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Jemisimiham Jehu Appiah

*A 20th Century African Prophet's Intellectual Contribution
to the Africanisation of the Church in the Gold Coast*

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Abstract

In the Gold Coast, now Ghana, J.W.E. Appiah, a teacher-catechist, left the missionary-founded Methodist Church for opposing his Afrocentric healing and preaching activities and founded the Musama Disco Christo Church in the 1920s. He then took on the prophetic name Jemisimiham Jehu Appiah. He wrote his philosophies to validate an Afrocentric church in the indigenous Fante language. His Church, an African anti-colonialist/anti-colonial establishment, is alive; yet his untranslated writings have remained in obscurity. This study provides a biographical view of Appiah. It translates his writings and interrogates their inner logic as liberation theology that rationalised the salvaging of certain indigenous mores through Afrocentric Christianity to promote a Black Nationalist cultural awareness.

Résumé

Dans les années 1920, à la Côte de l'Or (aujourd'hui Ghana), un professeur-catéchiste, J.W.E. Appiah, abandonna l'Eglise missionnaire méthodiste qui s'opposait à ses prêches et à ses pratiques de guérison africaines. Il fonda l'Eglise Musama Disco Christo et il adopta le nom prophétique de Jemisimiham Jehu Appiah. Il écrivit ses pensées philosophiques dans la langue fante pour démontrer la dimension africaine de son message. Etablissement anticolonial, son Eglise existe encore aujourd'hui, mais les écrits d'Appiah, qui n'ont pas été traduits, sont restés dans l'obscurité. La présente

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étude offre une approche biographique d'Appiah. Elle traduit ses écrits et interroge leur logique interne pour dévoiler une théologie de la libération qui légitima le maintien de certaines mœurs indigènes tout en faisant la promotion, au travers d'un christianisme africain, d'une conscience culturelle nationaliste noire.

Keywords

Gold Coast – Ghana – Afrocentric – Christianity – Nationalism – Musama Disco Christo Church

Mots-clés

Côte de l'Or – Ghana – christianisme africain – nationalisme – Eglise Musama Disco Christo

In this article, I explore the theme of African intellectual protest in the realm of the colonial church and religion, through the figure of J.W.E. Appiah, (later known as Prophet Jemisimiham Jehu Appiah), the founder of the Musama Disco Christo Church (hereafter M.D.C.C.) in the Gold Coast. Elsewhere, in 2015,¹ I discussed the “rhetoric and ideologies of order” and “argument by refutation,” that some Gold Coast intelligentsia used in the secular space against the colonial order’s illegal intellectual and administrative manifestations in the Gold Coast in the 19th and 20th centuries. I briefly observed that other intellectuals repositioned this resistance in the arena of religion. I cursorily cited how Reverend J.B. Anaman and J.W.E. Appiah, created the Nigritian Church c. 1907, and M.D.C.C.² c. 1922 respectively as schismatic groups away from the colonial Christian mission’s paternalism, to Africanise the ecclesiastical bureaucracies, advance indigenous languages as liturgical languages, and promote indigenous history and aspects of aboriginal lifeways, like polygyny,³ within Christian spir-

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- 1 De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway, “Defiance, Rhetoric and Ideologies of Order, and the Rewriting of Colonial Historiography: An Exploration of Cultural Nationalism in Colonial and Post-colonial Ghana,” in Frank Jacobs (ed.), *On the Correlation of Center and Periphery (Global Humanities. Studies in Histories, Cultures and Societies)*, 131–154. Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015.
 - 2 De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway, “Prophet Jemisimiham Jehu-Appiah: The Man, his Vision and Work”, M.Phil Thesis, Department of History, University of Cape Coast, 2004.
 - 3 David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 164.

itual and devotional cultures. It is worth noting that other studies of Africa have examined the topic of the history of schismatic groups variously known by names such as African Independent Churches and Spiritual Churches in Africa during the colonial period and independence era. They have dealt with different aspects of the topic, namely cause(s), course(s), structure(s), axiology, gender issues, biography of founder(s) and effect(s).⁴ It is also worth mentioning in relation to the M.D.C.C. that some fine works have also been done on the historical epistemology and ontology and development of the M.D.C.C.⁵ Nevertheless, the existing literature on the M.D.C.C. does not interrogate the interesting thematic programme of intellectual protest and contribution that the M.D.C.C. founder made to the Africanisation of Christianity. No one has examined the inner logic of the writings of the prophet, in particular the booklet *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem*,⁶ which justified the existence of his “African” church. It is on these issues that this study focuses, thus – revisiting African intellectual protest in the realm of church and religion in the Gold Coast.

J.W.E. Appiah engaged in intellectual resistance to what he regarded as hegemonic Eurocentric Christianity during his adult clerical life until his death on 23rd September 1948. Appiah’s example of religious reformation and cultural nationalism sustained a tradition of nationalist religious schism and inspired several independent Afrocentric churches to subsequently emerge in the coun-

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- 4 For example see Isreal O. Olofinjana, *Twenty Pentecostal Pioneers in Nigeria*, Vol. 1. Dartford, England: Xlibris Corporation, 2011; Brigid M. Sackey, *New Directions in Gender and Religion: Status of Women in African Independent Churches*, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2006; J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: A Study of Independent Indigenous Pentecostal Movements in Ghana*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2005; Klaus Koschorke and Jens Holger Schjørring (eds.), *African Identities and World Christianity in the Twentieth Century*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005; Allan H. Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century*, Trenton, NJ/Asmara, Eritrea, 2001; Sheila S. Walker, *The Religious Revolution in the Ivory Coast: The Prophet Harris and the Harrist Church*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983; E. Fashole-Luke, R. Gray, A. Hastings and G. Tasié (eds.), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978.
- 5 For example see, Botchway, “Prophet Jemisimiham ...”; Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *Pastoral Counselling and Inter-cultural Perspective*, Frankfurt/London /New York: Peter Lang, 1987, pp. 181–226; John S. Pobee, “I will lift up my eyes to Mozano”, *International Review of Mission*, 75, 298, 1986, pp. 123–128; K.A. Opoku, “Changes within African Christianity: The Case of Musama Disco Christo Church”, in E. Fashole-Luke, et al. (eds), *Christianity in Independent Africa*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978.
- 6 J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem*, Koforidua: Fanzaar Press, 1943.

try (now Ghana) both in the colonial and post colonial periods. The M.D.C.C. supported Kwame Nkrumah and his political campaigns for reforms in 1948 and the Convention Peoples Party-dominated mass struggle for independence between 1949 and 1957. The flock of the M.D.C.C. increased and some “orthodox” churches eventually adopted some of Appiah’s reform practices. Today the M.D.C.C. has several branches in Ghana and the global African diaspora.⁷

Appiah defied the orders of his missionary superintendents to conform to Methodist liturgical and evangelical traditions. Confronted by a litany of ideological differences and doctrinal concerns, he unilaterally abandoned the church and his teacher catechist job at Gomoa Dunkwa, a village in the Central Province on 19th October 1922 to form a made-in-Africa church. He claimed that his Afrocentric church, whose exotic name he translated as the Army of the Cross of Christ Church,⁸ was established with the Holy Spirit’s guidance.⁹ Christianity was a convenient starting place for his campaign because of the profound entrenchment of most Africans in that faith. The pulpit had been vibrant for Black nationalist political debates in the African continent and diaspora.

Appiah was formally excommunicated by the Methodist church in 1923. Wandering with his followers to the town of Onyaawonsu, he finally obtained land around Gomoa Abodom in 1925 and built Mozano, a religious commune, on the land. Mozano, which according to Appiah meant “My Town” in a certain heavenly language,¹⁰ became the church’s headquarters. There, he embodied the positions of *Akaboha* (a traditional religio-political authority), farmer, and *Komhyeni*, (lit. prophet or seer) of a church which, he declared, was open to all religious traditions, in contrast to the sectarian nature of many churches. Appiah and his followers believed he was divinely mandated to establish a new Christianity, with an adequate energy of ancient African religion (spirituality).

The M.D.C.C. represented a fresh, independent and indigenous Christian tradition that both reinterpreted indigenous culture and responded to the problems created by missionary Eurocentric Christianity, which was first introduced to the Gold Coast in the 15th century by Portuguese Catholic priests. It transformed colonial Christianity into a movement not of dogma and compliance to western views and norms, but one that required the holistic welfare

7 On the Church’s expansion and impact, see Botchway, “Prophet Jemisimiham ...”.

8 M.M. Jehu-Appiah, *The Constitution of the Musama Disco Christo Church*, Accra: Guinea Press Ltd, 1959, p. p. 7.

9 M.M. Jehu-Appiah, *The Constitution ...*, p. 3.

10 “Musama Disco Christo Church Diamond Jubilee Celebration and Peace Festival Souvenir Programme”, Accra: Billy-Ham Press Limited, 2000, p. 7.

of followers in their daily lives as Africans. It reinterpreted Christian teachings and practices to match local cultures and cosmologies, and kept an indigenous clergy in leadership positions.

The present article will now proceed with a biographical sketch of the prophet, and trace the itinerary that led to his “parting of ways” with the Wesleyan Methodists. For this text, I use the qualitative method of inquiry and analysis, informed by Lewis Edinger’s position that “a political actor’s orientation to a situation, his opinion, and his style of role behaviour are shaped by the interplay of personality characteristics and the perceived demands of his political [social, economic, cultural or even religious] environment”.¹¹ Consequently, in this article I combine both the trait and situational interactive approaches¹² and the reasonable view that “leadership is not a matter of universal traits but is rooted in a specific culture”¹³ to understand the life of this religious reformer and leader within the context of his religious, nationalist, political and cultural environment. Thus, I look at the common social, political, religious, cultural norms and values in the Gold Coast environment where the prophet operated.

The information on which I base this article was obtained from multiple sources. These include *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem*, which is the booklet that the prophet authored; newspaper and academic articles; the M.D.C.C. Constitution; and secondary literature. Although I draw extensively from the few available written records which touch on the prophet’s life and opinions, the first, biographical part of this article is largely based on oral history. The information was collected through a series of interviews conducted in 2003 and 2004. The interviewees are people who have primary knowledge about the prophet and his opinions. These people include Okyiami Jehunano “Tupameeka” Kwa Densu, the prophet’s page boy and pioneer spokesperson of M.D.C.C., some of the first converts and older members of the church, the prophet’s extended family and clan members at Abura Edumfa, a retired educationist of the Cape Coast Methodist Church, and some older members and ministers from the Methodist and Catholic Churches who are familiar with

11 Lewis J. Edinger, *Kurt Schumacher: A Study in Personality and Political Behaviour*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965, p. 5.

12 See J.M. Burns, *Roosevelt, The Lion and the Fox 1882–1940*, Vol. 1, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. 1956, pp. 482–485; Kenneth F. Janda “Towards the Explication of the Concept of Leadership in Terms of the Concept of Power,” in Glenn D. Paige (ed.), *Political Leadership: Readings for an Emerging Field*, 45–68. New York: Free Press. 1972; Edwin P. Hollander, *Leadership Dynamics: A Practical Guide to Effective Relationships*, New York, Free Press, 1978.

13 Burns, *Roosevelt ...*, p. ix.

the phenomenon of schism in the history of the Christian churches in Ghana. Other interviewees are the prophet's descendants, including his grandson (the spiritual head and third Akaboha of the Church), and other elderly members of M.D.C.C. in Mozano, the religious commune and headquarters of M.D.C.C., situated near Gomoa Eshiem, close to Agona Swedru.

Oral history has its shortcomings.¹⁴ However, the methodological challenges of oral history can effectively be managed when the accounts and information that oral history produces are triangulated with other sources, for example, "traditional" written sources.¹⁵ Oral history has by now been accepted as an admissible comprehensive historical source material that is validly applicable to the study and reconstruction of history in Africa.¹⁶ For the present article, I recorded and cross verified the reminiscences of the people who were interviewed through triangulation and comparison, and this yielded some interesting and illuminating facts about the life, vision and work of the prophet.

In the article's second section, I examine the inner logic of Appiah's ideas in extracts, which I translated, of his extant but not widely known magnum opus, *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem* (History of the Army of the Cross of Christ Church) published in 1943, to provide a reading of the resistance visions and aims of the M.D.C.C. It must be emphasised that this text is significant because it is the only surviving document that aggregates the prophet's opinions on African-centred ways of being Christian, and distils the philosophies of the prophet about the Africanisation of the church as a step, albeit in the religious domain, towards African self-determination in all endeavours and areas of social, intellectual and spiritual life.

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- 14 For example the memory of the informant is fallible; the story teller may have self-serving motives; interviewees may have biases because of their relationship to who or what information is being sought about; informant's testimony may not be consistent from one interview to the next; interviewer's questions may intentionally or unintentionally influence the informant's response. See David Henige, "The Problem of Feedback in Oral Tradition: Four examples from the Fante Coastlands", *Journal of African History*, 14, 1973, pp. 223–235.
- 15 Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, H.M. Wright (trans.), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965.
- 16 For example see K.O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885: Economic and Political History of Nigeria*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956; Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985; Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1994; David Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974; and Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings (eds.), *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003.

Though the text was published in 1943, it is not clear whether it was written that same year or whether its genesis dated back to the 1920s. The 1920s to the 1940s were turbulent times of nationalist agitations in the Gold Coast, in which many of the Gold Coast African intelligentsia resorted to writing, giving public lectures and forming study groups and nationalist societies, to produce and disseminate ideas that challenged the hegemony of colonialism and the negative effects of its social and cultural institutions. In concert with other protest actions, such as the foundation of political groups¹⁷ and economic protests, boycotts and initiatives,¹⁸ the writings published by these intellectuals sought to counter negative aspects of the colonial order. The prophet's booklet thus appeared in an environment of African self-assertion that built on the spirit of the nationalist agitations, self-improvement and struggles of the 1930s.

In spite of the fact that the prophet's booklet was published more than twenty years after the M.D.C.C. was founded, it provides unique insight into the resistance visions and aims of the M.D.C.C. at the time of its instigation. It also offers an accurate reflection of the prophet's philosophy of African religious independence and cultural assertiveness and a theology of liberation for a culturally and politically colonised African people who he envisioned to become decolonised ultimately.

Joseph William Egyanka Appiah: A Life History

Appiah was born, lived, worked and died in the Gold Coast. He was born c. 1892/93 on a Friday into the Fante ethnic group in the hinterland village of Abura Edumfa, near the large littoral Fante town of Cape Coast (originally known as Oguaa). Until 1877 Cape Coast was the colonial capital of the Gold Coast. It was the major starting point and centre of Wesleyan missionary activities, and a renowned bastion of the western formal school system in the Gold Coast.

Appiah's father, Opanyin Kwa Dum, and his mother, Maame Abena Esuon (Nsonwaa), alias Obaapanyin Abena Okumah, were illiterate peasant farmers who never left their indigenous village of Abura Edumfa, in the Abura state within the Cape Coast District of the Central Province. This loyalty to the vil-

17 D.E.K. Amenumey, *Ghana. A Concise History from Pre-Colonial Times to the 20th Century*, Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2008, pp. 191–198.

18 Amenumey, *Ghana ...*, p. 197.

lage earned his father the respectable office of Safohen (Warrior chief) of the village's Twafo asafo (warrior) group.¹⁹ Appiah's formative years were rooted in the peasant environment of Abura Edumfa, where indigenous traditions were sustained despite two exogenous forces of social change: Christianity and western formal schooling system. Both were being propelled by church missions, especially the Wesleyans. Abura state had become a Wesleyan stronghold²⁰ after the pioneer missionary Joseph Rhodes Dunwell landed at Cape Coast on 31 December 1834 and started missionary work on 1 January 1835 at the behest of the Missionary Committee of the British Methodist Conference.²¹ The Wesleyan mission came to Cape Coast when "The Meeting" (a Bible reading group of Africans) requested Bibles and a missionary through an English sea captain called Potter.²² Wesleyan evangelisation expanded into the hinterlands, including Abura Dunkwa. Thereafter missionary George Wrigley "laid the foundations, or rather strengthened the foundations on which ... Abura Dunkwa [Methodist] circuit [of which Abura Edumfa was part] was built."²³ Some non-Christians in the Abura area opposed the mission's evangelism and schooling activities. The opposers considered them to be "... setting apart a small group [converts] from the rest of the community"²⁴ and deemed them dangerous to the sacred customs and unity of traditional society (Oman). The mission later won the goodwill of the Abura chiefs, especially Nana Tsibu,²⁵ but this did not obliterate the clash of culture and religion between the Christians and non-Christians.

Abura Edumfa was not purged of its indigenous traditions. Appiah's parents were nominal Methodists but upheld some customary norms like ancestral veneration, festivals, divination and fortune telling as indispensably relevant to their lives as Akan peoples. Appiah's childhood was characterised by a baptism and an adequate elementary school education, which started in 1900 at the Methodist school in Abura Dunkwa, and was supplemented

19 Nana Akwa III, Abura Edumfa Mankrado (Owner of Town) and direct nephew of the Prophet, 73 years old, interviewed by author, 11 January 2004, 'Adwenadze Paado' Court, Abura Edumfa.

20 Reverend Asiamah, Cape Coast Methodist Synod secretary, 60 years old, interviewed by author, 2 January, 2004, Cape Coast.

21 F.L. Bartels, *The Roots of Ghana Methodism*, Cambridge, 1965, p. 1; *Ibid.*, p. 1.

22 R.M. Wiltgen, *Gold Coast Mission History 1471-1880*, Techny, Illinois: Divine Word Publishers, 1956., p. 111.

23 Bartels, *The Roots ...*, p. 24.

24 Bartels, *The Roots ...*, p. 25.

25 Bartels, *The Roots ...*, p. 25.

by Sunday school. Despite these initiations, he did not reject the vestiges of indigenous cosmologies in his hometown. His mother died a few years after she gave birth to two more sons. Appiah thereafter added “Egyanka”, (lit. an orphan), to his name.²⁶ At about 14 years old he was ready for middle school, but there was none in Abura Dunkwa. In 1907, his father and senior brother, Kobina Gyan, sent him to Cape Coast, the main training ground of catechists and teachers, especially Wesleyans, to obtain at least a standard four certificate from the Methodist middle school.²⁷ He stayed there under the home-stay custodianship of Reverend S.R.B. Attoh Ahuma. Attoh Ahuma was a member of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (A.R.P.S.), and the author of several patriotic articles and books. He was also a leading editor of nationalist newspapers such as the *Gold Coast Aborigines* and *Gold Coast Leader*, whose politics espoused antigovernment ideas,²⁸ being an unapologetic and eloquent political critic of colonialism and westernisation. In the 1890s Ahuma was fired as Wesleyan minister by the Wesleyan authorities for his political activism, especially for publishing “Colony or Protectorate: Which?”, a scathing article against British imperialism in 1897. In 1898 Ahuma joined the African-American-inspired African Methodist Episcopal Church when it was inaugurated in the Gold Coast.

Cape Coast, colonially nicknamed the “Athens of the Gold Coast”,²⁹ had vibrant schools and an intellectual culture that attracted many students from various parts of the country.³⁰ Its local intelligentsia created the earliest nationalist newspapers and societies, such as the *Mfantse Amanbuhu Fekuw* (Fante Nationalist Society)³¹ and the A.R.P.S. (1897). The A.R.P.S. which was joined by men like “Father” Brown, J.M. Sarbah, J.D. Abraham, and J.W. deGraft Johnson, stopped the infamous Crown Lands Bill of 1894–1897 which sought to vest so-called waste or ownerless land in the colony to the Crown. The A.R.P.S. remained as a major mouthpiece for the aboriginal people’s interest until it virtually became moribund in the second quarter of the 20th century.

26 M.M. Jezu-Appiah, *The Constitution ...*, p. 1.

27 Nana Akwa III, and Ebusuapanyin (Family Head) Kwadwo Kweenu, interviewed by author, 14 January, 2004, Adwenadze Paado Court, Abura Edumfa.

28 These included *Memoir of West African Celebrities*, *Cruel as the Grave*, and *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness*.

29 Kwame Arhin, et al. (ed.), *The Cape Coast and Elmina Handbook, Past, Present and Future*, IAS, Legon: University of Ghana, 1995, p. 3.

30 Nana Akwa III, interview, 11 January, 2004.

31 Kimble, *A Political History ...*, p. 150.

Appiah's school was administered by ordained clergy, teacher-catechists and missionaries, comprising Africans along with a few Europeans. The school was originally established to train the wards of Wesleyan converts, aged twelve to eighteen,³² and to protect them from distrusted traditional beliefs.³³ Throughout his four years there, Appiah studied hard and exhibited an impressive gift for rhetoric.³⁴ This supported his talent as a good preacher during evangelisation and Sunday school. His inquisitiveness and his connections to the well respected Attoh Ahuma made him a friend to many of his teachers. They introduced him to the larger universe of Fante customs and social life, evangelism, church politics, current affairs and theology. He paid attention to information and popular discussions about colonial policy and the prevailing nationalist atmosphere of the first half of the 20th century³⁵ in the numerous nationalist newspapers, homes, market places, pulpits and street corners that he could access.³⁶ He became familiar with the growing local dislike for certain alien policies of the colonial regime, and the tension between Africans and Europeans over leadership in administrative offices in the colony, even in the Methodist Church, which was a dependent Overseas District of British Methodism. When he completed his middle school education in 1911, at the age of 18, he could better understand prevailing anti-colonial rhetoric and activities, including those of his guardian Attoh Ahuma and the A.R.P.S. whose occasional open-air mass meetings in Cape Coast he must have witnessed. He joined the A.R.P.S. later in his life and remained a member until his death. The various nationalist newspaper articles written by Cape Coast leading intellectuals like J.M. Sarbah, Attoh Ahuma, J.E. Casely-Hayford, Reverend Ossam Pinanko, Kwegyir Aggrey, and Kobina Sekyi, who became his lawyer and personal friend, would have given him some understanding about their nationalist philosophies.

Unable to continue on to secondary school because he lacked funds, Appiah became a pupil teacher at the Wesleyan school at Abura Abakrampa, near his hometown, in 1911. Soon, when the teacher-catechist there died, Appiah's

32 Mrs. Annobil, former Headmistress of Cape Coast Methodist B, 89 years old, interviewed by author, 22 September, 2003, Aboom, Cape Coast.

33 Annobil, interview.

34 Komyhenibaa (Prophetess of M.D.C.C.) Anna Amo, 83 years old, interviewed by author, 2 November, 2003, Mozano.

35 Samuel K. Enison, M.D.C.C. member since 1946, and Elder of M.D.C.C. at Abura Abakrampa, 67 years old, interviewed by author, 9 January, 2004, Abura Abakrampa.

36 Coodiasney Cobbah Sagoe, Retired Minister and Instructor of M.D.C.C. Pastoral Seminary, 78 years old, interviewed by author, 29 January, 2004, Mozano.

superintendent, Reverend Stanhope, who admired his talent as a good rhetorician and preacher made him the teacher-catechist.³⁷ Appiah became known as “Master”, a customary title for village teacher-catechists.³⁸ He read voraciously and attended A.R.P.S. meetings to deepen his knowledge about religion and politics. He liked nationalist newspapers, including the out of circulation *Western Echo*³⁹ which was “a source of inspiration to the rising youth in a matters relating to the political enfranchisement of the Gold Coast”, and whose ‘Owl’ column, vivisected every move of government officials.⁴⁰

For three years, he worked in his station as an enlightened, well-read leader who tolerated some of the shortcomings of his congregants and enthusiastically evangelised.⁴¹ He found the work financially unprofitable and abandoned it in 1914. He lived briefly in Mensakrom, a village near Agona Nyaakrom, understudied his brother Kobina Gyan who bought and sold cocoa seeds there,⁴² and relocated to Osino,⁴³ a small town in Akyem Abuakwa in the Eastern Province where the good rainfall “produced a prolific crop and many new plantations came into being”.⁴⁴ With almost no capital he became a cocoa purchasing clerk,⁴⁵ but the venture proved unfavourable during a time when the First World War was raging. The war took its toll on international commerce in general and brought some negative dislocations in the cocoa industry of the Gold Coast, which was dependent on international trade networks.⁴⁶ Clearly, when the war started in 1914, the fortunes of the cocoa industry in the Akyem Abuakwa area, where Appiah went to do business, unfortunately changed for the worse.

37 C.G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A study of some 'spiritual' Churches*, London: SCM Press, 1962, p. 29.

38 Bartels, *The Roots ...*, p. 158.

39 Maame Kwanstima, a niece to the son of the Prophet, aged 68, interviewed by author 4 December, 2003, Abura Abakrampa.

40 J.E. Casely-Hayford, *Gold Coast Native Institutions*, London, 1903, p. 176.

41 Peter Kwame Ennin, (a Methodist), 80plus years old, interviewed by author, 9 January 2004, Abura Abakrampa.

42 Nana Akwa III, and Kweenu, interview.

43 M.D.C.C. Programme Souvenir, p. 6.

44 Benjamin Acquah, *Cocoa Development in West Africa: The Early Period with particular reference to Ghana*, Accra: Ghana University Press, 1999, p. 40.

45 M.D.C.C. Programme Souvenir, p. 6.

46 See Olisa Godson Muojama, “The First World War and the Cocoa Industry in Ghana: a Study of the Hazards of Economic Dependency” *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 16, 6, 2016, pp. 33–41.

As Olisa Godson Muojama has painstakingly distilled from colonial records from 1914 to 1918, the cocoa industry faced many hardships in the Gold Coast. There came inflation and depression in cocoa prices, increase in quantity amidst a fall in price and international restrictions on cocoa trade in 1917. The 1915–1916 cocoa season witnessed the payment of inflated prices till about the end of November. Consequently there was undue increase in the quantity of crop exported and the harvesting of immature pods due to economics of uncertainty. This decreased the value of cocoa. Due to this depression, cocoa was left to rot on the trees, because it was not worth picking. Moreover, when there emerged a shortage and scarcity of ships calling to load produce because of the naval needs of the imperial governments during the war, the Gold Coast had a stock of cocoa not exported in 1916. The heavy stocks and the difficulties of shipping, made the trade gradually grind to a halt at the end of the year. When a large quantity cocoa was exported in 1917 it caused a depression in price and adversely affected the value of Gold Coast exports of that year.⁴⁷ Moreover, according to *Colonial Reports – Annual Gold Coast 1917* there was “limitation of imports into the United Kingdom”⁴⁸ and “for reasons of national importance, ships were compelled to give preference to freights of palm oil, kernels and groundnuts, and when such freights were available, they were not permitted to take cocoa. This resulted in homeward-bound vessels passing the Gold Coast laden with oil produce from Nigeria, with consequent loss to our cocoa trade”.⁴⁹ Many farmers and local buyers in the Gold Coast lost interest in the cocoa business because of these problems.

Consequently, the expansion of production of cocoa was halted, and cocoa producers seriously doubted for the time that cocoa cultivation would yield a prosperous future.⁵⁰ As The First World War affected the country’s once lucrative cocoa purchasing business, a plight which the *West Africa* (1918) commented on thus: “Disheartened and disillusioned without adequate ... prospect of unloading his produce, the farmer is leaving much of his cocoa to rot on the trees ... to the permanent detriment of the crop”.⁵¹ Moreover, Appiah could not beat the competitive monopoly of the established companies in the brokerage work. Thus, in 1917 he sojourned in Agona Abodom, in the Agona District in the Central Province, and tried farming and petty trading,⁵² which he aban-

47 Muojama, “The First World War and the Cocoa Industry in Ghana ...”, pp. 37–39.

48 Cited in Muojama, “The First World War and the Cocoa Industry in Ghana ...”, p. 39.

49 Muojama, “The First World War and the Cocoa Industry in Ghana ...”, p. 39.

50 Acquah, *Cocoa Development ...*, p. 96.

51 *West Africa*, 9th February, 1918, p. 270.

52 Nana Akwa III, interview, 10 January, 2004.

done probably because of bankruptcy and/or debt. Reverend Ernest Bruce, the new Methodist superintendent of the Gomoa circuit learnt that he was virtually destitute and occasionally served the local Methodist Church as a lay preacher with his evangelising talent.⁵³ He offered to re-employ him. Appiah accepted the offer and became a teacher-catechist at Gomoa Dunkwa, full of ideas to make himself excel and be promoted to a higher rank in the mission.

The social environment he inhabited was one whose culture permitted people to rely on supernatural wonders, divination, and exorcism to meet their spiritual, social and health needs. Converting many people therefore required the performance of miracles, of at least a Christian sort, which of course the Wesleyan missionary tradition did not promote. Thus, as Appiah preached to obtain converts for the Methodists, despite competition from Catholics and Anglicans and miracle-centred and spiritual protection traditional groups of spiritism, including anti-witchcraft spiritual cults,⁵⁴ and traditional priests, herbalists, and sorcerers who performed wonders, he pondered the Wesleyan tradition's intolerance of miracles.⁵⁵ He reasoned that the Eurocentric mission did not tolerate them because they were akin to indigenous cosmologies of spiritual miracles. Secretly he desired and had "the intuition to fast and pray for the faith of miracles".⁵⁶ Perhaps, at this time, he heard about Prophet Harris, the itinerant Liberian Methodist preacher, who, not bound to any mission, performed exorcism and cured diseases in Christ's name in the Gold Coast. Two converts of Harris, Grace Tani and John Nackabah, and a third person John Hackman, gathered Harris's followers to constitute the Church of the Twelve Apostles in Ghana.⁵⁷

53 Nana Akwa III, and Kweenu, interview.

54 A number of anti-witchcraft cults and spiritual armoury and prosperity shrines were in operation and mushroomed in the early part of the 20th century among the Akan peoples of the Gold Coast. Others came from the northern part of the country and became popular and active in the south especially among the Akan. Many flourished especially in the 1920s and 1930s. For some information about this phenomenon see, T.C. McCaskie, "Anti-Witchcraft Cults in Asante: An Essay in the Social History of an African People", *History in Africa*, Vol. 8, 1981, pp. 125–154; M.J. Field, "Some New Shrines of the Gold Coast and Their Significance", *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1940, pp. 138–149; H.W. Debrunner, *Witchcraft in Ghana: A study on the Belief in Destructive Witches and its Effect on the Akan Tribes*. Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot Ltd, 1961; Jean Allman and John Parker, *Tongnaab: The History of a West African God*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

55 Sagoe, interview, *op.cit.*

56 M.M. Jehu-Appiah, *The Constitution*, p. 2.

57 Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana ...*, p. 9.

Determined to inject the verve of miracles and faith healing into the mission to meet the local aspirations of the African congregants, Appiah founded a special “prayer group”: *Egyedzifo Kuw* (trans. Society of the Faithful), also known as Faith Society, within his congregation in 1919.⁵⁸ A few of his teacher-catechist friends from the neighbouring villages of Gomoa Tarkwa, Gomoa Brofun, Gomoa Mumford and Gomoa Dawurampon joined this small exclusive group.⁵⁹ They met in secrecy for meditation and prayers for miracles. He approached Samuel Yankson, a teacher-catechist at Onyaawonsu, for spiritual instruction because Yankson was believed to have acquired miraculous powers that he used for healing.

Following an inner direction, Appiah made long retreats for meditation in the bush. He sported an untrimmed beard like an Old Testament patriarch and prophet. Deeming European-style canticles and hymn-like songs to be moody, he introduced vibrant African singing and drumming and dancing techniques and musical instruments into the church’s service to augment and enliven it. His “novel” activities attracted a huge following to him, and also reached the ears of the Circuit Superintendent at Apam. His superiors charged him with neglect of duty and spreading spurious spiritual ideas and practices, which were tangential to Methodist orthodoxy.⁶⁰ They denounced him at Gomoa Dunkwa for “practising curious magical rites and customs, and indulging in the use of secret medicine from India and America,”⁶¹ and engaging in necromancy and secret séances with his “group”.⁶² Confidently, he claimed that the Angel of God, in a vision, had mandated his continued reformatory activities. It seems that his primary objective then was to preach revival within the framework of the Methodist church and by extension the existing churches, and not to found a new church, nor dismantle the doctrinal basis of the mission churches. His superiors cautioned him to stop his almost “fetishistic” practices, and transferred him to Gomoa Oguan (Oguan) in 1920. There he intensified the spiritual activities – speaking in tongues, ecstatic African-style singing and dancing, falling into trances, faith healing, exorcism, and laying on of hands – of his Faith Society, and slipped some of his “unorthodox” activities into the local church.

58 M.D.C.C. Programme Souvenir, p. 2.

59 Sagoe, interview.

60 Okyiami Jehunano “Tupameeka” Kwa Densu, the Prophet’s page boy, and pioneer spokesperson of M.D.C.C. c. 99 years old, interviewed by author, 7 February, 2004, Mozano.

61 Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana ...*, p. 30.

62 Mr. Eghan, Senior teacher, Abura Abakrampa Methodist School, 57 years old, interviewed by author, 12 January, 2004, Abura Abakrampa.

He explained to his superiors the biblical and social legitimacy of his actions and their usefulness to the Gold Coast Christians. For example, he invoked Psalm 150 to elucidate the use of traditional musical instruments during worship; he defended faith healing and speaking in tongues, by making allusions to the healing activities of Jesus Christ, Peter and Paul, and the manifestation of tongues on the “Day of Pentecost”. He claimed to have rediscovered methods that conformed to the Holy Spirit’s work and gifts as they manifested in the early New Testament Church.⁶³ Nevertheless, his bosses, especially Reverend Gaddiel Acquaaah (O.B.E.), a Gold Coaster, disagreed with him and again cautioned him. Unable to withstand the incessant warnings, Appiah parted ways with the mission and formed the M.D.C.C.

Philosophy and Opinions of the Prophet: Extracts from *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem*

Appiah lived in an age of colonialism, racism and paternalism in the historic churches, foreign suppression of indigenous African culture, and the gradual resurgence of both continental and diaspora Africans from the periphery and their efforts to become respected on the international stage. As a visionary of his times, his reactions as a reformer stressed a new Christianity to promote a Black nationalist cultural consciousness in the Gold Coast and other colonies. He was a “budding Gold Coast nationalist” in the global “Black Struggle”, and his actions reflected the strains of the decades he lived in. In the words of Kimble, “the [early twentieth century Gold Coast] nationalist politician[s] played many parts: newspaper editor, lay preacher, platform orator or petition drafter; as champion of native customs ... or defending the Chiefs’ jurisdiction in their own domain”.⁶⁴ Appiah was a preacher, champion of “native” customs and defender of traditional authority. His reform activity in Christianity aimed to uphold many African traditional beliefs, values, customs and norms, and yield “... [an] offering [of] what it regarded as a new perspective and new solutions to problems of traditional as well a contemporary nature [in the Gold Coast]”.⁶⁵

Appiah did not want people in the Methodist church to misconstrue his schismatic manoeuvres as illogically rebellious. He also did not like to appear to the members of the mission churches as a fanatical mystic who was selfishly

63 Densu, interview. See also, J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem*, Koforidua: Fanzaar Press, 1943, pp. 37–38, and pp. 41–42.

64 Kimble, *A Political History ...*, pp. 555–556.

65 P.B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity*, London: Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1986, p. 189.

bent on distorting the rules of the religious order and truculently promoting his own hermeneutics of scripture and ecclesiastical tradition. Furthermore, he did he want Christians to erroneously deem his attraction to the principle of respecting indigenous culture as a thoughtless one. Thus, he rationalised his actions within the frame of liberation theology philosophies, which he verbalised and wrote in Fante even though he could speak and write English. He reasoned as a cultural nationalist on an indigenisation project in the Christian church that it was better to address his followers and conscientise them in an African language and not that of the coloniser. The concept of liberation theology, advocated by an African theologian like Appiah, is best expressed in the philosophy that African Christians, rather than being subservient and docile, are divinely mandated and called upon by an African God to use the power of human dignity promised to humanity through Christ and the Holy Spirit to take control of their destiny and to struggle against social, political, and economic oppression and cultural subjugation, which are perpetuated by an insensitive and racist European colonial power structure. Consequently, Appiah creatively used biblical verses to legitimise his seemingly renegade and non-conformist actions and ideas. Translations from his *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem* provide us with some of his rationalisations. We now look at several aspects of his innovations. Firstly, his justification for introducing the use of African traditional musical instruments and African singing, drumming and choreographic patterns into the Methodist liturgy, which later found expression in the M.D.C.C. Secondly, the stress on certain practices like faith healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, inducing trances, found in African spiritual exercises, as legitimate in Christianity. Third, his understanding of the need for an autonomous African church with African leaders, which included women in position of leadership. Fourth, his acceptance of polygyny and spirit possession as being at once African and Christian. The following sections consider each of these aspects in turn.

The Case for the Expression of African Musical and Dance Forms in the Methodist Liturgy and the M.D.C.C.

When Appiah first introduced instruments like the donno, mpintin, akasa, totorubento and mfiritwuwa, and rigorous unhymn-like singing, especially the Fante lyric *abibinwom* (lit. Black/African Songs), and vigorous clapping and dancing into the worship of the Gomoa Ogwan congregation, many conservative Christians in his congregation deemed him a “fanatical maniac”,⁶⁶ because

66 Densu, interview.

such items had generally been branded “unwholesome” and “uncivilised” by the mission churches since they featured in African traditional religious ceremonies.⁶⁷ The Methodist Church did not permit members to go near indigenous drumming groups, let alone dance to their music. Instead,

they [members] could march, or shuffle along, in a neatly organized column, to variety of Sankey and Moody tunes played by a village brass band, the women being permitted to sway a little to the rhythm of the tune, but not too much, while the men stepped out with dignity bringing up the rear.⁶⁸

The mission churches thus put Christianity on a plane quite alien to African ideas about religion. This is because, in G.K. Nukunya’s words, “the African, religion is, apart from the belief in and expectation from the supernatural, a medium of self expression, entertainment and even enjoyment, which is deeply rooted in his culture”.⁶⁹ Missionaries were not the only colonial agents that condemned indigenous sonic and choreographic expressions. For example, a British colonial governor, F.M. Hodgson, remarked in 1896 that the Chief of Srah had formed a “drum and fife band with English instruments”, and that he (Hodgson) was “glad to see ... the natives ... abandon their hideous performances on tom-toms, gong-gongs and native horns in favour of music of a more civilised character. It marks advancement towards enlightenment.”⁷⁰

Appiah’s nationalist consciousness and musings inspired him to realise that indigenous instruments and singing and dancing forms were not barbaric, heathen or uncivil, and neither was their use in church services.⁷¹ They were culturally functional and injectors of new meaning and dignity to African Christianity and cultural pride respectively. Their use could create an inclusive type and procedure of worship, and facilitate an invocation of the Holy Spirit, and spirit possession for prophetic messages and instructions from God to be received, tongues spoken, miracles performed, and diseases cured.⁷² Appiah also used them to animate his special healing sessions, and *asuom mpaebo* (vigils of

67 Sagoe, interview.

68 Bartels, *The Roots ...*, p. 234.

69 G.K. Nukunya, *Tradition and Change in Ghana*, Accra: Ghana University Press, 1992, p. 131.

70 Dispatch Nos. 386 of 29th September, 1896, from Hodgson to Chamberlain; C.O./96/277, as quoted in Kimble, *A Political History ...*, p. 132.

71 Prophet M.J. Jehu-Appiah (Akaboha 111), interviewed by author, 2 February, 2004, Mozano.

72 Opanyin Kwame Antobam, (a Methodist), 92 years old, interviewed by author, 11 February, 2004, Gomoa Oguan.

prayers). Thus, his innovation was distant from the solemn and plain service of the Methodist tradition, and closer to the indigenous worldview, which permitted spaces for ecstasy, direct communion with the divine and healing and problem-solving sessions during worship. Interestingly, his querying of the church about “why” it disapproved of the introduction into Methodism of certain elements of traditionally African culture and worship was similar to the one which the Gold Coast nationalist and lawyer, J.E. Casely-Hayford (a Methodist himself) had posed in 1903 in relation to the colonial missions’ “non-sensical” prejudice. Casely-Hayford asked:

Why ... should not the ... convert sing his own native songs, and play his native airs in church? Why should he not attune his horns, his adziwa, his gomey, or ... his adankum, to the praise of God, much as the Israelites of old praised Jehovah upon the cymbal and the harp? ... Why, indeed, except that the simple missionary has, from the beginning ruled that all these things are against the letter, if not the spirit, of the Gospel?⁷³

Appiah rebutted this long-standing rule of the church in the following terms:

Many ... do not understand the rationale behind the ... playing of African traditional musical instruments and dancing in the ... Church. They think it is ... unchristian ... [O]ur ancestors ... had certain musical instruments to worship and glorify God’s name. These include ‘traditional’ instruments like mpintsin, mfuaba or adziwa, mbenson, nsenku, among others. However, due to modernization, Europeanization and doubt many people now deem it wrong for Christians to play these instruments and dance to them. [W]e (M.D.C.C.) dispel the lie and ignorance to bare the truth. God does not forbid the playing of musical instruments and dancing ... to glorify His name.⁷⁴

He cited Psalms 68:25, 81:2–4, 150:3–6 and 149:3 to prove the correctness of his innovations in Christian worship and to emphasise that the Christian God accepted the use of indigenous instruments and dancing to glorify him.⁷⁵ He continued,

73 J.E. Casely-Hayford, *Gold Coast ...*, p. 105.

74 Translation of original Fante text of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua Hu Dom Asorn Hu Abakosem*, Koforidua: Fanzaar Press, 1943, pp. 41–42.

75 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 41–42.

[I]n Exodus 15:20 ... “Miriam the prophetess ... and the women went out ... with timbrels and with dances”. ‘David danced ... and all Israel brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of trumpets’ (2 Samuel [6]:14 and 15). In 1 Chronicles 15:16 and 19 ... “David spoke to ... the Levites to appoint ... musicians to make a joyful sound with musical instruments: lyres, harps, and cymbals.”⁷⁶

Appiah drew on local social circumstances of practice and theory to prove to “doubters” that the use of African musical instruments and dancing in Christian worship was legitimate. Hence, he asserted confidently that:

Most European musical instruments are unchristian and used for worldly functions. For example the Baan [sic] (Side Drum/Brass Band) are mainly played on the battlefield by European soldiers. However, they can play same to accompany Christian songs to glorify God. This is deemed proper [by them]. By the same token ... people (Africans), use traditional African musical instruments like the Kyin, etumpan, and kyinsin to worship God. Such is pleasant in the sight of God.⁷⁷

The Value of African Spiritual Praxes like Faith Healing, Miracles, Tongues, and Trances in African Christianity

Regarding faith healing, Appiah argued that God was not just a soul saving God, but also one who was prepared to meet the physical needs and health problems of people.⁷⁸ He philosophised that such healing should logically occur within the church, especially in Africa where maladies were attributed to both physical and spiritual causes. He appealed to African Christians to hear the word of Christ in church as it related to the spirit-backed miracles of healing, prosperity and fertility as desired and expressed through the traditions of Africa. He declared:

[P]athetically ... many people do not believe that God (Nyankopon) is the Healer of humankind. Traditional priests, healers and herbalists even acknowledge that God heals, thus: “God is our Helper”. No Biblical ... verse can ... argue that God does not heal. It is written ... ‘I am the Lord who heals you’ (Exodus 15:26) ... When ... Jesus Christ was ... on Earth

76 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 41–42.

77 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, p. 42.

78 M.M. Jehu-Appiah, *The Constitution ...*, p. 10.

He healed ... with the spiritual powers within Himself ... He asked his disciples to preach ... and baptise those who will believe. "And ... in my name [Jesus] they will cast out demons; ... speak ... tongues ... lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." (Mark 16:15–18).⁷⁹

He emphasised that faith healing of spiritual and physical diseases, which he supported, was something that Jesus Christ practiced and the Holy Spirit permitted:

Jesus Christ ... met a sick and demon possessed man, and the Lord was asked to heal him after his disciples had tried and failed. He only rebuked the demon and the man's good health was restored. The Lord, explained the failure of his amazed disciples thus: "Because of your unbelief; ... if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing would be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:14–21).⁸⁰

To challenge the position of those who opposed faith healing in the church, Appiah invoked James 5:14–15: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord". And he reminded those who "obeyed" scepticism that:

"[T]o whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Romans 6:16) ... [L]et us [African Christians] ... thrive in faith and dedicate our souls and bodies to Him (God).⁸¹

Appiah's innovations were sensible only to minds, especially the African Christian's minds, which could appreciate indigenous African cultural mores and values. Such additions appeared unchristian and bizarre to the Eurocentric minded Christian and Church. For example, polygyny, an important family and society-building institution, was deemed sinful and unacceptable in the Church, because European society was mainly monogamous. The orthodox churches excommunicated polygynists and coerced converts to be monoga-

79 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 37–39.

80 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 37–39.

81 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 37–39.

mous. Hence, Appiah reasoned that the logical thing to do was to advocate for and create an autonomous African church. An African church would easily accept functional African beliefs and practices, such as polygyny, when the Methodist mission refused. Moreover, the orthodox churches were able to restrain such innovations because the paternalistic European missionaries deemed Christianity as theirs, and had for a long time monopolised the leadership position and the policy-making power in the church. Why this monopoly? The reason was simple. The African was not an equal to the European. Just as it had shaped colonial politics in Africa, Racism also shaped unequal relationships in the religious sphere. Being a product of his times, when Europeans had dictated the paradigms of colonial politics and the form of Christianity, Appiah felt that an African controlled church was important.

Appiah's Understanding of the Need for an Autonomous African Church with African Leaders which Included Women

The courage to institute such a church, J.W.E. Appiah thought, would awaken the natural right and capability of the African to be self-determining, contribute to exploding the myth of White supremacy, and strengthen and inspire greater support for the wider Black struggle against the hegemony of imperial Europe in African affairs and societies. He drew on history, logic and his biblical hermeneutics to justify the imperativeness of an African church. He questioned why the seat of administration of the Christian Church in general had traditionally resided outside Africa – for example in Rome, England and Jerusalem. Opposing this monopoly, he argued that the Gold Coast and Africa could also birth the divine:

[S]ceptics ask whether the Musama Disco Christo Church was introduced into the Gold Coast (Africa) from elsewhere. It is the same as asking whether 'any good thing can come out of Nazareth?' (John 1:46) ... [W]e [M.D.C.C.] believe that something good can come out of Nazareth ... 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible' (Matthew 19:26).⁸²

In the logic of Ethiopianism, he charged, that Europe and Europeans should not control the church in Africa. He asked:

82 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., p. 29.

[H]as the time not come for the African also to see God? Has the time not come for the African to see himself as a human being? Is it not time for an African leader to emerge?⁸³

This challenged a long-standing European missionary intolerance of the efforts of competent African clerics to have equal leadership status and speech in church administration in Africa and the African diaspora. Racial discrimination⁸⁴ and Social Darwinism which colonialism supported had long existed in the Methodist Church in the Gold Coast. Reverend Dennis Kemp, the General Superintendent of the Gold Coast Methodists, who worked in Cape Coast from 1887–1897, asserted in 1894 that an all-European Synod was better. Kemp further advanced a Social Darwinist view, which many European missionaries shared, that “the negro was not built ‘so as to be on an equality – intellectually – with the white race’, and that his African friends in Cape Coast were 1500 years behind England in Christian influences”.⁸⁵ Although this incident energised the aspiration of African clerics for religious self-assertion and desire for White colleagues but not White control, Appiah’s African supervisors were still auxiliaries to European missionaries when he worked as a teacher-catechist. They were still the subordinates of a leadership command which had traditionally been exercised from Europe. Thus, they followed orthodox Wesleyan lives in terms of doctrine and liturgy. As a challenge to this norm he reasoned:

The time has come for us [Africans] to know that Jerusalem is with us in Africa. Africa is our Nazareth. It is here, that we have to ... take our rightful place before the throne of God, instead of crawling before others for them to direct us. Please think about this because you are a human being.⁸⁶

He used the M.D.C.C. example to foreground the achievability and imperative-ness of an African church:

The Musama Disco Christo Church ... is not from overseas ... [S]ceptics, God ... has power to use an African to establish a Christian Church ... ‘an African Church ... in Africa. Africa is the land of our birth ... we

83 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., p. 29.

84 Bartels, *The Roots* ..., p. 139.

85 *Methodist Missionary Society, Gold Coast (1893–1902)*, Rev. D. Kemp, as quoted in Bartels, *The Roots* ..., p. 141.

86 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., p. 29.

have to search here ... we shall find'. The 'ladder of Jacob' is everywhere. The ... Church is a genuine Christian Church ... we are not afraid of any disorders. Doubters should read 1 Corinthians 12:5 – "There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord".⁸⁷

Within the logic of "differences in ministries" he emphasised and incorporated aspects of African customary practices and beliefs like polygyny and spirit possession into the cosmology of the M.D.C.C. His son and successor Moses Mathapoly Jehu Appiah believed these incorporations made the church "never a carbon copy of any imported Church. It is purely an African Church" with members who love it because they are Africans.⁸⁸ Appiah was determined to "... revive the ancient lustre of true religion [through his church]".⁸⁹ For example, he advocated that footwear should not be worn into the Church's building because it was God's and a Holy Place. This was similar to the African indigenous practice that prohibited footwear in places of worship and rituals like shrines and sacred groves and other hierophanic spots.

He also emphasised that women should have equal access to leadership in Christianity because women played important leadership roles as priestesses and ritual specialists with moral and spiritual authority in the indigenous setting. His wife and *Komhyenibaa* (Prophetess) Nathalomoa Jehu Appiah (née Hannah Barnes) became the co-leader and *Akatitibi* (Queen) of the M.D.C.C. Many women became ordained prophetesses, priestesses, mediums, pastors, and healers. This innovation in Christianity in the Gold Coast challenged the androcentric tradition and the nature of the sacerdotal leadership position structure in the mission churches.

On the Acceptance of Polygyny and Spirit Possession as Wholly African and Christian

Regarding polygyny, Appiah argued that it dated from ancient times, that it was not sinful, and that it could not disqualify any person from Christianity. He explained:

[N]o one in the world, [from the bible's view] was more faithful than our great patriarch Abraham who was also a friend of God, yet he married

87 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, p. 30.

88 K.A. Opoku, "A Brief History of Independent Church Movement in Ghana." A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Historical Society of Ghana, Ghana, 1969, p. 13.

89 M.M. Jehu-Appiah, *The Constitution ...*, p. 5.

three women. Jacob also ... married four ... Moses ... married two. King David ... married many women.⁹⁰

He used 2 Samuel 12:8–9 to show that God was not angry with David for being a polygynist but for the sin of killing Uriah, the Hittite, and taking his wife. Hence, he declared:

God's law stipulates: 'thou shall not commit murder and thou shall not commit adultery'. We, today, are not obliged ... to marry just one woman; because the worship of God did not start in these modern days ... Many of our forbearers and predecessors were priests and prophets whom God spoke with, and yet no law barred them from marrying a number of wives.

Referencing Matthew 22:29–30, he added that: "[M]arriage is a physical social institution ... [and] Jesus Christ never made a law to sanction only monogamy."⁹¹ Commenting on the missionary churches' intolerance, which was inspired by a European monogamous worldview, and its ramifications, Appiah averred that the imposition of conventional laws to sanction monogamy and forbid polygyny made many Christians dishonestly pretend to be monogamous but secretly had affair with several women.⁹² "Is this practice not adulterous before God?" he asked.⁹³ Interpreting the Pauline declaration on monogamy, he averred that Paul said: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife ... Let deacons be the husbands of one wife ... (1 Timothy 3:2; 12.) ... Paul was not cautioning the entire congregation". He added: "the same Paul also said, 'For I wish that all men were even as I myself ... but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry ... than to burn with passion.' (1 Corinthians 7:7–9.)".

Appiah also argued that,

Presently ... some people remain celibates; others are honest monogamists. Others, also, unable to keep one wife, go against God's law by fornicating. This makes the stance of the M.D.C.C. on polygyny valid ... God instructed that the M.D.C.C. should not to forbid polygyny like other

90 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., pp. 39–40.

91 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., pp. 39–40.

92 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., pp. 40–41.

93 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., pp. 40–41.

churches ... The Holy Spirit has revealed it desires concerning marriage to mankind.⁹⁴

Spirit possession of people by ancestors or deities, as a valid form of communion between humans and the spirit world, is not foreign to the indigenous African worldview. Appiah reasoned that spirit possession, therefore, should be legitimate in the context of the church in Africa. He deemed the Holy Spirit a vital ally and edifier of the M.D.C.C. and Christianity as a whole, and capable of possessing Christians for them to reveal God's desires and perform wonders. Citing texts like Acts 19:2–6⁹⁵ and John 14:16–17⁹⁶ Appiah reasoned that the important role of Holy Spirit possession in the worship pattern of the M.D.C.C., like the days of old, would not be a new phenomenon to most.⁹⁷ He explained that God's Holy Spirit and Satan's Evil Spirit were the two major spirits in the universe. Each could possess people. Satan's power mainly emanated from idols and other physical objects. Those possessed by satanic spirits, mostly fetish priests, drank excessive alcohol, trembled extremely, and shouted excessively, mostly in a guttural voice, and did many filthy things. He elaborated:

[T]he Holy Spirit possesses ... through faith ... mostly Godly people who fast and pray. They [can] perform miracles ... shout out the name of Jesus Christ ... Other signs include falling down, speaking in tongues, and prophesying ... [T]he Spirit of God came even upon Saul ... and he walked along prophesying ... This is why people say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Samuel 19:23–24). [I]gnorance ... in modern times, has shadowed the truth about spirit possession. Remember ... Saul, he encountered the Holy Spirit on his way to Damascus; he did not eat or drink for three days (Acts 9:3–9). Also "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come ... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak ... tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance". Others mockingly said, "They are full of new wine." (Acts 2:1–4 and 13).⁹⁸

94 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., pp. 40–41.

95 "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? So they said to him (Paul), "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ... Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied".

96 "And ... He (God) will give you another Helper, ... forever – The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive ... but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you".

97 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., pp. 40–41.

98 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua* ..., pp. 40–41.

In the case of the M.D.C.C., an African church, he averred that: “Now ignorance makes people to mock at the members of the church because of their relationship with spirit possession”.⁹⁹ He explained that sceptics were wrong to think that God had selected some people to have monopoly over the Holy Spirit because, as John 12:32 and Acts 2:39 showed, the Holy Spirit and the beneficial gifts of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, performance of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues that it bestowed was promised to humankind. Appiah invoked the voice of Jesus Christ in John 14:12 (“[H]e who believes in me ... greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father”) for his argument to make spirit possession a legitimate part of the M.D.C.C. and Christianity as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Confidently he declared further,

[D]o away with all doubts, and work with the power of the Holy Spirit ... “Assuredly ... he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit ... is subject to eternal condemnation” – Because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.” (Mark 3:28–30).¹⁰¹

Clearly, Appiah was sure that his innovations were culturally right for the African Christian and his reforms were biblically legitimate.

Conclusion

Like many of the world’s great reformers, Appiah dreamed dreams, saw visions, and was imbued with a self-conscious premonition of impending greatness. His innovations contrasted with the entrenched Eurocentric traditions of the Methodists and so-called historic or orthodox churches established by paternalist non-African missionaries in colonial Africa. Yet, he believed he was correcting the mistakes committed by Eurocentric missionaries in their Christianisation efforts within African socio-cultural terrains. He aimed at creating in the Gold Coast an African Christian religious citadel – a Church – which he and his African society could call their own, and promoted a new Afrocentric consciousness to disband the psychologies of African ethnic, religious and cultural inferiority that the paternalism of European Christianity and other non-

99 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 40–41.

100 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 40–41.

101 Translation of J. Jehu Appiah, *Christ Mbiamudua ...*, pp. 40–41.

indigenous African traditions had created. He considered the message of Jesus Christ as simple but revolutionary. Jesus led a mass movement for the uplift of oppressed people, and so did he. That is why Appiah could be pro-religious and anticlerical at once.

The difference between Appiah's stance and missionary Christianity was not accidental. Appiah considered that "White" Christianity was synonymous with hypocrisy and assailed Black people; he criticised Black preachers who uncritically emulated their White counterparts and gave up their right to self-determination for the dubious privilege of receiving and perpetuating a "white washed" Christianity. The essence of Appiah's reformatory stance was the imparting of race pride and self-reliance which would return Africa to her glories and magnificence which he saw in the prediction of Psalm 68:31: "Princes shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God". This, according to his hermeneutics, proved that Black people should and would build their own government and institutions in Africa, with rulers of their kind. His thought and actions were not signs of banal enmity to the church and the colonial regime, but logically followed in spirit what his countryman and elder nationalist Sarbah said in defense of the efforts of all the Gold Coast resisters:

The[ir] [subject African's] ambition to excel in whatever is of good report is not insolence, neither is the determination to cultivate self-respect and to cherish a manly independent spirit, nor is pride of race in the African a sign of disloyalty ... That the African can ever succeed ... is denied by his unfriends, and doubted by the sceptic; ... could there be an answer more convincing and conclusive, than the chapels and conventicles, churches and cathedrals of Christendom to the cool, cynical challenge – Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?¹⁰²

102 From John Mensah Sarbah, *Fanti National Constitution*, (1906) chapter 6, in H.S. Wilson, (ed.), *Origins of West African Nationalism*, London/New York: Macmillan/St. Martin's Press, 1969, p. 301.