number as many as all other Protestant groups together. He draws out the implications of the phenomenal growth of Pentecostal Christianity when he states:

*It reveals that the overwhelming part of this Christianity belongs either to the indigenous non-white or to the Third-World Pentecostal churches. 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. Christianity as a whole will no longer be a predominantly white person's religion.²

As I have noted elsewhere,³ at a time when chapels in Europe are being converted into wholesale warehouses, drinking bars, restaurants, museum monuments, and, in not a few instances, Buddhist and Hindu temples, churches in my native Ghana are struggling to find places to meet. Cinema houses and other property originally built for commercial and secular purposes have now been converted to places of worship. If the growth continues at the present rate, one could surmise positively that many countries in sub-Saharan Africa could become strong Christian nations with the church as their conscience.

Two of the primary influences of Pentecostalism on Ghanaian Christianity have come through the lay-oriented fellowships of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) and Women's Aglow. This article will analyze the rise of these Pentecostal lay movements within the Ghanaian development of Christianity, provide an overview of the historical development of FGBMFI and Women's Aglow in Ghana, and identify the impact of these two Pentecostal movements on Christianity and society in Ghana.

**Pentecostal Waves and Lay Initiatives in Ghana**

One cannot go far in the study of the wide-ranging and manifold phenomena found in the modern religious life of Africa without some system of classification.⁴ However, when it comes to categorizing the different types of Pentecostals in Ghana, I hesitate to use strict typologies, preferring to see them rather as waves of the same movement whose emergence and existence, although occurring at different times, dovetail into each other.⁵ Certain aspects and versions of the movement may wane but are unlikely to perish without trace because previous Pentecostal movements tend to influence subsequent ones, especially if they emerge within the same cultural context.

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⁵This hesitation does not mean that typologies are not useful. In spite of their limitations, they help to give a general impression of categories of religious movements in various contexts. For an example of a useful typology of Pentecostal movements in Ghana, see Cephas Omenyo, "The Charismatic Movement in Ghana," *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 16 (fall 1994): 169-185.