

African Pentecostal/Charismatic Iconography: A Study of their Significance and Relevance

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Abstract

African Pentecostals and Charismatics adopt one or more biblical, religious, and cultural symbols or imaginative artistic expressions in their spirituality, worship, and witness. These are often displayed on their sign posts, posters, billboards, banners, event paraphernalia, and literature. It is in relation to this that this paper seeks to explore the significance and relevance of these artistic symbols and imageries in the official logo(s) of some Ghanaian Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations and ministries. This paper also argues that the full potential of such Christian arts is yet to be explored, even though their use in African Christianity could be traced back to the era of the African Independent Churches. It also pointed out that the use of objects such as oil, water, sand, stones, fruits, and other materials in sections of Ghanaian Pentecostalism and Charismatic ministries for mediating upon the supernatural are now raising syncretistic feelings across Ghana's Pentecostal ecumenical fraternity.

Antecedent

From Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth; from one heartland to the other, in new areas of penetration and engagement with other cultures and traditions; and even in the continuous renewal of Christianity in all forms and expressions, the uses of logos, symbols, and images have been very conspicuous.¹ From the first-century church to the Roman Catholic church, to the Protestant Reformation, to subsequent Christian renewal movement groups, up to contemporary Pentecostal/Charismatic denominations and churches, all kinds of logos, symbols, and images have been employed and continued to be used to further express Christian themes and messages.²

The focal point of this paper is the study of the relevance and impact of the uses of logos, symbols, and images in some Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic Ministries. And since African Pentecostals and Charismatics are not the first to actively engage in the use of “religious artistry” in their ministries and spiritualities, their uses of such visual communicative symbols stand in historical continuity of a practice in church history. This fact situates the focus of this paper in an established field of study known as “Christian Iconography”—a study whose content and outlines were predominantly a product of Christian Europe,³ which later incorporated that of the non-Western World as a result of cross-cultural encounters.

Iconography, which according to Andrew F. Walls was largely a Christendom phenomenon, lost its theological and ethical relevance as Christianity declined in the West and began to relocate its heartland to the southern continents.⁴ Thus, for Walls, it is the historic and

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massive growth of Christianity in Africa and Asia that eventually rescued the global Christian art movement. The pioneers of the study of the discovery of non-Western Christian art, according to Walls, were Cardinal Celso Costantini, Daniel Johnson Flemming, Arno Lehmann, and J. F. Butler.⁵ We will therefore proceed to discuss Christian arts in the non-Western world and that of early Christianity.

Christian Visual Communication in the First Millennial

The phrase, “visual communication” is used here to denote or encapsulate the whole range of artistic expressions in the form of logos, symbols, and images, etc. The same phrase elsewhere has been rendered as “visual vocabulary.”⁶ According to Mark O’Connell and Raje Airey, “visual signs and symbols”, or “[a] visual vocabulary, formulates our thoughts and dictates our reactions to the world around us.”⁷ This assertion attests to the choice and use of some specific symbols adopted by the early Christians in the Greco-Roman world, partly in response to the hostile environment in which they lived.

Some of these symbols were Alpha and Omega, Anchor, Bread and Vine, Chi-Rho (the first two letters of “Christ”), the Cross, Dove, Fire, and Fish. Others such as Lamb, Shepherd, ship, and Vine were also used.⁸ To think of those symbols as visual or conceptual representations pointing to realities beyond themselves,⁹ suggests two things: the first is, those symbols or images were not created or invented by the early Christians; they were part of their cultural, phenomenal and spiritual environment, and all they did was to adopt them and imbue them with a certain religious significance. The second is, the theologically creative and syncretistically responsible appropriation and use of those symbols occurred.¹⁰

The use of those signs and other artistic symbols in the first two or three centuries to express the Christian faith and shape its life explains why Christianity needs such religious innovations to survive from time to time. Thus, the energy that drives any notable renewal or revival of Christianity in any setting is “religious innovation.” This observation has hardly been contested by historians of Christianity. It is against this background that the following observation was also made in relation to the creative use of symbols by all forms of Christianity:

Symbolism is the vehicle of revelation. Born in encounter ... symbolisms summarize and interpret ... experience. They are ... given, born, grow, and die amid changing circumstances. At times they appear as something new; at times they bring new significance to observances which have lost their meaning, or which have been adopted from elsewhere. Taken from the realm of human experience, they relate man to that which is of ultimate concern.¹¹

This further confirms the fact that the reactions and responses that religious symbols, logos, and images dictate inspire, and are, to some extent, symbolic. It is in this sense that symbols and images transcend just mere visible signs to also include thoughts, reactions, habits, and attitudes etc. Even the very art of interpreting symbols also affirms the affinity between visual or objective symbols, and “behavioral symbols;” both are often subjected to similar systems of interpretation. The very complexity of thoughts that anything symbolic generates

particularly in religion and how it affects the impact of religion on society, also subjects religious symbols to changes, modifications, abandonment, controversies, and/or de-emphasization from time to time.

From the fifth to the eight centuries of the church, one of the theological controversies that plagued the church was about ‘icons’.¹² In what was popularly described as the “iconoclastic controversies” – the question was whether the church should or should not use images in Christian worship.¹³ The images in question were that of Christ, his mother (Mary), the apostles, saints, and scenes from the Old and New Testaments pictured in Mosaics, frescoes, bronze, and carvings in ivory. These were predominantly found in churches, chapels, and private homes.¹⁴ The division caused by the use of those images in the church partly deepened the territorial divide between the East and the West as bishops, monks, followers, and later some emperors from either side opposed and defended the veneration of the so called “Christian images.”

At the heart of the controversy was the allegation that the images used by the church were idolatrous, pagan, and unscriptural. Those who defended their use, on the other hand, claimed that they were valuable means of instructing illiterate Christians in the faith. Whether the Greek constituency favored icons, or the non-Greek opposed the use of icons, the whole controversy became an issue of cultural, political, and theological struggle in the church.¹⁵ At the end of the day, both East and West accepted the use of icons as part of the life and worship of the church. But only icons basically in the form of pictures were retained, legitimized, and restored to the church, as a matter of compromise.¹⁶

The following statement by Walls aptly summarized this whole discourse on the church’s use of religious arts or symbols in the first millennial of its existence:

There was nothing distinct about the Earliest Christian art except its subject – matter. It brought no style, form, or technique that was not already employed in pagan Roman art. Christian art needs vernacular expression, a sense of locality. The word became flesh and spoke Aramaic; presumably with a Galilean Accent.¹⁷

Christian Visual Communication in the non-Western World: Discoveries of the Modern Missionary Enterprise

This part of the discussion is based on “the Christian West’s discovery of non-Western Christian arts.”¹⁸ If Walls’ use of the term “discovery” is to be taken seriously in relation to non-Western Christian arts, then what it means is that before the missionary enterprise from the West to the non-West, those “non-Western Christian arts” were already in existence and were only waiting for discovery. Walls emphasized this by contending that Christianity does not have a univocal religious culture belonging to a particular soil to warrant a necessary transport of a symbol, or by extension an image, or a logo belonging to a specific culture to another culture, since that culture has enough of its own symbols, images, and pictures to be discovered for use in the communication of the Gospel.¹⁹

Walls supported his assertions about the universality of the Christian message and themes in relation to the discovery of non-Western Christian symbols and images from the pioneering works and documentations of Constantini, Fleming, Butler, and Lehmann.²⁰ On specific achievements, Walls made reference to these pioneers' caveat that in taking the Gospel to the non-West, the West and its Missionaries should follow the example of the Early Church by identifying revered personalities, historical figures, and sages, make use of thought forms and patterns of life, evangelize and not colonize, and also remove all forms of "foreignness" from the host culture's sacred art.²¹

Walls again highlighted the fact that the use of arts that were "value free" and "religiously neutral" as means of communicating Christian themes and was common to the discoveries of Constantini, Fleming, Butler, and Lehmann. He noted that these men actually practiced the art of communicating Christian themes through paintings, architecture, and scholarship in a manner that the host cultures resources, materials, and symbols were adopted to reflect their identity, history, culture, aspirations, and hopes.²² It is against this background that Walls cited an example of how converted Asians and their scholars and artists painted Christ as belonging to Indians as a peace-maker, healer, and a "blesser" of the poor and naked, as along with transcending time, space, race, and culture.

According to Walls, that explains why in all of these Christian artistic expressions, be it in music, liturgy, portrayals, paintings, and architecture, the image of Christ in relation to the cultural world of non-Westerners was significant. The non-Western encounters and the discovery of Christian arts, as it were, partly produced the principles of the dialogue between Gospel and culture, contextualization, adaptation, and indigenization, which were all fundamental to missiological studies.²³

Walls apparently took the pains to focus more on what took place in the discovery of Christian arts in China, India, and other Asian countries, than that of Africa, in his book on the *Missionary Movement*. When it actually comes to the question of the discovery of African Christian arts, he maintained that the focus on Christian arts in Africa at the time of its encounter with the Christian West was marginal and tentative.²⁴ Even with what happened in Asia, in his own estimation that was also marginal. His argument was that those who pioneered the Christian Art Movement in Asia were unable to persuade the great missionary conferences and councils and societies of the West to give much attention to those arts, because the focus then was rather on how Western education and civilization could impact and transform non-Western churches.²⁵

Walls also emphasized that on the question of African Christian arts in African Christian worship, witness, and life, the attitude towards that was mixed; whilst some of the newer churches at the time were eager to employ indigenous art forms, others were reluctant to do so. Even African church leaders were careful to experiment, explore, and encourage the use of indigenous arts in African Christian worship. Walls thus pointed out that Western missionaries, missiologists, anthropologists, and field workers, who foresaw the potential of indigenous art in African Christianity, resorted to advocacy, encouragement, and offering suggestions in that direction.²⁶

Lesslie Newbigin, in relation to the potential of “these arts” encouraged his fellow missionaries to be faithful in words and action, and in theology and practice by ensuring that the Gospel is transmitted in its universal, supernatural, and supra-cultural nature across cultures.²⁷ Eugene Nida also shared his experience of the “indigenous arts” factor in cross-cultural Christianity as a result of his encounters in East Africa. He described what he saw as “positive discoveries” and as “extra biblical elements.” He chided his fellow Westerners of their inability to distinguish between central and peripheral areas of the African Christian faith.²⁸ In an article entitled, “Can the West be converted?”, Newbigin again denounced the principles of “Indigenization,” which he believes focus more on the past, and “adaptation,” which also wrongly suggests that the Gospel could be “cultural-free,” and rather opted for “contextualization,” which in his view focuses on the actual context shaped both by the past and open to the future as the credible guiding principle for cross-cultural engagement.²⁹

The questions posed by Lamin Sanneh, in relation to all of these points, were instructive, particularly in the light of the encounter between Africans and the Gospel:

The real question we should ask relates to the phenomenon of the rich and diverse religious life that flourished in African societies. For example, why did people draw a careful line between the world of divinities and that of ordinary life? By what rule did a common object, such as water or a piece of stone or wood, make the transition into a ritual symbol? Did the perception of a common object and its transformation into ritual subject become a factor in the use of mediation and intercession in African Christianity?³⁰

To these and other related questions on the use of artistic materials, objects, and symbols in African Christian spiritualities, Sanneh concurred that the issue is more than just an academic interest, as it has implications for pastoral concerns and developing a meaningful theology for the church in Africa.³¹

He again contended that the confident and articulate use of Christian language and symbolism to diagnose and prescribe for the African condition was an imaginative and almost a visionary achievement by African Christian groups, such as the charismatic churches, the prophetic churches, and all the other groups that come under the category of African-initiated churches.³²

In his book, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Lamin Sanneh highlights these same truths about the Gospel across cultural frontiers. In what he describes as the principle of “translatability” in Christianity, Sanneh argues that it embodies all the principles underlying the relation of the Christian Gospel to traditional cultures as the best method for spreading the Gospel.³³ The suitability of the translatability principle, according to Sanneh, is in its continuity with the culture in which the Gospel locates itself at any material time.

Translatability therefore affirms the fact that all cultures fundamentally continue with the Gospel with all the threats, risks, and vulnerabilities, and as part of the dialogue, it also makes demands for discontinuities, departures, obedience, and also encourages self-affirmations and self-transformation.³⁴ Sanneh maintains that though translation was basically a linguistic exercise

carried out by the missionary enterprises, it contributed largely to the endless renewal of the Christian message and themes in pluralist Africa.³⁵

Describing Christianity as syncretistic, including its motif, is where Sanneh underscores Christianity's transcultural appeal and its appetite for absorbing materials, concepts, symbols, and imageries from other religious traditions in order for it to survive.³⁶ And for the risks that the tendency to borrow and absorb from other religious traditions bring, that only makes Christianity to endlessly survive in all cultural societies and to continue to be renewed, revived, and reformed. In societies like that of Africa, the prophetic reforms of the Christian faith explains these syncretistic risks better.³⁷

Logo(s), Symbols and Images in General Literature

A logo is a symbol, emblem, trademark, or an image that represents an entity or a thing; a logo signifies or identifies a thing or an idea.³⁸ Logos are generally associated with businesses or corporate outlook with the intention to influence public behavior favorably towards a corporate's brand or build a trust. Logo(s) appear in unique fonts, colors, and designs.³⁹ As a matter of fact, they present a visually recognizable and memorable picture that gives information, tells the story, and relate a brand's message to its target audience.⁴⁰

A logo is an abbreviation of the term "logotype," which is a combination of two Greek words, *logos* - meaning "a word" and *tupos* or *typos*, meaning "imprint".⁴¹ Putting the two words together could literally mean "putting word into print, or a graphic, or a symbolic representative of an idea." Hence, be it "logotype," or "logography," which also could mean "putting one's word into a sign, a symbol or writing," is a long-standing tradition or practice of enterprises or organizations, or even an individual for promoting instant recognition.⁴²

Logo(s) therefore, encompass a wide range of symbols either "uniquely or exclusively" created without any prior existence, or adopted from already-existing symbols, which are culturally and naturally conditioned. Culturally and naturally conditioned logos have their established and dynamic meanings and interpretations – whilst uniquely or exclusively created logos have their assigned meanings often derived from experience, history, vision, mission, philosophy, etc.⁴³ Both categories, however, could have multiplicity of meanings apart from the established, authorial, or assigned meaning.⁴⁴

The multiple meanings of logos are often triggered by people's sensual, emotional, religious, cognitive cultural, economic, and social state of being. This is often in relation to surrounding elements, such as habits, actions, objects, climate, atmosphere, or a combination of one or two of these in different proportions.⁴⁵ Logo(s) in general are adopted, created, and also abandoned. Their visual simplicity, conceptual clarity, and corporate impact assessment also affect the decision to abandon, change, transform, or reconfigure the logo in use.

Symbols =are defined elsewhere as anything that carries and conveys to people an idea shared collectively, and also impresses an idea into the mind of people.⁴⁶ According to Forte, symbols basically include objects - both in sacred and secular use for events. They may include gestures or images.⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that even as a food-stuffed dish, like sweet potatoes

in some cultures, is given as a symbol of a promise of life in times of bereavement to the bereaved.⁴⁸ Victor Turner emphasizes what he describes as “document symbols,”⁴⁹ as including objects, activities, rituals, gestures, social relationships between people in a given context, and verbal behaviors like prayers, formulas, chants, songs, and recitations of sacred narratives, etc.⁵⁰

Symbols according to Turner have their semantic structure: some are “multivocal”, whilst others are “univocal.” The multivocal implies “many senses,”⁵¹ and the univocal, a single meaning or sense. At the heart of the semantic structure and themes being represented is “what is being signified,” or the referent.⁵² Thus, fundamentally, symbols communicate values and norms, sets of practical guidelines, and a set of paradigms for actions.⁵³ In some circles or settings, symbols do not only have meanings; they actually carry powers. As noted in respect of a ritual symbol in particular; Turner posited:

It is also a fusion of the powers believed to be inherent in the persons, objects, relationships, events, and histories represented by ritual symbols. It is a mobilization of energies as well as messages. In this respect, the objects and activities in point are not merely things that stand for other things or something abstract [:] they participate in the powers and virtues they represent.⁵⁴

Symbols in this sense, especially in religious and faith environments, assume a certain degree of ontological significance.⁵⁵ This allows us to appreciate and in many ways relate to non-human entities in terms of motivations and imbue into them immanence and transcendent realities.⁵⁶ George Lakoff, and Mark Johnson, in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, hinted that symbols as ontological metaphors serve a very limited range of purposes, but merely perceiving them as symbols also truncates their inherent cosmogonic essence.⁵⁷

As noted already in this paper, images are visual icons; beyond that they serve as mediating notions of the sacred to a religious society or environment.⁵⁸ Images are basically in the form of pictures, figures, and animals, paintings, sculpture, architecture, and any form of artistic impression, with the purpose of conveying a sense of the sacred and to preserve religious traditions.⁵⁹

The oldest of such religious images are in the form of paintings, and manufactured images of all kind. For Christianity, such images serve also as windows through which the believer is led to the sacred mysteries of Christ and the Gospels.⁶⁰ They also serve didactic purposes, and, in some areas, serve as a form of religious statement.⁶¹

Logo(s), Symbols and images of Contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostal /Charismatic Ministries in Scholarly Literature

In one of his recent books on African Pentecostalism titled, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*; with a major sub-title, *Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa*, and a minor sub-title, *Trends in African Christianity*, Asamoah-Gyadu, devoted Chapter Three of that book to symbols and logos used by some African Pentecostals.⁶² The heading of that chapter reads, “Dove, Eagle and Globe: Symbolizing Dominion Pneumatology”.⁶³

What Asamoah-Gyadu intends to illustrate in the heading of that chapter is highlighted in his own words:

In this chapter, we continue with the changing nature of mission with the rise of Pentecostalism, looking at new ways of symbolizing the Spirit and his work. Through new symbols, contemporary Pentecostals have pushed for a practical pneumatology, in keeping with the focus on power, transformation, and expansion ‘to the ends of the earth’ (Act 1:8).⁶⁴

He goes on to clarify this by saying further:

The traditional symbol of Pentecostalism has been the dove. The recent focus on motivation, expansion of territory, and empowerment means, however, that other symbols have been adopted by contemporary forms of the movement. Among those symbols are the globe, which represents the international mission aspiration of contemporary Pentecostalism and its leadership. Of particular significance in the African context is the eagle, a symbol of emancipation, accomplishment, power, and dominion that has been widely adopted based on the text in Isaiah 4: 28-31.⁶⁵

In fact, contemporary Pentecostals and Charismatics use more than just the dove, the globe, and the eagle to symbolize the Holy Spirit’s works, or to represent the practical pneumatology that Asamoah-Gyadu talks about. Again, in their use of many other symbols, the focus is not always on power, transformation, territorial expansion, emancipation, dominion, and accomplishment, etc. We will revisit this discussion later and see what the use of other symbols signifies in African Pentecostal and Charismatic spiritualities.

Meanwhile, of the three symbols, that is, the dove, the eagle, and the globe, Asamoah-Gyadu maintained that the dove is the traditional symbol of Pentecostalism. Just as I was trying to figure out what that assertion meant, I realized that a white spotless, beautiful dove depicted on the front cover of Cephas N. Omenyo’s book on Pentecostalism was about to land on earth.⁶⁶ Apart from that indirect confirmation that the symbol of the dove represents Pentecostalism, Larbi’s *Pentecostalism* makes no such association. And even in *African Charismatics*, such assertion was hard to find.⁶⁷ But, perhaps, the beautiful white dove symbol, which is the official symbol always on top of the cover page of *Pneuma*, “the *Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*” may also support the view of it being the symbol of global Pentecostalism.⁶⁸ These are but just a few of such evidence indications in favor of this assertion.

Classic Ghanaian Pentecostal Denominations and their Logos, Images and Symbols

The Classic Pentecostals

The classic Pentecostals in Ghana, according to Larbi, include the Christ Apostolic Church (International), the Apostolic Church of Ghana, the Church of Pentecost, and the Assemblies of God, Ghana.⁶⁹ The symbolic logo of the Christ Apostolic Church is in three different forms; meanwhile, there are two other different logos under the name Christ Apostolic

Church International.⁷⁰ The first forms are all spherical in shape and each one of them has another sub-spherical shape; inside them are the image or picture of Jesus and his sheep around him; two of these logos show Jesus lovingly holding a lamb with his right arm to his chest, and in one of the logos, Jesus is holding a long shepherd staff.⁷¹

In one of the three slightly-different types of logos of the Christ Apostolic Church, the particular type of image of Christ inserted in the sub-spherical shape looks like the type you find in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.⁷² Jesus is depicted in what looks like a light or a cloud of glory circulating around his head. Meanwhile the inscription on all these three Logos reads, “One Fold, One Shepherd”;⁷³ and the relevant text is John 10:16. The other different types of logos that come under Christ Apostolic Church International are both slightly different in content.⁷⁴ One of them has a sub-spherical shape and the other has nothing of the sort. Both of them have John the Baptist and Jesus standing in a river - Jesus in front with John the Baptist behind him; and Jesus in white apparel while that of John the Baptist is different. In both *logos* you see “a white dove,” descending from the midst of a white cloud to land on Jesus.⁷⁵ In the other spherical shaped logo, you can actually see different cloud formations as the white dove descended on Jesus in his shining white apparel.⁷⁶

There are three forms of *logos* bearing the name Christ Apostolic Church and two under the name “Christ Apostolic International,” but apparently all belong to one religious Pentecostal denomination in Ghana. The description “international” may have been added to the Christ Apostolic Church when they started planting churches outside Ghana.⁷⁷ This description is typical of most Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Ghana. Let me now attempt to explain at least the significance of the image of Jesus, the sheep, and the dove in the official Logos of the Christ Apostolic Church International.

The Christ Apostolic Church

The image of Jesus – This is actually found at the center of all the different types or forms of *logos* that the Christ Apostolic Church International has. It obviously affirms their doctrinal and church denominational position on Christ.⁷⁸ This can be confirmed by the fact that while Christ is present in all the church’s official logos, the white dove is not. That is why as it can be seen in the church’s official name, it is Christ Apostolic, and not just any Apostolic Church. Even the official Biblical text, John 10:16, which partly talks about “one fold, one shepherd” also highlights the church’s ecumenical belief and relationship with Christ.⁷⁹ Once Christ is at the center of the church as the only shepherd, and the sheep fold is one and not many, as all the various churches across the whole world are one in fold under one shepherd called Christ.

The Sheep – As an Apostolic Church belonging to Christ, the picture of the sheep around Christ, and Christ himself holding one of the sheep in his arm are missiologically significant to the Christ Apostolic Church.⁸⁰ Christ is illustrated as a shepherd whose pre-occupation is to look for his sheep, bring them to the fold, and nurture and care for them. Hence, the name “apostolic,” to express their mission of soul-winning, evangelism, disciple-making, and church planting.

Once Christ is at the center of the church as shepherd, the ministry of bringing in the lost sheep is critical, as far as Christ's shepherd identity is unquestionable. Thus, for the Christ Apostolic Church, the lost sheep are within their national domain and international territories, and they must be brought to the fold. So, the mandate to win souls and plant churches is sacrosanct.⁸¹

If you actually study Christ Apostolic Church's *Logos*, you would realize that there are two images that come under the name Christ Apostolic International. It is in those ones that you see the white dove descending on Christ. In fact, you wonder why those *logos* also in particular come under the name Christ Apostolic Church International. This can partially be explained by alluding to the fact that the foundation of World Pentecostalism is the Holy Spirit as the inaugurator, inspirer, and sustainer. And in Acts 1:8, where Jesus promised the coming of the Spirit, the very event associated with Pentecostalism, its global character, and influence cannot be achieved without the work of the Spirit, because that was indispensable for the mandate. That was why Jesus commanded his followers to wait until the Spirit comes upon them.⁸²

It therefore stands to reason that Pentecostal Internationalism is impossible without the Holy Spirit. And wherever the Spirit is at work among the people, their impact would be capable of going across frontiers.⁸³ This may somehow account for the adoption of the dove under the name Christ Apostolic Church International.

The Apostolic Church

The official logo of the Apostolic Church is a bold drawing of the letter "A" in its minuscular form and the picture of the globe inserted within it. The letter "A" obviously represents the name "Apostolic," and the globe as well represents their geographical mandate or presence.⁸⁴ Apart from the globe, which might represent the missional vision of the church, there is nothing else about the Apostolic Church's official logo that requires any critical interpretation. However, a closer observation of the Apostolic Church's official logo as adapted by its youth movement and its Bible school are rather interesting.

That of the youth movement has the official logo alright but with a sub-spherical shape under the name, the Apostolic Church International, and then the "youth movement" written underneath. That of the Bible School also has the official logo symbol in the sub-spherical shape including a Bible, and a picture of an ancient scroll with the inscription, with "study to show thyself approved unto God" below it.⁸⁵

The addition of the word international to the Apostolic Church by the youth movement of the church might suggest that the Apostolic Church has either not yet gone international, or its youth movement has gone international. But the symbol of the globe could also suggest that they are already international, or that probably represents the aspiration and vision to go not just international, but also global. It would however be doubtful for anyone to think that the Apostolic Church has existed all this while without international branches as one of the oldest Pentecostal churches in Ghana. In all, The Apostolic Church's official symbolic logo seeks to communicate two main objectives: its apostolic identity as symbolized by the Basic Latin letter \mathfrak{a} , and its global vision symbolised by the globe.⁸⁶

The Church of Pentecost

The Church of Pentecost's official logo is a simple one. The obvious difference between it and that of Christ Apostolic and the Apostolic Church is in its triple spherical shape. Besides, it also has the white dove symbolizing the bodily form of the Holy Spirit and what looks like the drawings of the continents of the world under it. The drawings do not look like that of a typical globe but like a "world map."

There is another logo, but that is not often used, or very conspicuous. That one looks like a flame of fire encircled with woven branches of leaves. One would have expected to see this particular unofficial logo of flames of fire as the official logo because of the name "Pentecost." This is because to some extent, many of the members of the Church of Pentecost believe that their Church continues the Biblical day of Pentecost when the Spirit descended like a tongue of fire on the waiting disciples and their followers, hence the name "Pentecost," and their sense of uniqueness and prayer lifestyle.⁸⁷

The official logo, with its features, and the unofficial logo, with its flames, are meant to communicate an identity that is based on Bible and Church history. The rest are spiritual orientation and ethics, and a sense of global mission. In a casual conversation with one of the contemporary scholars of the Church of Pentecost, he hinted without comparison that, "the Church of Pentecost is a serious church."⁸⁸ It is also somehow true that members of the church of Pentecost, wherever you encounter them, have a different attitude towards other churches, their own church, and Christian spirituality. Many have attributed that to their polity, sheer visibility, numbers, growing number of churches, social institutions, and organizational excellence.⁸⁹ The phenomenal success of the Church of Pentecost, in relation to the dove, the flames of fire, and the symbol of the world map, as depicted in its composite official logo, have all been acknowledged in the following words:

The main reason the church has grown is that its people love Jesus – they have been set on fire for Him. It shows in their worship and in their lives. The church has never allowed compromise. They treat sin and reversion to cultic religious practices as seriously as each one takes his responsibility to Jesus Christ and the church. Conversion growth ... personal conversion ... personal experience ... focus on the fundamentals of mission has helped the CoP to avoid the over clericalism and nominalism associated with the ... older mission denominations.⁹⁰ [or may be the other sister Pentecostals]

Assemblies of God, Ghana

The denominational logo of the Assemblies of God, Ghana, appears to be the simplest of all in terms of its symbolic elements among that of the main classic Pentecostal traditions in Ghana. This logo is first of all in the form of a rectangle, in which "Assemblies of God" has been written, and below it, a geometric figure of a shield with AG embossed within it.⁹¹ The other forms are the one with an "open Bible" with the inscription "All the Gospel," and the one that looks like an open Bible on a cross, with the complete logo on the Bible instead. There is another

one in the form of a stylistic writing of the AG, with a flame of fire in-between the two legs of the letter “A.”⁹² From the look of things, the logo with the Open Bible in it is the one that is officially used by the church.

Therefore, as one can notice, the main symbols in the Assemblies of God, Ghana, logo are the letter AG, and the Open Bible. It will not be wrong for anyone to presume that the letters AG stand for the name Assemblies of God. But such an assumption would be incontestable only if the authors had thought of inserting the small letter “o” in between A and G, for it to read as “AoG.” Thus, to the contrary, the letters AG, as embossed in the official organizational logo of Assemblies of God, stand for something else and not the name Assemblies of God. This is evident in the doctoral thesis on the *Origins, Growth, Development and Influence of Assemblies of God, Ghana*, wherein the author, Paul Frimpong-Manso, used the abbreviation AoG for Assemblies of God, and AoGG, for Assemblies of God, Ghana.⁹³

Interestingly, the general public of Ghana identifies with the stylistic AG embossment on the Assemblies of God’s logo even more than the actual name written in the rectangular shape on top of the shield-like symbol.⁹⁴ All of these put together effectively communicate the symbolic identity of the church. Also, of notice is the Open Bible with the inscription “All the Gospel.” Perhaps, the phrase, “All the Gospel” as written on the Open Bible is what is abbreviated as AG in the logo of Assemblies of God. And for Assemblies of God, that symbol or abbreviation is fundamental to their *doctrine, life, and faith*.⁹⁵

As noted earlier, there are other symbols like the flame of fire and the cross. As the first major global and world-wide Pentecostal body or church produced by the AZUZA revival of 1906, their use of the flame and the cross was significant.⁹⁶ The cross symbolizes their emphasis on the message of salvation in Christ to the dying world and the flame of fire that their spiritual devotion and the form of their personal and corporate worship incorporates.⁹⁷ The symbol of the cross was to portray their continuity with historic Christianity, regardless of the fire or the flame. The cross also represents their commitment to the spiritual salvation and the social transformation of humanity as a shared consciousness with all forms of Christianity.⁹⁸

The Charismatics

In general, the Charismatic Churches in Ghana share some of the symbolic elements in the official logos of the older Pentecostals churches. But Charismatic churches like Victory Bible Church International and Fountain Gate Chapel, and probably a few other ones have none of those symbolic elements at all in their official logos. However, most of the official logos of the rest of the Charismatic churches have the following symbols: the dove, the eagle, the shield, the sword, the cross, a royal crown, and an open or closed Bible. The rest are: the globe, the type of oil lamp used in Biblical times, and flame of fire, among others⁹⁹

A few Charismatic Churches have changed their names in the course of their ministry. When that happens, their official logos’ symbolic elements or images also change. Most times, the change of elements is just a mere substitution with the many symbols available, or the original composite logo is just reshuffled. Usually, apart from one, two, or three of such Biblical

imageries adopted by Ghana's Charismatics for their official logos, the rest are just stylistic or aesthetic impressions in form.

The spiritual, Biblical, and contextual relevance of such visual Biblical images often compel the Charismatics to use them for their periodic and annual church events, anniversaries, revival programs, and festivals. Thus, events themes displayed on billboards, handbills, posters, and "tele-publicity" are likely to have certain relevant, appropriate, and significant Biblical symbols. Even if they are drawn for the natural or cultural repertoire of symbols, they are contextualized, spiritualized, and sacralized to convey an experiential appeal.

The use of religious symbols to communicate Biblical truth, the call to mission, and a specific message all affirm a distinct ecclesiastical identity, and to appropriate and create a certain spiritual atmosphere by African Charismatics is not new to African Christianity.¹⁰⁰ Indigenous African churches were known for their profuse use of objects, drawings, pictures, colors, and images for their spiritual mediations, devotions, and instructions. Most contemporary African Charismatics and the prophetic ministries are only continuing that practice in creative and innovative ways where you even find such communicative logos in books published by most Pentecostal and Charismatic Church leaders and pastors.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

It cannot be out of place to contend therefore that Christianity, in contemporary Africa and in its Pentecostal and Charismatic forms, in particular, employ "religious symbols," objects, images, and symbolic logos in their spirituality, worship, and witness. Though their emphasis on the Word of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit prevents them from falling into the trap of venerating the symbols and objects that are dear to them, their motive for using them might not be radically different from the Iconoclasm of the church in the era of the Holy Roman Empire.

Thus, contemporary African Pentecostal/Charismatic Iconoclasm, as evident in their logos, symbols and images, are employed to convey a distinct Christian identity; affirm a specific mission and message, demonstrate the sense of continuity with Biblical and historic Christianity and to exhibit personal, denominational, and corporate religious culture, faith, and ethos. These uses of Christian arts and symbols are creative departures from the traps that beset the uses of such Biblical, religious, and Christian arts in the first millennial history of the church. It is also a fact that the fullest potential of these artistic expressions of the Christian faith is yet to be fully exploited by African Pentecostals and Charismatics. Rather, the use of objects and elements for mediating the supernatural is what is gaining prominence in sections of African Christianity. Pentecostals and Charismatics themselves remain divided over how oil, water, stones, sand, and fruits, etc. are used in spiritual mediations as symbolic means of tapping into the supernatural for healing, deliverance, prosperity, and protection of members of African Christians.

But regardless of whatever the risks and the achievements are, Pentecostal/Charismatic Iconography will continue to crave for a theological, pastoral, and scholarly guidance and attention in order to strengthen the faith and life of the church in Africa.

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