

Volume 1, Issue 2 (December 2024)
ISSN 3049-9704

Journal of Religion

and Public Life



OCRPL

Oxford Centre for
Religion and Public Life



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Contemporary Prophetic Ministry in Ghana: An Explorative Focus on the Appellations of Ghanaian Prophets and the Implications for Mission and Evangelism

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Abstract: The rise of Pentecostalism in Ghana has reignited the flames of the prophetic ministry with nearly all the prophets carrying unique titles or appellations. This paper explores the contemporary prophetic ministry in Ghana with a focus on the appellations of Ghanaian prophets and the implications for mission and evangelism. It also examines the various appellations used to refer to prophets in Ghana such as 'obotan', 'nation's prophet', 'Eagle prophet', 'prophet one', 'bulldozer', 'akwadaa nyame', 'one touch', 'ogya nyame', 'owuo mpo suro' etc. and how these appellations reflect the prophets' self-understanding, their role and calling as God's representatives in the nation.

In contemporary Ghana, the appellations of prophets are mostly used as a 'marketing tool' to draw attention unto themselves. The appellations are also closely tied to the spiritual authority, legitimacy, and influence of the prophets but have little to do with mission and evangelism.

Through the missionary activities of Western mission societies in Africa, the African church's model of participating in God's mission and evangelism remains Western in nature. This paper discusses the potential of using appellations as a tool for mission and evangelism in the Ghanaian context. It contends that embedded in the various appellations are divine messages, divine symbolism, traditional wisdom, and dynamic insights necessary for effective mission praxis by the Ghanaian church.

The paper thus contributes to the broader discussion on domesticating the Christian faith and its ministry in Africa with a special emphasis on the appellations of Ghanaian prophets in contemporary Ghana.

Keywords: Ghana, Pentecostalism, Prophetic Ministry, Appellation.

1.0 Introduction

This paper discusses contemporary prophetic ministry in Ghana, examines the use of appellations by selected Ghanaian prophets, and the impact of the appellations on

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Christian mission. While appellations are largely used as a ‘marketing tool’ within the Ghanaian Christian space by most prophets, this paper contends that appellations can be deployed as a paradigm for mission and evangelism. Mission as mentioned here refers to God’s plan of rescuing and restoring fallen humanity and the created order (Okesson, 2020:65-93; Bosch, 2002:390).²

Over the years, the success story of Pentecostalism in the world as the fastest growing group of churches within the Christian church space is well documented and has generated interest in both academia and church circle (Anderson, 2004:1).³

Pentecostalism has many dimensions, and the phenomenon continues to unfold with the passage of time. Much research and writings have emerged from scholars such as Asamoah-Gyadu, Allan Anderson, Ogbu Kalu, and Opoku Onyinah among many others with the focus on the various religious and ethical dimensions of the phenomenon. Out of the different strands of the Pentecostal phenomenon identified by scholars like Asamoah-Gyadu, it is the prophetic churches which operate a system of Christianity evocative of the older African Independent Churches (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2010:9).⁴

The era of prophetic ministry under consideration in this paper covers the period referred to by Ayeh as the 5th and 6th phases of prophetism in Ghana with occasional reference to earlier periods (Ayeh, 2014:6-7).⁵ The prophetic churches profoundly emphasize on the ‘prophetic’ to give credence to their genre. Reference to the ‘prophetic’ indicates a sense of divine inspiration, insight, and guidance. The use of the word prophetic here therefore suggests a situation where individuals or church members receive personal prophecies about their lives based on revelation (Ayeh, 2017:6-7).⁶

It is fair to postulate that the prophetic strand of Pentecostalism has emerged as a force to reckon with within Ghanaian society. Characterized by a strong emphasis on divine revelation, deep spiritual insight, and attractive appellations signifying the origin, mandate, and competence of the prophet, the prophetic ministry in Ghana has grown exponentially in contemporary times.

² Gregg, Okesson, *A Public Missiology: How local churches witness to a complex world*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 65-93.

David J. Bosch, *David, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 390.

³ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

⁴ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Taking Territories & Raising Champions”: Contemporary Pentecostalism and the Changing Face of Christianity in Africa 1980 – 2010, (Accra: Trinity Press, 2010), 9.

⁵ Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, *Hermeneutics of Re-enacting Biblical Text(s) and Concept(s) in the History of Prophetism in Ghana’s Christianity: A Case Study of the Ministry of Agabus and Prophet Bernard Opoku Nsiah*, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, (UNISA: 2017), 6-7.

⁶ Ibid.

According to the Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics, appellation is generally rendered as a term usually used to refer to a name or label given to an individual, place, or thing. Appellations can also refer to a title or designation that indicates a person's status, profession, or affiliation (Brown et al. 2006).⁷

An appellation is therefore a name or title people call themselves and are called by others. It could also be considered as an exaggerated language of description of someone, a place, or a thing. Appellations carry with them a functional description, history of origin, and promise of a unique advantage or support. It is also indicative of the territorial dominance of the individual and the boundaries others must observe so that there will be peace and tranquility.

Scholars like Adamo, Asante, Annorbah-Sarpei, Arhin, Gyekye and Boahen have written about these traditional tools as a means of communicating moral lessons within the African context. Not much work has been done to look at the mission and evangelism potential of these traditional tools.

With the focus on appellations of selected Ghanaian prophets, this paper discusses the prophetic ministry in Ghana, appellations of some prophets, the potential of using appellation as a tool for mission and evangelism and then a conclusion.

1.1 The Prophetic Ministry in the Ghanaian Context

Ghana is an independent West African country with an estimated population of 33,480,000 according to the 2022 National Population and Housing Census. Over 70% of this population profess to be Christians. Although politically independent, Ghana like most of its West African neighbours continues to face some significant social, political, and economic challenges. The massive unemployment ratio has created some amount of desperation among the populace. This situation coupled with high illiteracy have made the prophetic ministry exceedingly handy.

Prophets and the prophetic ministry have been a regular feature of the religious concept of the African since the days of the African Independent Churches (AICs). Prophets William Wadé Harris (1860-1929), John Swatson (1855-1925), and Kwame Sampson Oppong (1884-1965) are regarded as founders of AICs and forerunners of the prophetic ministry or Pentecostalism in Ghana. They prophesied and were consulted on a wide range of issues (Baeta, 1962:23).⁸

⁷ Brown, K. et al. (2006). *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. Elsevier. ISBN 978-0-08-044299-0.

⁸ Christian Goncalves Baeta, "Prophetism in Ghana: A study of some 'Spiritual' Churches", London: SCM Press, *World Mission Series* xiii 169, (1962), 23.

The prophets in this dispensation carried appellations which were mostly formal and strictly reflected their role, status, or abilities. For instance, Prophet Sampson Oppong, the renowned Ghanaian prophet was popularly referred to as “*Sebetutu*” which literally means destroyer of native charms or personal deities. This appellation emphasized his strength and the Ghanaian people’s acceptance of him as God’s “Messenger”, “Angel” and a “Bridge” between God and humanity (Boahen, 2022: 57-61).⁹

In the Ghanaian context, some notable prophets offered spiritual guidance and comfort to countless people in times of brokenness. In an era of moral relativism, many prophets provided moral guidance and behavioural reform. This they did by speaking against social vices using biblical examples as the benchmark. They also engaged in charitable activities to put smiles on the faces of the disadvantaged in society. This role had a desirable effect on the emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of those they served.

The prominence of prophets and the prophetic ministry however, faded with the arrival and growth of Pentecostalism and also the death of their charismatic founders as noted by Asamoah-Gyadu. He mentions that because these prophets were charismatic, their death without commensurate replacement in the area of charisma contributed to the decline of their churches and by extension the prophetic ministry (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:65-66).¹⁰

This observation is reminiscent of how the arrival of early Ghanaian prophets also caused the decline of the *Tigare* shrines as noted by Annorbah-Sarpei (Annorbah-Sarpei, 1990: 27-30).¹¹ Thus, the prophetic ministry suffered some decline in popularity and influence but continued to remain a part of the Ghanaian religious orientation.

Contemporary African Pentecostalism through its prophetic churches have reignited the flames of prophetism making the office of the prophet an attractive one. The scope of their clientele cuts across the gender and socio-political class spectrum. They include the educated and uneducated, rich, and poor, young and old, male and female. The popularity and impact of contemporary prophets on the Ghanaian society is a

⁹ Isaac Boahen, *From Sebewie to Sebetutu: A Theological and Missiological Analysis of the Life and Ministry of Prophet Sampson Kwame Oppong*, (Noyam Books, 2022), 57-61.

¹⁰ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 65-66.

¹¹ James Annorbah-Sarpei, “*The Rise of Prophetism – A Socio-Political Explanation*” in *The Rise of Independent Churches in Ghana*. (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), 27-30.

testimony to the 'religious notoriety' of the African as noted by Mbiti (Mbiti, 1969: 124-5).¹²

For many decades, African society was noted for being communalistic, religious, and humanistic in nature and essence. Although contemporary African society appears to have lost a great deal of its communal and humanistic tendencies, its religious ethos remains the most significant attribute (Gyekye, 1992:101-122; Bujo, 1998).¹³

Pentecostalism through the prophetic ministry has succeeded in establishing some significant contact with the social, economic, political, and spiritual dimensions of the Ghanaian's life. Contributing to this situation perhaps are several reasons but two of them are worth mentioning in this paper. The first as noted by Asamoah-Gyadu is the kind of Christianity sold to Africans by Western Christian missionaries. He intimated that the rise of Pentecostalism and the prophetic dimension of the Pentecostal phenomenon was in a sense 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, led in time to the rise of a plethora of independent, indigenous church movements under various local charismatic figures" (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2002:30-57).¹⁴

Today, the rise of Pentecostalism and in particular the prophetic ministry in Ghana has not only been a reaction against "the over-cerebral and rationalistic nature of Western forms of being Christian....."¹⁵ but drastically engendered a form of revitalization of traditional churches hitherto perceived as stale, stagnant, and unresponsive to the move of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the emotional and spiritual dryness associated with most traditional churches have given way to passionate worship, spiritual experiences, and encounters with God at the personal level.

This observation suggests that while the rise of Pentecostalism and the flourishing of the prophetic ministry emerged as a reaction to "the over-cerebral and rationalistic nature of Western forms of being Christian..."¹⁶ the Western mission-oriented

¹² John S. Mbiti, *African Traditional Religion and Philosophy*, (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1969), 124-5.

¹³ Kwame Gyekye. *Personhood and Community in African Thought*. In K. Gyekye (Ed.), *African Cultural Values*, 1992 (pp. 101-122).

Benezet Bujo. *The Ethic of African Community*. (Peter Lang, 1998)

¹⁴ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Pentecostalism and the Missiological Significance of Religious Experience in Africa Today: The Case for Ghana 'Church of Pentecost' in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. XII, No 1&2 (July/December 2002), 30-57.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

churches have equally reacted by incorporating prophecies and other charismatic tendencies in their worship life.

The second reason for the rise and popularity of the prophetic ministry in Ghana if not Africa as a whole is the use of attractive appellations of the prophets in an economically volatile environment. Their unique appellations are publicised by their dominant use of the internet, the electronic, and print media. This serves as a 'marketing tool' with magnetic influence. Nearly all the prominent Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal denominations in Ghana own radio and television stations, sometimes with nationwide coverage. Much time among other things is normally spent to explain and emphasise the appellation the prophet carries to draw attention to what he/she can offer to mitigate the myriad of challenges facing the populace. This is usually done by the prophet or one of the associate pastors.

As a result, many Ghanaians rely upon prophets for guidance, direction, and solutions to nearly all problems of life. This they do, believing that prophets possess high spiritual insights and powers to bring about an end to their misery. Due to this disposition, the ordinary Ghanaian is on a daily basis bombarded by countless prophetic messages concerning the direction of the national economy, outcomes of football tournaments, presidential and parliamentary elections, and the financial direction of individuals and their families etc. There appears to be no single issue in Ghana today that prophets do not speak on regardless of their level of education and how effective their utterances may be. A typical example is the many prophetic utterances the country was subjected to during the outbreak of the Coronavirus in 2020 (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2024: 168).¹⁷ They speak on social, economic, political, and spiritual uncertainties of the society. It is against this background that some prophets acquire their titles or appellations to cement what they are about.

So compelling is the influence of prophets in Ghana such that one is in doubt as to what should be the basis for decision making in both public and private spaces. Should it be the position of experts, one's own knowledge and experience or the voice of prophecy which is dominant yet unverifiable? This question confronts any keen observer of the happenings within the general Ghanaian Christian space.

Beyond the growth and influence of the prophetic ministry in Ghana, it has also attracted criticisms and in some instances generated controversies. The criticisms against the prophetic ministry have mostly pointed to issues such as

¹⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu. 'Something Like a Nuclear Weapon': African Charismatic Prophetic Revelations and Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 54 (2024), 167-192.

commercialization of prophetic messages, the validity and propriety of some prophecies, and the lack of discretion within the prophetic industry.

In an election year, predictions and counter predictions of election outcomes generate considerable debate within the public space almost to suggest that different sources of authority are speaking through the prophets. Through prophecies, public opinion as to who should be voted for into public office is shaped. Also, favourable prophecies and endorsement in the Ghanaian context have the propensity to legitimize political parties and political candidates vying for either presidential or parliamentary positions.

In fact, it is rare to find strong prophetic voices genuinely holding public officers accountable for their stewardship. It is almost as if the two major political parties in the country have evenly shared the number of prophets around and commanded them to do their bidding. Majority of Ghanaian prophets could be said to be overly partisan. So, receiving political figures in one's church is viewed as a measure of a prophet's power, popularity, and influence.

This situation, coupled with cases of lack of accountability, authenticity, manipulation, exploitation, and deception have bedevilled prophets and the prophetic ministry in Ghana (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015: 141-162).¹⁸ Such incidences occur as vulnerable and desperate individuals approach them for solutions to their challenges. Complicating matters are issues of divisiveness and conflicts arising in families and relationships due to prophetic utterances. Sometimes, it is the prophet who determines the person one should marry or avoid owing to the claim of the anointing of a special prophetic insight upon their lives. Such dynamics have made the prophetic ministry both essential and problematic within the Ghanaian Christian space.

Without impugning the validity or efficacy of prophecies within the Ghanaian religious context, it is recognisable that the model of contemporary prophetic ministry found in the Ghanaian context cannot be wholly credited with robust biblical interpretation or hermeneutics as the basis for prophetic utterances. Prophecies are usually based on the prophet's 'spiritual insight' when he/she enters the spiritual realm as they normally put it. The subjective mode of prophets at the point of prophesying suggests that whatever is uttered may conform with scripture or be considered a new direction.

The weight of relativity and subjectivity associated with contemporary prophetic ministry in Ghana lends itself to situations of misinterpretation and misapplication of

¹⁸ Johnson K. Asamoah-Gyadu, "Prophetic Ministry in Ghana: A Critical Perspectives". *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 45(2), (2015), 141-162.

scripture, manipulation, exploitation, false prophecy, cult-like behaviour, and overemphasis on material wealth. Notwithstanding these challenges, the popularity, impact, and dexterity of the prophetic ministry in Ghana expressed through unique titles and appellations makes it an interesting area of study as it remains a vital part of the religious orientation of Ghanaians.

1.2 Appellations of Some Contemporary Ghanaian Prophets

Appellations in the Ghanaian society can be used in various contexts. They may be used in the religious space. Here, appellations are attributed to God or deities as “Onyame” i.e. the one who satisfies, “Otumfo” i.e. Almighty, “Nyansabuakwa” i.e. All knowing or Fountain of Wisdom, “>kofo” i.e. Great Warrior, etc. It could also be given to people who have distinguished themselves or professionals who have attained a certain feat like "Doctor," "Professor," “Your Excellency”, “Your Majesty”, or "Your Honor."

Other contexts where appellations are used are places or geographical locations. For instance, just as Israel is usually referred to as the “Holy Land” (cf. Zechariah 2:12, Psalm 78:54, Ezekiel 20:40), Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana is known as the “Garden City”. Sekondi and Takoradi, two cities in the Western part of Ghana are popularly known as the “Twin City”. Groups or tribes are sometimes known to carry appellations. For example, the Akyem tribe in Ghana has an appellation known as “Akyenkwa a >nom birim” to wit, the people who drink from river birim. The birim river is full of large deposits of diamond, gold, gravel, and sand hence demonstrating the riches and pride of the Akyems (Chirico, G. P. et al. 2010).¹⁹ It is not only God, deities, humans, and places that carry appellations. Creatures such as trees, rivers, animals, and mountains also have appellations telling a story about them.

According to Arhin, in his work; “The Akan Concept of the Person and the Appellations of Personal Names”, many personal Akan names also come with their own appellations (Arhin, 1994: 123-142).²⁰ Individuals whose names have appellations are expected to live up to a certain expectation. In fact, most often than not, the appellations attached to these names serve as a motivation and a guiding principle for them throughout their lives.

¹⁹ Peter G. Chirico, Katherine C. Malpeli, Solomon Anum & Emely Philips, Alluvial diamond resource potential and production capacity assessment of Ghana. Report number: Scientific Investigations Report 2010-5045 Affiliation: U.S. Geological Survey (2010). *ResearchGate*.

²⁰ Kwame Arhin. “The Akan Concept of the Person and the Appellations of Personal Names.” In Kwame Arhin (Ed.), *The Life and Work of Kwame Nkrumah* (pp. 123-142). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press: 1994.

Appellations can therefore be formal, informal, or colloquial, and they often convey meaning, reverence, affiliation, significance, or identity. A critical observation and analysis of the prophetic ministry in Ghana through religious advertisements, audio, and video interviews of the prophets reveal that nearly all the prophets carry appellations or unique titles. Some of these appellations are: *'obotan'*, *'nation's prophet'*, *'eagle prophet'*, *'prophet one'*, *'bulldozer'*, *'akwadaa nyame'*, *'one touch'*, *'ogya nyame'*, *'owuo mpo suro'*, *'gyataba'* etc.

The appellations are carefully chosen to convey to the populace a specific message of what the prophet stands for and the blessings he/she carries. For instance:

'Obotan' – The Supreme Being in the Ghanaian Akan traditional society is known as *'Obotantim'* which means mountain of defence. *'Obotan'* literally means the Rock or Mountain. The rock or mountain naturally is elevated and commands other creatures under its shadow. Mountains are rich in natural resources like clean water (which represents life), timber, and minerals. The mountain is also endowed with strength, longevity, and defence/security.

Highlighting the mythological significance of rocks and mountains in African cultures, Asante, in his work; "The Rock as a Symbol of Strength and Fertility in African Mythology", notes that the rock is a symbol of strength, fertility, and ancestral wisdom in African Mythology (Asante, 2009: 831-844).²¹

Indeed, in Psalm 94:22, we read: "But the Lord has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge" – NIV. Also, in the Ghanaian Methodist Hymn Book, the hymn numbered 498, refers to God as the Rock of Ages. So, largely, God referred to as the Rock symbolizes one who defends and protects his children from dangers and other forms of attacks.

With these qualities in mind, the prophet who labels himself as *'Obotan'* seeks to convey to his clientele that he is elevated above all other prophets, possesses the above listed qualities, and that when they come to him, they will be secured. The appellation in this sense conveys assurance of strength to conquer life challenges, security against evil forces, and other life negating factors. Those who feel threatened by one challenge or the other may therefore find these qualities appealing and assuring for which reason they may patronise the services of prophet *'Obotan'*.

²¹ Molefi Kete Asante, "The Rock as a Symbol of Strength and Fertility in African Mythology", *Journal of Black Studies*, 39(6), (2009), 831-844.

‘Nation’s prophet’ – On the Ghanaian religious scene, there seems to be a subtle yet tangible competition for recognition and space among the prophets and other religious leaders. To refer to oneself as the nation’s prophet is to suggest that of all the prophets in the land, the *‘nation’s prophet’* is the one chosen by God to speak to the nation on his behalf. It also indicates that on any matter of concern in the nation, he is the one citizens must listen to as the accredited mediator between God and the nation (Okyerefo, 2014: 77-101).²²

This appellation conveys a message of exclusivity and priority. Other prophets could be assigned to speak on other issues but when it concerns the nation, all must relegate themselves to the background and submit to utterances from the *‘nation’s prophet’*. It is reminiscent of what God said to Jeremiah the prophet i.e. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” – (Jeremiah 1:5, NIV). By this appellation, the prophet projects himself in the eyes of those who politically manage the affairs of the state and their followers for consultation.

‘Prophet one’ – This appellation, however attractive, does not seem to neglect the importance of other prophets. Rather, it appears to send a message that of all the prophets he is the number one. It is like the concept of “Primus inter pares” i.e. first among equals. It nevertheless carries with it the notion of being the most respected, prominent, and influential in the community of peers.

To the general Ghanaian populace therefore, if one were looking for the number one prophet to consult, it must be prophet one.

‘Eagle prophet’ – The eagle is credited with exceptional vision and therefore can spot prey from miles away. It has the ability to soar high using its strong wings. It also has sharp talons, strong beak, agility, and intelligence to deal with its prey. Naturally, people are concerned about the future and are on the urge to know what the future holds for them. A prophet with eagle qualities can see far and therefore worth patronizing. Also, the concept of me versus witches, wizards, demons, and evil forces in general is steep in African Christianity and in this context, Ghana. A prophet who prides himself with exceptional agility, vision, power like the eagle has a ‘ready market’ to influence.

In his article: “The Eagle in African Culture: A Symbol of Strength, Courage, and Wisdom”, Fakeye explores the significance of the eagle in the African context and

²²Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, “The Role of Pentecostal Churches as an Influential Arm of Civil Society in Ghana” in *Ghana Social Science Journal* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2014), 77-101.

associates the Eagle with strength, courage, and wisdom (Fakeye, 2017:1-12).²³ It is the same thinking that drives the selection of the eagle as an appellation for the prophet.

'Bulldozer' – Ordinarily, the bulldozer is a heavy equipment used for demolition, excavation, levelling, and grading. The above listed abilities of the bulldozer suggest that the prophet who bears this title possesses the charisma and capabilities to demolish all satanic powers tormenting the individual. In this day and age, where many Christians whip, shoot, and 'kill' the devil, people who desire to see their enemies completely annihilated will see prophet bulldozer as the preferred option.

'Akwadaa nyame' – This title or appellation is accorded to someone who performs wonders like God. However, because in the African and Ghanaian thought the Supreme Being is incomparable, the human wonder maker is called 'Akwadaa nyame' i.e. little god among the Akans in Ghana. Already, Ghanaian traditional religious history is replete with unique individuals like Komfo Anokye who performed incomprehensible miracles. With this background, prophet 'Akwadaa nyame' is projected as a wonder worker and available to serve anyone who needs his services. The import of his appellation thus reminds the populace of the likes of Komfo Anokye.

'One touch' – One virtue missing in many societies today is patience. Majority of humans are on the move at a top speed and intolerable of any delays. Others are impatient because they have tolerated their incapacitation for many years and are now at the breaking point. This disposition has found its way into the fabric of Christianity in Ghana. As a result, a prophet who promises to offer a panacea to problems at the first call will obviously be in demand irrespective of the methodology employed.

Sometimes, such claims are backed by testimonies of people whose challenges were dealt with at the first call i.e. "one touch". The prophet who identifies himself with the appellation "one touch" presents a perfect space for the impatience of the contemporary person.

'Ogya nyame' – "Ogya" in the Akan language means fire and "nyame" means the God who satisfies. Fire destroys but can serve a good purpose too. In Hebrews 12:28-29, we read: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" - NIV. Atkins postulates that in verse 28, two characteristics of God's

²³ Adebayo Akanmu Fakeye, "The Eagle in the African Culture: A Symbol of Strength, Courage, and Wisdom", *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 9(3), (2017), 1-12.

kingdom are emphasised i.e. eternal and unshakeable. Believers are therefore enjoined to receive this kingdom with gratitude, reverence, and awe (Atkins, 2010:271-284).²⁴ Verse 29, says: “God is a consuming fire”. Here, the verse emphasizes God’s ability to purify and refine us with his presence. This attribute of God demands reverence, humility, and obedience from believers (Guthrie, 2007).²⁵

The appellation “*Ogya nyame*” therefore draws attention to the prophet’s ability to destroy the works of the enemy in the life of people, purify them of all undesirables just like fire, and bring them to a place of satisfaction.

‘Owuo mpo suro’ – This title or appellation can be translated literally as “even death is afraid”. Jesus Christ in parts of the New Testament is portrayed as the conqueror of death (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57; Hebrews 2:14-15; John 11:25-26; 2 Timothy 1:10; Revelation 1:18 etc.). So, the intrinsic message of the appellation is someone who conquers death.

Although Jesus conquered death and in both the Christian and African sense, it is not understood as the end of life, many are terrified by death. They would therefore do practically anything to get protection against it. Prophet “*Owuo mpo suro*” by his appellation presents himself to the Ghanaian people as someone who has the ability to prevent and even conquer death.

‘Gyataba’- This appellation is literally translated as the cub or lionet. The lion is typically resilient, fearless, confident, decisive, and a natural leader. Such qualities make the lion unique and fearful among its peers. Lions as a result of these qualities have earned the recognition as apex predators and symbols of majesty in the animal kingdom.

In Revelation 5:5-6, Jesus is referred to as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”. Prophet ‘*Gyataba*’ markets himself as the ‘baby Jesus’. By this appellation, he sells himself as a prophet endowed with the abilities of Jesus Christ depicted in his appellation as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah”. Clients who are looking for decisive pronouncements, confident predictions about the future, and someone whose presence scares the enemy away, have prophet ‘*Gyataba*’ as the most attractive destination.

²⁴ Robert Atkins, “Hebrews 12:28-29: A Call to Worship”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 53(2),(2010), 271-284.

²⁵ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. (Abingdon Pres, 2007).

The appellations of some Ghanaian prophets as discussed above reflect the prophet's ministry focus, level of spirituality, spiritual gifts, spiritual lineage, divine mandate, length of time in ministry, and character trait. Thus, they depict to their clientele the prophet's level of efficiency and area of specialization. Additionally, the appellations serve as a form of identification and acknowledgement of the prophet's role and influence in the social, economic, political, and spiritual life of the contemporary Ghanaian.

The use of appellations by Ghanaian prophets as noted in this section have a marketing intent just like how manufacturing companies market their products. The appellations are tailored to specific or general needs of the people. As a result, expectations are created, belief is generated, and the conclusion is drawn that once a prophet is consulted, the individual's challenges are solved. But beyond its marketing value, appellations can be effective tools for mission and evangelism. In this sense, attention is not placed on the prophet but Christ and him crucified.

1.3 Appellations, Mission, and Evangelism.

Mission and evangelism broadly encompass God's plan to redeem humanity and creation. Evangelism as a key component of mission thrives on the mode of communication and the content of the message communicated among other things. The message designed to be communicated ought to be clear, relatable, and meaningful to the realities of the audience. Since the gospel is not meant to be kept but shared, the mode of communicating its truth requires some level of contextualization.

From the missiological view point, appellations can be effective tools for mission and evangelism in the African context when properly fashioned. Just like how Ghanaian prophets leverage on their appellations to reach out to the populace, in the context of mission and evangelism, the same can apply. Appellations are attractive, pregnant with a specific message, enrich prayer language, teaches about cultural relevance, attributes of God, and can generate interest in Christian missions.

Currently, the use of appellations by Ghanaian prophets has a major defect. It draws attention unto the prophet and seeks to project the image of the prophet and his/her ministry leading to deification of prophets in the Ghanaian context. Such a situation diminishes the centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian mission and waters down the essence of mission. It is in the light of this grievous anomaly that this paper argues that appellations should be deployed as a paradigm for mission and evangelism in which case Jesus Christ is rightfully recognised as the centre of affairs.

Indeed, such an approach will represent a major contribution to the already known methodology of using Western categories of conducting mission and evangelism. The need to identify local and traditional elements within African society to enhance the spread of Christianity ought to be encouraged.

Employing titles or appellations in the local languages that reflect God's nature, character, and essence can be a good platform to share the Gospel. For example, many people in the Ghanaian context may not have read Bible verses that project God as the Rock or Mountain but have appreciable knowledge of what "obotan" i.e. the rock or mountain represents. Building on their traditional knowledge of rocks or mountains to assure them of God's ability to protect and secure their lives and property just like the rock or mountain can powerfully bring home the Gospel.

Similarly, the eagle is a familiar bird to most Ghanaians, but they may not have processed the attributes of the eagle in the light of the Christian faith. The projection of the eagle's ability to see far and take appropriate action as a trait originating from Jesus Christ and not the prophet helps to bridge the gap between the person seeking Jesus Christ and him/herself. Thus, by incorporating appellations into the various aspects of the church's mission and evangelism mandate, African Christians are adequately armed to own the Christian faith, practice their faith, and share the gospel in the most effective manner. It also in a sense contributes to the cognitive awareness of the harmony that exists between the Creator and his creation on the part of humans.

Discussion in this section about the potential of appellation as a tool for mission and evangelism raises consciousness regarding other African traditional elements such as: proverbs, folktales, artifacts, symbols, riddles, and songs which are all prime tools for mission and evangelism in the African context (Adamo, 2015:1-11).²⁶ The point here is that, the aforementioned traditional tools have always been effective means of theologizing, expressing wisdom, and passing on cherished values from one generation to the other both in the formal and informal settings in the African context. They can therefore serve a good purpose in the African church's quest to participate in God's mission in contemporary times.

²⁶ David T. Adamo. 'Ancient Israelite and African proverbs as advice, reproach, warning, encouragement, and explanation', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71(3), (2015), Art. #2972, 11 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2972>

1.4 Conclusion

Contemporary scholarship from Africa has assisted in bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and the Christian faith. It has become more evident to African theologians and missiologists that the gospel can be domesticated.

Accordingly, this paper discussed the use of appellations by Ghanaian prophets in the context of the prophetic ministry. It also looked at the potential of employing appellations as a paradigm for mission and evangelism.

While the aged old Western missionary categories of conducting mission and evangelism have carried African Christianity for many decades, it is time the African church looked inwards and challenged itself to develop homegrown methods to enhance the spread of the gospel. Looking within the tradition and culture of its environment and selecting useful tools to further its missiological activities is the sure way to go for the church in Africa.

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Disclosure Statements

The author has not reported any potential conflict of interest.

The author has not reported the use of generative AI in the research for and preparation of this paper.

This research received no specific funding.