

# 15

Bayreuth African Studies  
**WORKING PAPERS**



**RELIGION AND SPACE:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM  
AFRICAN EXPERIENCES**

Serawit Bekele Debele and Justice Anquandah Arthur

**15**

**Bayreuth African Studies  
WORKING PAPERS**

**Religion and Space:  
Perspectives from African Experiences**

## The Editors of this Volume

**Serawit Bekele Debele** is a BIGSAS alumna and currently a postdoc at the same graduate school. She completed her doctoral studies in 2015 in the field of religious studies (Religionswissenschaft). Her current research focuses on the interplay of religion and politics in contemporary Ethiopia. She takes an annual thanksgiving ritual known as Irreecha, predominantly celebrated by the Oromo ethnic group, to show that religion, ethnicity and politics are closely intertwined and the understanding of one begs for a closer scrutiny of the other. Religion and nationalism, religion and space, religion and media as well as religion and gender are her other areas of interest.

**Justice Anquandah Arthur** is a Junior Fellow at BIGSAS. His PhD project looks at religious diversity and conflict in Ghana. Specifically, he focuses on a protracted conflict involving Charismatic Christian churches and the Ga Traditional Council, the custodians of Ga indigenous religion and culture, in the Greater Accra Region. Justice obtained a Master of Philosophy degree in Religious Studies from the University of Cape Coast (Ghana). His other research interests include Pentecostal-Charismatic studies; religion and development; interreligious dialogue and use of the Bible in African Christianities.

## **BIGSASworks!**

With BIGSASworks! we aim at offering Junior Fellows at the Graduate School of African Studies a platform for publishing research-related articles. This new online-working paper series provides an excellent platform for representing and promoting the idea of BIGSAS. It opens a space for showcasing ongoing research, creating transparency of the work carried out by Junior Fellows and providing a space for present articles and working jointly on them towards further publication. Each issue focuses on a certain thematic field or theoretical concept and Junior Fellows from any discipline are invited to submit papers, enabling common interests beyond the predetermined BIGSAS research areas to flourish. At the same time BIGSASworks! offers its workgroup participants deeper insights into and practical experience of what it means to be an editor. Last but not least BIGSASworks! makes BIGSAS and its research(ers), (i.e. us!), visible before our theses are published.

The name BIGSASworks! had various implications when we first chose it. First and foremost it is an abbreviation of "BIGSAS Working Papers!" Secondly, it is meant to show the work of our BIGSAS "work groups", so indeed it is the works that are resulting from a structure like BIGSAS. Thirdly, taking "works" as a verb, it demonstrates the work that we as BIGSAS Fellows carry out, with BIGSASworks! guaranteeing us a visible output in addition to our theses.

# Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers

The Institute of African Studies (IAS) at the University of Bayreuth promotes and coordinates African studies in 12 subject groups distributed over the six faculties of the University of Bayreuth. It coordinates research and teaching, training junior researchers, and promotes the exchange of information between persons and institutions engaged in research and teaching in or on Africa.

The 'Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers' report on ongoing projects, the results of current research and matters related to the focus on African Studies. Contributions may be submitted to the Editor-in-chief Dr. Antje Daniel ([antje.daniel@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:antje.daniel@uni-bayreuth.de)).

The 'Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers' is chronicled on the EPub document server at the university library:

- [https://epub.uni-bayreuth.de/view/series/Bayreuth\\_African\\_Studies\\_Working\\_Papers.html](https://epub.uni-bayreuth.de/view/series/Bayreuth_African_Studies_Working_Papers.html)

Other IAS publications are available here:

- [https://epub.uni-bayreuth.de/view/series/Bayreuth\\_African\\_Studies\\_Online.html](https://epub.uni-bayreuth.de/view/series/Bayreuth_African_Studies_Online.html)
- <http://www.ias.uni-bayreuth.de/de/forschung/publications/nab/index.html>
- <http://www.lit-verlag.de/reihe/BzA>



INSTITUTE  
OF AFRICAN STUDIES

## Institute of African Studies

Executive Director: Prof. Dr. Dieter Neubert  
Vice Director: Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Seesemann

Universität Bayreuth  
Institute of African Studies  
95440 Bayreuth

Phone: +49 (0)921 555161  
Fax: +49 (0)921 555102

[www.ias.uni-bayreuth.de](http://www.ias.uni-bayreuth.de)  
[IAS@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:IAS@uni-bayreuth.de)



## About the Authors

**Johanna Sarre** is a PhD student at BIGSAS. Her PhD project examines how (particularly ethnic and spatial) forms of belonging are lived, experienced and expressed among the Nubian population of Kibera, Kenya. In addition, she works and teaches as wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin (Research/Teaching Assistant) at the Chair of Social Anthropology at the University of Bayreuth. She also holds a Master's degree in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology from Leiden University (NL). Her research interests include ethnicity and belonging, space and urbanity as well as political and medical anthropology.

**Chacha Babere Kerata** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at Laikipia University. He is a coordinator of external linkages and also acting director of the Centre for Human Rights in the same university. Chacha obtained a PhD and MA in History both from Egerton University in Kenya. He has wide research interests in diverse areas such as sexuality, gender, environment, governance, and religion and security studies.

**Azza Mustafa Babikir Ahmed** is a junior fellow at BIGSAS, University of Bayreuth. Her PhD research project in anthropology examines the impact of urban regeneration master plans on how people experience places and shape and reshape the identities of these places. Taking Tuti Island as a case study, it focuses on the impact of a 2007 Khartoum structural plan on how the people living on the island experience it and how these different experiences in turn influence the construction of the identity of the place. Azza's research interest is in urban anthropology.

**Bakheit M. Nur Mohammed** is a PhD student at BIGSAS, University of Bayreuth. His doctoral work examines the role of religious men in the Jebel Marra society, Sudan. The study focuses on the process of learning in Qur'anic schools and performance of Islamic rituals and techniques. Bakheit obtained a Master's degree in Social Anthropology from the University of Khartoum. His research interests are Anthropology of Islam; Islamic Education and Knowledge; Religion and Conflicts, and Muslim Religious Men.

**Weeraya Donsomsakulkij** is a PhD candidate in English studies and Anglophone literatures at the University of Bayreuth. Her PhD project focuses upon the representations of alternative environmentalisms and environmental ethics in selected post-apartheid South African literatures with particular emphasis on the works of J.M Coetzee, Zakes Mda and Nadine Gordimer. She received her Master's degree (MA) in Intercultural Anglophone Studies from the



# Acknowledging the Reviewers of this Volume

On behalf of the contributors, we would like to express our profound appreciation to the reviewers of this issue of BIGSASworks! This publication would not have been possible without the hard work and support of several senior scholars, who despite their busy schedules, found time to review this collection of essays. Most of these senior scholars were involved from the beginning as they took time to listen to the presentations of the junior fellows, offered insightful comments and thereafter read the papers at various stages. Accordingly, we would like to particularly show our heartfelt gratitude to the following senior scholars:

<b>Prof. Dr. (Emeritus) Ulrich Berner</b>	BIGSAS, Universität Bayreuth, Germany
<b>Prof. (Emeritus) Yohan Jacob</b>	University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa
<b>Prof. Sandra Elaine Greene</b>	Stanford University, USA
<b>Prof. Dr. Walter van Beek</b>	Universiteit Tilburg, Netherlands
<b>Prof. Nicoletta Gatti</b>	University of Ghana, Ghana
<b>Dr. Stephanie Cawood</b>	University of the Free State, South Africa
<b>Dr. Patrick Desplat</b>	Universität Köln, Germany



# From 'Egypt' to 'Ahenfie':

## The sacralisation of space in a Ghanaian Charismatic Church

Justice Anquandah Arthur

### Abstract

Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa are noted for using various spaces including hotel lobbies, classrooms, football fields and warehouses as church halls. This known flexibility contributes to the rapidly spreading charismatic sector on the Ghanaian religious scene. This paper focuses specifically on the revealed and constructed nature of sacred spaces by focusing on the activities of the Royalhouse Chapel International in Ghana. It shows the practices that turn ordinary spaces into sacred ones in Charismatic Christianity. It argues however, that the nature of sacred spaces in this movement could be better understood by employing a theoretical framework that incorporates both human and transcendental agencies.

**Keywords:** Sacred space, Sacred place, African Pentecostalism, Charismatic spirituality, Sacred and profane

### Introduction

Since its emergence on the Ghanaian religious landscape in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Charismatic movement<sup>1</sup> has seen a significant increase both in the number of adherents and also in terms of the number of churches established. Although mostly an urban concept, Charismatic churches have a great visibility across the nation mainly through the conspicuous media space they occupy and their competitiveness in the real estate sector in Ghana. These churches can be found on every major street corner, residential areas, slums and even industrial hubs across the nation, literally occupying any available physical space for religious services, including school classrooms, backyards, cinema halls, bars, cafes, warehouses and parks.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, space is of

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, (London: Hurst and Company, 2004): 23. I use Charismatic Churches here in the same sense as Paul Gifford to refer to independent Pentecostal churches that evolved in the Ghanaian religious landscape in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Ghana, they are also called neo-Pentecostal churches or Charismatic Ministries. The most recent population and housing census revealed that, of the 71.2% Christian population in Ghana, 28.3% belong to the Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches strand.

<sup>2</sup> This development sometimes comes at the disapproval of political authorities. For instance, it was recently reported that all the mayors of the Greater Accra Region expressed great displeasure about the high use of public school

the essence to these churches, primarily because of their inclination to expand their territories by building extensive networks of churches. While the practice of using unusual spaces as church halls is not a recent development, it was hitherto not a regular practice among churches in the Ghana.<sup>3</sup>

One such Charismatic church is the Royalhouse Chapel International (hereafter, the RCI), which like many mega churches in Ghana, has gone through a cycle of using diverse types of spaces for religious rituals. Thus, this paper shows how RCI has gone about constructing and sacralising spaces since its establishment in 1992. Drawing from field research in Ghana, the key questions this paper addresses are: 1) How do Charismatic churches transform normative spaces into sacred spaces? and 2) What practices turn spaces or buildings into sacred spaces in Charismatic Christianity. It will be useful, at this point, to define the theoretical parameters within which space is analysed.

## Theoretical considerations

A considerable amount of theorizing on space has been done in various disciplines including Religious Studies, Philosophy, Geography, Architecture and Anthropology. Henri Lefebvre identified two basic types of space namely, 'ideal' and 'real' spaces. 'Ideal' spaces, relate to mathematical categories while 'real' spaces are concerned with the setting in which people live and perform their everyday activities.<sup>4</sup> Other conceptions of space have come from the French Geographer, Maximilien Sorre, who was engaged with such spaces as political, linguistic, religious, economic and ethnic spaces.<sup>5</sup> Sociologist Chombart de Lauwe also noted other forms of space referring to them as familial, neighbourhood and the urban regional spaces.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the idea of space or place is not only a geographical matter but it also connects with socio-cultural expectations.

However, the focus of this essay is the religious or sacred space. Essentially, there are two different types of spaces predominantly considered in the History of Religions, namely, sacred and profane (secular) spaces. Firstly, it is paramount that there is an understanding of the sacred, in order to comprehend its association with space. In his book, *The Idea of the Holy*,<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Otto put forward the notion of the sacred as an irrational experience and argued for the non-rational

---

facilities outside school hours for the purposes of holding religious worship services, mainly by Charismatic churches.; Lawrence Markwei, "Halt use of classrooms as worship centres – Assemblies," *Ghanaian Times*, Sep 11, 2014, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Some African Indigenous/Initiated/Independent Churches (AICs) used to and still meet under trees/shades and meeting houses made from palm fronds.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991): 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Buttimer, Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective, *Geographical Review*, 59 (1969): 418-419.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 420-421.

<sup>7</sup> '*Das Heilige*' in the original German version. It is important to note that the German '*Heilig*' translates into either *holy* or *sacred*. The translator had to make a choice and he preferred to use, *holy* instead.

aspects of religion to be accorded the due significance and importance in the study of religions.<sup>8</sup> Otto maintained that the sacred is the heart of religion and that experience of it cannot be explained in terms of other rational experiences – it is a completely new order (*ganz andere*). Those who experience the sacred, he affirmed, experience a sense of dependency on something that is *real, greater than and external to the self*. Nevertheless, the experience of the sacred culminates in a sense of worthlessness of the entire ordinary existence. This therefore brings out clearly two different types of experiences, the sacred and the secular everyday experiences. These ordinary everyday encounters, an unavoidable association with the experience of the sacred, he referred to as ‘the feeling of absolute profaness.’<sup>9</sup> This implies that Rudolf Otto believed that the idea of the sacred is associated with transcendental beings and that exposure to it is the most important element in all genuinely experienced religious emotions. Hence, Otto’s definition of the sacred as an experience out of this world, takes away intentionality and any connection of the sacred with human agency.

Emile Durkheim is the foremost scholar to use the terminologies ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ to engender a dichotomy between the two spaces.<sup>10</sup> On sacred spaces, Durkheim states that ‘religious and profane life cannot co-exist in the same space.’<sup>11</sup> For Durkheim, the fundamental feature of religion is the division of the world into profane and sacred spaces. He contended that the two domains are fundamentally at variance with each other, to the extent that they are seen as distinct worlds. Nevertheless, unlike Otto, in Durkheimian thought, the sacred is not the same as divine, because although gods and spirits can be sacred, anything else can also be sacred including rocks, pieces of wood, trees *et cetera*. Thus, what makes something sacred is not its association with the divine, rather it is the subject of a religious prohibition that sets it aside from something else, which is itself, profane.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the sacred is a socio-cultural construct devoid of any transcendental revelations. In other words, sacred spaces or places are created by people. It is a concept that human beings apply to certain things, places or persons.

Finally, Mircea Eliade drawing from Rudolf Otto’s concept of the sacred, explained that the sacred is anything in nature that is the subject of religious experience for the ‘religious man.’<sup>13</sup> The religious man, he claimed, tried to constantly live in the presence of the sacred and therefore led a completely different life from the non-religious man, who lives in a desacralised world. Although non-religious modern man is considered to live in a desacralised world, Eliade contends that his world is not even completely desacralised, because he can have degraded religious experiences resulting from a personal association with some specific special locations, namely his birthplace, the first foreign city he visited as a youth and so forth. On sacred spaces, Mircea Eli-

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the Divine and its relation to the rational*, Translated by John W. Harvey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1936): 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 51

<sup>10</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964): 84.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated by W.R. Trask, (Harvest/HBJ Publishers, 1957). Mircea Eliade defines the religious man as the ‘*man of all pre-modern societies*.’

ade theorised that while non-religious man sees and experiences the world as primarily neutral, the religious man considers the world as a heterogeneous space - partly sacred and partly profane. The religious man, Eliade asserted, thought of and experienced the world as having a sacred centre, in which he sought to live because to him, that was 'the only real and really existing space.'<sup>14</sup> Eliade identified two ways through which sacred spaces come into being. Firstly, sacred spaces could be revealed to the religious man as in the case of hierophanies<sup>15</sup> like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem or Ayodha, the place recognised in Hinduism as the birth site of Vishnu's *avatar*. This sacred space, he asserted is normally linked to the existential needs of the religious man. Secondly, Eliade proposed that sacred spaces could also be constructed by the religious man, based on a revelation or signs from divine sources, howbeit he is not free to choose the site. For example, a church typically brings out the dichotomy between sacred and profane spaces. But, unlike Emile Durkheim, Eliade basically considered sacred spaces as natural and revealed, which takes away human agency, because for him, like Otto, the idea of the sacred is intertwined with transcendental beings. As a result, the intentionality involved in building sacred places such as the pyramids of ancient Egypt is out of the equation for Eliade. Accordingly, he states regarding the construction of sacred spaces that 'we must not suppose that human work is in question here, that it is through his own efforts that man can consecrate a space.'<sup>16</sup>

In this paper, a combination of Otto's, Eliade's and Durkheim's thoughts have been used as the framework of analysis. It is important, however, to note that Otto and Eliade's approaches have come in for some criticisms such as being too Eurocentric, Judeo-Christian and contextually poor. Nevertheless, they are still very relevant in the context of Ghanaian Charismatic churches.<sup>17</sup> Otto and Eliade signify the *substantial* line of definition of the sacred, from which perspective the sacred is seen as 'an awesome, powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance.' Durkheim's ideas represent the *situational* understanding of the sacred that analyses the practical, relational and frequently contested dynamics of production and reproduction of the sacred. This is because the contrast between the substantial and the situational notions of the sacred are in principle very much prevalent in the analysis of sacred spaces and places.<sup>18</sup> Before proceeding to examine how sacred spaces are constructed we shall have a brief overview of the RCI and its founder, Samuel Korankye-Ankrah.

## Sacred spaces and sacred specialists: RCI and Korankye-Ankrah

RCI is one of the churches that make up what Paul Gifford described as the 'premier league' group of churches in Ghana's new Christianity. Having been established in 1992, it could be des-

<sup>14</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Eliade defines Hierophanies as "the manifestation of something of a wholly different order" in a profane world (11). This is similar to Otto's wholly other or 'ganz andere.'

<sup>16</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Post, Philip Nel, Walter Van Beek, *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities: Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa*, (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 2014): 1.

<sup>18</sup> David Chidester, *The Poetics and politics of Sacred Space: Towards a Critical Phenomenology of Religion in Analecta Husserliana XLIII*, A.T. Tymienicka (Ed.), (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 211.

ignated as a late entrant among Accra's Charismatic mega churches. Nevertheless, within two decades of its existence, the church has expanded into a network of 120 local branches in all the regional as well as many district capitals of Ghana. Besides these local endeavours, they also have 18 international missions network in the UK, USA and the Republic of Togo.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the fact that RCI started with only 24 people (12 adults and 12 children), the headquarters now has an average membership of 8000 and runs three adults church sessions, one youth service and one children's session on Sundays.

It has 26 different ministries or groups and other distinct organs incorporated under the umbrella name *Ahenfie*, the central church. Significant among the ministries are the Christian Leadership College and the Department of Social Services. The Department of Social Services has a wide range of sub-ministries including the Basic Trust Scholarship Project; Feed the Hungry; Rural Missions and Evangelism; Rescue to the Needy; the Compassion Ministry; the Pre-Marital and Marriage Counselling Departments; the Children, Teens, Men's, Women's and Aged Ministries; as well as the Anglo-Francophone Ministry. The membership of *Ahenfie* is mainly composed of youth and individuals in their midlife. Unlike other mega churches like the Christ Temple of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) and the Qodesh of Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI), the church does not have the same level of educated professionals.<sup>20</sup> However, there is a sizable number of Ghanaian politicians and business people among the congregation.<sup>21</sup>

The stories of RCI and its founder are linked together and cannot be told in isolation. Of the 60 church members who responded to questionnaires administered for this purpose of this present research, 49 of them came to the church through the founders' media efforts. Sam Korankye-Ankrah founded the church *in absentia*, as his wife was in reality the one who organised the members for church services in the first year of its formation, while her husband remained in the Netherlands. The pastor asserts that he had asked his wife to start church services with members of a Christian fellowship he had initiated while at the University of Ghana, following a dramatic call to the pastorate. In summarising his experience, he stated thus:

After my university education, I left Ghana for Holland to seek greener pastures and to further my education. My desire was to study law, political science or business administration. But on June 19, 1991 I had an encounter with the Lord, which completely changed the course of my life. I was sleeping soundly in my room when suddenly I felt a hand touching and waking me up. Intuitively, I looked at the time and it was 2:00am. Immediately, I heard a voice calling me by name and instructing me to pray. I obeyed

<sup>19</sup> The Royalhouse Chapel History, accessed Sep 2, 2014, <http://royalhousechapel.org/about-us/our-history/>

<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*. (Accra: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, 2001). Larbi states that many of these neo-Pentecostal churches are composed of professionals especially ICGC and LCI. Firstly, out the 60 respondents in a survey conducted in March, 2012 survey by the writer, only 52 were between 25-45, 7 were between 46-60 and 1 was over 60. Secondly, 22 of the 60 respondents while 9 were civil servants and 31 were self-employed. Thirdly, 22 of the 60 respondents had a tertiary degree whereas 38 had up to secondary level of education.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Korankye-Ankrah, *The rising of the sun: Shining from obscurity*. (Accra: Combent Impressions, 2010):

knowing it was the voice of God and for the next three hours, I prayed while I cried simultaneously. At about 5:00 in the morning, God asked me to take my Bible. When I did, for reasons one cannot fathom, it fell open at 1 Timothy 3:1 which says: *'This is a true saying, if a man desires the office of a bishop, he desires a good work'*. Having been in Christian leadership for a long time, you would naturally expect me to be well acquainted with this Scriptural text. But when I read it on that day, it spoke to me in a very personal way. The text came alive all of a sudden. I felt the Holy Spirit arrest my spirit as I read that verse and I immediately knew that God was calling me into full-time ministry.<sup>22</sup>

After this initial incident, Korankye-Ankrah affirmed that there were other series of similar signs and occurrences, which confirmed that God wanted his services back home in Ghana and not in the Netherlands. He revealed that through further encounters, God ordered him audibly to go back to Ghana with a three-fold mandate: 1. To bring people into God's presence through prayer, praise and worship. 2. To preach salvation, healing and deliverance as well as messages of hope with relevance to the needs of people and 3. To bring comfort to people, offering them a place and an atmosphere of love, care, sharing and fellowship. To date this 'divine' mandate has served as the mission of RCI and thus the driving force of his ministry. As a result, all church functions and programmes are geared towards this 'divine' authority to carry out the work of ministry.

This kind of dramatic experience narrated by Korankye-Ankrah is comparable to many other accounts given by mostly Pentecostal and Charismatic leaders in Ghana with regard to their call into full-time pastorate.<sup>23</sup> Mostly enveloping their call and life changing decisions in mystery is a common way some pastors use to legitimize their call and spiritual status among their congregation and the entire Charismatic movement. Some even go to the extent of re-enacting earlier events in their lives and realigning them with their present profession and calling. Others also change their stories completely and make them sound more dramatic and believable in order to gain acceptance and win adherents.<sup>24</sup>

Korankye-Ankrah is however, quite different from most of the first generation Charismatic church leaders in his use and promotion of objects and rituals he refers to as 'tokens.' These are physical objects like handkerchiefs, anointing oil, water, mantle, prayer shawl as well as activities such as foot washing that he believes attract the power and presence of God. These sacred objects he argues: 'are things the mainline Churches used so much in the past but when the era of Charismatism arrived, it became a no-go area. Why? – Because it had been abused by what we call *spiritual churches*.'<sup>25</sup> He continued, 'Tokens simply mean things people normally consider unimportant and insignificant but for which God gives the preacher a direction to use. Their use connects a person with the power of the Holy Ghost and subsequently miracles happen'<sup>26</sup> The application of these items and rituals, he insists has contributed immensely to the spiritual and

<sup>22</sup> Sam Korankye-Ankrah, Interview by author. Tape Recording. Accra. January 16, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*, 390.

<sup>24</sup> A story is told of a Charismatic pastor who claimed God referred to him in conversation as: "Apreko, my daughter," even though he was obviously a man.

<sup>25</sup> Spiritual churches refer to African Initiated/Indigenous/Independent Churches (AICs).

<sup>26</sup> Sam Korankye-Ankrah, Interview by author. January 16, 2012.

numerical growth of the church. It is obvious that for Korankye-Ankrah, the sacred power is a completely different experience that is separate from normal everyday encounters and way beyond human understanding.<sup>27</sup> As a result, it can be understood by the human mind through the medium of concrete objects and events, namely the 'tokens' - the sacralisation of ordinary objects.

### From 'Egypt' to 'Ahenfie': Constructed and revealed sacred spaces

What is now called RCI has undergone several name changes since its inception in March 1991. Initially, it was called Showers of Blessing International until Korankye-Ankrah returned from the Netherlands and took over the leadership of the church in November 1992. This first name was then changed into Abundant Life Missions International and it remained so until July 1993 when there was a subsequent name change to Bible Worship Centre (BWC). Along with the name changes came the use of secular spaces as places of worship. In its infancy, the church adopted the Ghana Education Service (GES) Model Nursery School in Accra as its meeting place. The decision to use this classroom was mainly informed by the limited financial resources available to them at the time and not by revelation. This is a 30 by 20 metre square single storey building with children's tables and chairs, situated on a 14000 square metre land area. The fact that this was a school compelled them to meet as a community only after school was over and also on weekends when the children were off school. For the church to meet they always had to pack out the furniture used by the children and replace it with 'sacred objects' like a pulpit, sets of musical instruments, collection stands, background curtains as well as mundane items like adult wooden chairs and carpets, among others.

The sacred objects are distinguished from the profane objects by reason of the fact that the sacred is passed on by physical contact through consecration, specifically with the anointing oil by Korankye-Ankrah. Durkheim refers to this transfer as the *contagiousness of the sacred*, where things are made sacred by being touched with other things that are already sacred as in anointings with sacred liquids. Korankye-Ankrah affirmed that they always transformed the classrooms completely into "holy grounds" where people encountered God and "received incredible forms of healing from the Lord."<sup>28</sup> The sacred objects used here, although similar to the 'token' related sacred objects mentioned earlier, in terms of the way they are consecrated, they are different because these ones tend to be community based while the latter is sacred specialist (Korankye-Ankrah) specific, which attracts and mediate sacred power. Again, whereas the 'token' related objects become permanently sacralised, pulpits, musical instruments, collection stands and background curtains only become sacred in ritual periods or during church services. The impact of the sacralisation of these objects is seen in the way church members and pastors handle them with awe during ritual times. Therefore, the attitude towards these objects in sacred times is completely different from ordinary times even within a sacred space.<sup>29</sup> The transfor-

<sup>27</sup> Otto, *The idea of the Holy*, 6-7.

<sup>28</sup> Sam Korankye-Ankrah, *Interview by author*. January 16, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> For further reading on ritual times cf. Durkheim, *The Elementary forms of life*, p. 313.

mation of a classroom into a church, which is a sacred space in its own right according to Mircea Eliade, indicates that sacred spaces can be situational and fleeting too.

After a period of two years, the church relocated from its GES School base to the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) Canteen on the Ring Road Central in Accra, due to lack of space as a result of increase in membership.<sup>30</sup> Presented with a number of options after a search period, the leadership of the church settled on this site primarily because of it being in a strategic central location, proximity to public transportation hubs in Accra and most importantly, the affordability of the space. Clearly, the search for the new meeting place was a human undertaking not informed by any revelation but by necessity. Since this canteen belonged to a corporate organisation, the church could only use the place after office hours and on weekends. While the canteen had 20 tables and a seating capacity of 80, replacing the dining tables with chairs doubled the figure. As was the case in the GES School, this place was always converted into a church for their meetings and then reverted to the restaurant thereafter. The fluidity of the space inhered in shifting between being sacred and temporal and also meant that the transformation was not a permanent one. The flexibility therefore is an indication that sacred spaces can be constructed, dismantled and reconstructed by human agency. Derek Amanor, the resident pastor of the headquarters church described the cafeteria as a place where “phenomenal healings and spectacular miracles” enhanced the growth of the church.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that although classrooms and cafeteria are naturally or normatively used for teaching and dining, to the members of the RCI it became a place of worship, an awe-inspiring space – a church. It is an indication that a particular space or place can be made sacred through the conscious actions of the people, the congregation and their pastor.

After a few years at the ADB Cafeteria, the RCI subsequently moved to the Blackmore and Sons building, an unused warehouse with 3,140 square metre area on the Ring Road Central less than a mile from the canteen between November 1994 and November 2000. Once again, the leaders attributed the move to numerical growth and the inability of the ADB canteen to accommodate them especially on Sundays. However, the subject of proximity, ease of access and the leadership’s desire to find a more permanent location were crucial factors that inspired the move to this third site. Since they had a ten-year lease on this property, they converted it to a near-permanent place of worship, by creating windows, decorating the interior, tiling the floors, building a car park in front of the structure and having the landscape done for aesthetic appeal. Korankye-Ankrah said of this warehouse-turned-church: ‘it became a place of solace for thousands of people with all kinds of spiritual, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social needs.’ He asserted that within the six years the church was housed in this location, membership of the church grew from 250 to 5000, due in part to his ability to prove the power of God through signs, wonders and miracles.<sup>32</sup> It is during this period that the church underwent another name change from International Bible Worship Centre (IBWC) to Royalhouse Chapel International (RCI).

<sup>30</sup> Sam Korankye-Ankrah, *The rising of the sun: Shining from obscurity*, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Derek Amanor, *Telephone Conversation by author*, October 10, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Sam Korankye-Ankrah, *The rising of the sun*, 114.

Furthermore, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2000, the RCI finally moved to 'Ahenfie'<sup>33</sup> the present location of the headquarters branch of the church after about a decade of its inception. Interestingly, the movement from the Blackmore and Sons premises to Ahenfie was dramatised as the pastor led the church to re-enact the biblical story of the Jewish exodus from Egypt to the land promised by God.<sup>34</sup> To begin with, he declared an 'all-night' prayer vigil on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November at the Blackmore and Sons site, which he said was well attended by hundreds of people, to the extent that many more participated via closed-circuit television (CCTV) from outside the main building. At exactly 4:00 am, he led the entire congregation in what he called a 'prayer-march' for the two-kilometre journey to the new church site, akin to Moses leading the Israelites to freedom. Korankye-Ankrah, therefore, perceived his role in this re-enactment episode as a God appointed liberator similar to Moses. He had the following to say:

Symbolically, it was a significant move, a crossing over from 'Egypt' to the 'Promised Land'. This is because in 1997, three years before this time, Archbishop Nicholas Duncan-Williams<sup>35</sup> had prophesied to us that God was going to bless Royalhouse Chapel with a property on which we will put up our own church building. Unknown to the Archbishop, we were almost completing negotiations for the purchase of another property in an entirely different location, at the time of the prophecy. This prophecy restrained the leadership from pursuing that property. Ahenfie is thus considered by all members of Royalhouse Chapel as a land of prophecy and promise.<sup>36</sup>

Besides the prophesy by Duncan-Williams, the pastor indicated that there were three other prophecies that confirmed that God was going to give them 'a property of our own and it was going to be on the Ring Road West, exactly where we are.' Therefore, Ahenfie is considered by everyone related to the church as a holy land. The analogy playing out here is that all the initial changes in location were seen as 'a time of wandering and bondage, similar to what the Jews experienced in the period before they settled in the Promised Land and the final settlement at Ahenfie as a place of rest.'<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Ahenfie is an Akan word meaning the palace or the house of royals. According Rev. Korankye-Ankrah, Ahenfie was derived from Revelation 1:5b-6: *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, 6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* (KJV)

<sup>34</sup> Exodus 13 and 14 covers the Jews' departure from Egypt to the Promised Land led by Moses.

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Duncan-Williams is widely credited with establishing the first Charismatic church in Ghana in 1979 and is a very respected churchman in Ghana.

<sup>36</sup> Sam Korankye-Ankrah, Interview by author. January 16, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.



*6 Members of RCI praying in the compound of Ahenfie during the Week of the Altar. At the far end of the photo is the Ahenfie Church hall. Photo: Author*

Prior to being converted into a church settlement, Ahenfie was a collection of six warehouses owned by a real estate company used mainly to store building equipment. It has since been transformed into a 30,000 square metre property with a 2500 capacity church auditorium (temple), offices for the pastors and staff of the church, youth and children's churches, a Christian leadership college, several warehouses, food vending space, a bookshop, media centre and a large compound with brick flooring and mounted canopies with about a thousand seats to complement the capacity of the main hall. All this is walled and the front part of the wall is a big three-storey office space. The forepart of these offices is a huge private car park also owned by the church. The patrons of these corporate offices do not have access to the main yard of Ahenfie as only the rear of the building forms part of the complex. Next, we shall consider some of the activities associated with Ahenfie as a sacred place and particularly its altar.

## Ahenfie and its Altar: The lived experience of space



7 Congregation praying (beseeching the altar) and 'sowing seeds' at the Ahenfie Altar. Photo: Author

Ahenfie is seen as a sacred space where the members of the church encounter God and their spiritual and existential needs are met. Korankye-Ankrah and all the 60 congregants interviewed considered it as a sacred site revealed by prophecy and it is a 'depository' of God's presence. However, particular reference was made to the altar in Ahenfie as a key place where members' prayer requests were answered speedily. A summary of some of the selected testimonies is offered. First, Jemimah said a few years ago, she was in abject poverty and highly indebted, thus she could not afford to pay her children's school fees. Nevertheless, four months after attending church services at Ahenfie, her situation changed and she was able to pay off her debts. She avers, 'since I met the God of Royalhouse Chapel and started attending services at Ahenfie, my story has completely changed – my children are doing very well and my business is booming. Ahenfie is a place of wonders, it is where God lives, if you like.' It is unclear whether she received financial support from the church but she would not say so, only attributing her turnaround to the sacredness of Ahenfie.

Secondly, Foriwaa, a mother of three claimed her life had totally been turned around since joining RCI. She stated, 'as a result of the power of the Royalhouse altar, my life and that of my children have completely changed despite having totally lost hope a few years ago.' Thirdly, Regina reports that her daughter had extreme learning disability and had tried several private teachers to help her to no avail. She said, 'I came to Ahenfie, after I had heard the pastor preach on radio.

Once here, I never stopped praying and *sowing seeds at the altar*.<sup>38</sup> Now this same daughter is attending a university in Accra." Fourthly, Thomas attributed his selection to represent Ghana on the youth steering committee of the Commonwealth Education Ministers to a series of prayer at the altar, prophetic words from the pastor and *seeds sown at the altar*. Finally, Josephine whose son was extremely sick and at the point of death related the ordeal she went through, 'my son was seriously sick and he needed an immediate surgery, which could only be performed at Ho in the Volta Region.' She continued, 'at the time, I had no option than to call the pastors at Ahenfie to engage the altar and intercede on my behalf. This they did and the surgery was successful. Now my son is healthy again - completely recovered.'

These stories and over fifty other narratives collected strengthen the notion among the congregation that not only is Ahenfie a sacred space but that its altar is also considered a sacred space within the larger space. Thus, creating different layers of sacred spaces: the entire Ahenfie compound being the first layer, then the church hall and finally the altar. It is implicit here that the coagulated nature of the sacredness of the space is inversely proportional to its size. Consequently, the smaller altar is considered a more potent sacred space than the church auditorium, which is also seen as endowed with even more sacredness than the larger Ahenfie compound. Additionally, a more recurring activity by the members as regards activating the sacredness of Ahenfie for existential purposes is the act of *sowing seeds* at the altar. Aside from prayer, fasting and consulting with Pastors for guidance, it is evident that money is almost always deposited on the altar serving as 'points of contact' to access a miracle or another at Ahenfie. Basically, the people offer money which they believe gives them the means of entry to divine provision. This shows how the profane and the sacred are sometimes intertwined in these Charismatic churches.

Furthermore, there is a kind of correlation between sacred objects, sacred space and sacred place. For example, the 'communal' sacred objects are key in turning mundane spaces into sacred ones temporarily for church services as was the case in the use of classrooms and warehouses. While the altar and the church hall in Ahenfie can be described as sacred spaces, the entire compound is seen not only as a sacred expanse or space in an otherwise non-sacred building but a *particular* place. It has become a place with dimensions and its own dynamics. Whereas the sacred objects are now permanently placed in Ahenfie, it is important to state that as a revealed place, its sacredness no longer depends on the sacred objects. It is a coagulated sacred place connected with a special meaning by the members, to strengthen its sacred position. It is a holy place, the centre of orientation of the church members' world, an *axis mundi*, a point of communication between different levels of reality, a reference point for the distinction of cosmos and chaos.<sup>39</sup> Lastly, from the lived experiences mentioned above, it is clear that another significant factor that makes Ahenfie relevant to the members of the church is the part played by Korankye-Ankrah, the bishop. Although pastors in RCI are generally considered by the members

<sup>38</sup> This literally means putting money on the altar, a practice common among Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians in Ghana. It is usually done as pastors move people through their sermons or when they are believing God for a miracle and they want to step out in faith.

<sup>39</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 36.

as storehouses of miracles, Korankye-Ankrah is seen by even the pastors as a complete embodiment of the sacred. He wields such enormous influence within the church to the extent that his absence clearly affects church attendances at Ahenfie. Hence, for these churches, sacredness also inheres in the person of the leader as a result of which they become *sacred specialists*.

### Concluding remarks

The foregoing has pointed to two separate periods in the history of RCI. The first phase, a ten-year wandering period, where they consistently sacralised otherwise profane spaces, namely a school building, staff canteen and warehouses for church services. This period is a very familiar story to how several Charismatic churches in Ghana have survived over the years, including such mega churches as Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church and Dag Heward-Mill's Lighthouse Chapel International. This first stage shows the diverse ways in which these Charismatic Christians transform profane spaces into sacred ones, and also brings to the fore the role of human agency in the construction of sacred spaces in general. It affirms Durkheim's view that sacred spaces are social constructions that can be situational and ephemeral. Sacredness, for Durkheim, requires that special places be set aside for religious rituals, which can be anywhere including classrooms and canteens, as long as the people choose to sacralise the place.<sup>40</sup> Also, the fact that human agency is paramount in the construction of these sacred spaces, is indicative of their non-permanent nature as they can be destroyed and reconstructed too.

The second phase involved the settling at Ahenfie, a more permanent site, which was identified through a revelation from God, as maintained by the members. Ahenfie as a sacred place is therefore a place of power in line with Eliade's view that the utilization of various ritual techniques gives rise to the discovery of a sacred space. Specifically, the place was discovered upon prophetic declarations by sacred specialists, particularly Nicholas Duncan-Williams, the man regarded as the 'father' of the Charismatic movement in Ghana. Ahenfie and its altar in particular are in the opinion of the members of RCI not man-made but a revealed place, where miracles and encounters with God abound - a place of power in line with Eliade's view. Nevertheless, there are two elements that Eliade cannot explain, namely the role of the competitive real estate market in Ghana that might have contributed to the church sacralising other spaces and also the fragility of the sacredness of these functional spaces. Therefore, I argue, that in order to understand how sacred spaces come into being in Charismatic circles, it is imperative to adopt a theoretical framework that encapsulates both human agency and transcendental activity. For example, a combination of Durkheim and Eliade's theories on sacred space. The reason is that with these churches, the adoption of or claims to a particular sacred space, be they churches, landscapes, old cinema halls or cafeteria, are mostly influenced by the Holy Spirit through prophecies, dreams or visions and they are almost always anchored to the economy of real estates. For

---

<sup>40</sup> Durkheim, *Elementary forms of life*, 312.

them, both the rational and the non-rational factors in the idea of the divine are significant in constructing sacred spaces.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, this paper has deviated from the general belief that Charismatic pastors typically have a strong aversion to placing any significant meaning to physical spaces, choosing rather to concentrate on the presence of God and the activity of the Holy Spirit. The widespread belief among these churches is that they do not credit physical objects with supernatural meanings. Some even argue that their consecrated buildings and halls are simply functional meeting spaces that have no spiritual value. It is commonly understood, therefore, that for this group of churches, sacred spaces are created when there is the presence of God through the working of the Holy Spirit in healings and miracles.<sup>42</sup> Marlene De Witte captures this notion succinctly, 'Charismatic people see the Spirit of God at work beyond material spaces' and access to the power of the Holy Spirit is 'unmediated by ordained priests and sacralised church buildings.' However, contrary to these rather generalised views from De Witte, it is obvious, from this paper, that for Korankye-Ankrah and his RCI members, inasmuch as the sacredness of the place depends on the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, it also inheres in the material space of Ahenfie. This is one of the key reasons why many members of RCI around the world come to Ahenfie once every year for either the Week of Altar or Convention of Saints.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the role of Korankye-Ankrah, the pastors and Ahenfie as a whole is significant in accessing the power of the Holy Spirit in the RCI.

## References

- Buttimer, Anne (1969). Social Space in Interdisciplinary Perspective- In: *Geographical Review*, 59, 417-426.
- De Witte, Marleen (2008). Accra's sounds and sacred spaces. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32(2): 690-709.
- Eliade, Mircea (1957). *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by W.R. Trask, Harvest/HBJ Publishers.
- Gifford, Paul (2004). *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*. London: Hurst and Company.
- Korankye-Ankrah, S. (2010). *The Rising of the Sun: Shining from Obscurity*. Accra: Combert Impressions.
- Larbi, E. K. (2001). *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity*. Accra: Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies.

---

<sup>41</sup> Otto, *The idea of the Holy*, 6

<sup>42</sup> Eric Xexemeku of International Central Gospel Church and Bernard Arde-Acquah of Powerhouse Ministries International believe that for Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians, attaching the sacred to a place is like making an idol out of the place. Since God is everywhere the power of God can be felt everywhere; Marleen de Witte, Accra's sounds and sacred spaces. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32(2) (2008): 699.

<sup>43</sup> *Convention of Saints* is an annual weeklong festival that draws members of the church from as far afield as North America and Europe as well as many prominent Pentecostal-Charismatic preachers as Guest Speakers. *Week of the Altar* is an annual 21 days' prayer and fasting festival held in January of every year.

- Lefebvre, Henri (1991). *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford and Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Meyer, Birgit (2012). *Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches, The Wiley Blackwell Companion to African Religions*. Oxford and Malden: Blackwell.
- Otto, Rudolf (1936). *The Idea of the Holy: An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the Divine and its relation to the rational*. Translated by John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press.
- Post, Paul, Nel, Philip & Van Beek, Walter (2014). *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities: Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa*. Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press.

