

## DEVELOPING CHARISMA: NKRUMAH AS A “CARGO” BENEFACTOR IN GHANA

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**ABSTRACT** Some scholars view that Kwame Nkrumah's strength in the general elections of the 1950's simply resulted from the CPP's promise of economic benefits. But Nkrumah's appeal and influence might be more understood in his charisma akin to that of the prophets of the African Independent Churches. Nkrumah frequently used Christian symbolism, and prophet-like authority, to offer psychological 'healing' and economic security in a situation of social anomie of rapid transition. Nkrumah can be compared to 'cargo' benefactor in this context. His offer of economic benefits helped establish Nkrumah as a charismatic 'prophet' of 'Nkrumah Cult' in Ghana.

**Key Words:** African Independent Church movement; Cargo Cult; Christianity; Charismatic authority; Kwame Nkrumah; William Wade Harris.

### INTRODUCTION

#### I. Nkrumah, the Father Figure in the Gold Coast and Ghana

In 1997, Ghana celebrated its 40th anniversary of independence. For the last 40 years, the evaluation of Kwame Nkrumah has fluctuated. Especially after the coup in 1966 which threw out Nkrumah and his cabinet, Nkrumah was underestimated. During the radical period in the early 1980's, Nkrumah was revitalised in the struggle for African revolution. After the radical years, because Ghana pursued economic recovery through the Structural Adjustment Programme, the political significance of Nkrumah reemerged. Currently, Nkrumah is finally recognised as a father of the nation, even if quite a few people think that his mismanagement in economic policy resulted in political disaster. This trend is partly because Nkrumaist radical influence had become least significant in the present politics and therefore the Ghanaian government can exploit his image and legend only for the unity of Ghana and Pan-Africanism. In comparison, Zambian President Chiluba is said to have feared former President Kenneth Kaunda enough to house-arrest him recently.

Compared with his contemporary African politicians, Nkrumah's role may have been more complicated and paradoxical because he exploited Christian aspects as much as possible in the style of his leadership, although as a Marxist he clearly denied the Christian church. The charismatic style of his leadership resembled some prophets in the African Independent Churches. In particular, compared with his political rival, J.B. Danquah of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), Nkrumah's charisma appealed more to general public in the Gold Coast.

Nkrumah was not alone in exploiting Christianity for political campaign. Kaunda influenced the mass in Northern Rhodesia with Christian-style mass political rallies. Nyerere also often quoted from the Bible for his campaign. However, only Nkrumah skillfully cultivated economic and materialistic expectations of the people to his policy, people anticipated a better future for the emerging country and themselves.

#### RECENT DISCUSSIONS ON NKROMAH'S CHARISMA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NKROMAISM

Apter (1968a) first pointed to the importance of the charismatic aspects of Nkrumah, and developed the 'political religion' argument for the case of Nkrumaism in *Ghana in Transition* (1972) as Ghana went from a traditional regime to a legal-rational one. Weber (1947) earlier argued that the emergence of a charismatic leader was probable in such a transition period. Kedourie in *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* also wrote that Nkrumah satisfied the conditions of a religious charismatic leader (Kedourie, 1970). Apter (1972) argued that Nkrumah succeeded as a politician because he and the Convention People's Party (CPP) established him as a new charismatic leader in the early 1950's.<sup>(1)</sup> In his capacity as a charismatic figure, Nkrumah frequently used Christian clichés and symbolisms.

On the other hand, Owusu (1970) retorted that the economic benefit was paramount in his analysis of the mass support for the CPP:

The fundamental thesis of this study is that political relations are considered extensions or primary dimensions of economic relations. That is, the set of relations concerning the mobilization of resources, of production and exchange, of distribution and allocation of scarce values, primarily defines, establishes, or influences power relationships and patterns of authoritative domination and subordination. Economic relations also greatly influence legitimate control of public policy-decisions and support for these decisions. Possession and control of wealth or economic resources is, no doubt, an important ingredient of power, .... (Owusu, 1970: 3-4)

Rathbone (1973) argued that the main actors to support the CPP were not 'Standard VII Boys'<sup>(2)</sup> but small businessmen, who were strongly motivated by practical economic benefits. And only the small businessmen practically possessed both the economic motivation and finance to support the CPP.

Owusu (1970) put forward a very interesting point. How far did economic benefits influence the masses to vote for the CPP? Owusu concluded that the aspect of economic benefit was superior to the other aspects, such as charismatic leadership in rapid transition.<sup>(3)</sup> Owusu has ignored other important factors, such as loyalty to the party and anticipation of a charismatic leader in a chaotic social and political transition. Without considering the charisma of Nkrumah, it is not easy to explain why Nkrumah won the general elections, especially in 1951 and 1954, before the CPP was institutionalised. The economic-benefit argument may be appropriate after the CPP held government power to implement economic policy. But in the early success of the CPP, Owusu's argument does not satisfy those questions. If only CPP eco-

conomic policies would benefit the commoners, he needs to explain why other political parties did not produce such appealing economic policies. Rathbone admitted, that ‘the UGCC leadership was more concerned with economics than with nationalist politics’ (Rathbone, 1973: 394). The important question lies in why the masses intended to support the CPP, and dared to vote for them.

Offering economic benefits to the masses should not be understood as a paramount factor for CPP support, but, as Weber suggests, as an accelerator or a catalyst when a charismatic authority is in the process of legitimising itself (Weber, 1947). The economic factor is not separate from other reasons for CPP support, but interrelated. The process of building a charismatic leadership and transferring this authority to legal-rational institutions is not necessarily incompatible with the economic motivation for CPP support.

A further question therefore arises. What made Nkrumah so charismatic? Dunn (1972) suggested that:

Owusu is unable to go beyond an explanation in covertly charismatic terms of Nkrumah’s superior *plausibility as a bringer of cargo*. (Dunn, 1972: 115, my emphasis)

That is, Nkrumah became a successful charismatic leader, because he was expected, as the prophet William Wade Harris was to realise materialistic benefits for the masses in Ghana.

The use of Christian symbolism in a political context is not infrequent. Kaunda did not hesitate to call Christian ministers and himself “we, as Christian leaders.”<sup>(4)</sup> The Mau Mau members in Kenya were convinced that they would never be shot because they were protected by spiritual power. Even the Pakistani nationalists frequently used C. Newman’s hymn, ‘Lead Kindly Light,’ in the rallies (Kedourie, 1970). This prophetist or Christian tendency in political parties was often seen in Africa (Bennett, 1968). Nyerere’s Arusha Declaration on Ujamaa socialism showed the influence of Catholic theology. From the beginning of the CPP election campaign, Nkrumah’s resemblance to prophets and Christian preachers was apparent (Kedourie, 1970).

‘Spiritual’ churches and African Independent Church movements were often seen in Africa in the first half of the twentieth century. The Gold Coast also had many movements.<sup>(5)</sup> African Independent Churches became popular because people needed new interpretations and expressions of their religious beliefs, amid tensions of social change.

Nkrumah and the prophets of African Independent Churches shared similar circumstances. The syncretism of African Independent Church movements was very appealing to the deprived people, when traditional societies dissolved and rapid modernisation began. Similarly, Nkrumah offered materialistic wealth, power, and a new kind of authority, after traditional authorities seemed to have lost their capability in a rapid social, economic, and political transition.

One might ask why Nkrumah, the charismatic leader, needed to build Nkrumaism as a political religion. Weber (1947) originally defined three basic ideal-types of authority; traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational. Shils (1958) wrote that pure charisma was very unstable, and the maintenance of charisma required its transition

into either traditional authority or a legal rational (bureaucratic) one, which are more secure. Routinisation and legitimisation of charismatic authority are necessary for establishing a longer and more stable regime (Gerth & Mills, 1991).<sup>(6)</sup> Nkrumah's government needed to transform itself into a more legal-rational authority by the early 1960's, when his charismatic authority rapidly faded. Constitutional reforms was undertaken to change the Ghanaian political system, then legitimised by a national referendum and general election. However, an additional device was needed to secure his regime, and this was provided by the ideology of Nkrumaism.

Apter (1972) argued that 'Ghanaian socialism or Nkrumaism was a blend of moral values which emphasized many of the puritan qualities: thrift, hard work, honesty, sacrifice, devotion to duty.' It consisted of 'the element of racial revolution and African socialism,' and was 'symbolized perhaps by the Black Star, the "Garvey star" in the flag ....' Nkrumaism was 'clearly directed towards the establishment of a social state using modern rational means of planning in order to move rapidly toward modernization and economic development' (Apter, 1972: xvi, 356, 358).

#### PROPHETISM, A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS BASE FOR CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP IN GHANA

African Independent Churches were the religion of the suppressed and deprived people in colonial regimes, who needed a new moral standard religious syncretism and a strong leadership.

When the African Independent Church movement began in the late 19th century in the Gold Coast, it was led by local factions which had split from the societies of the Methodist mission. It was not only a new religious movement providing an inversion of Christianity, but was also a political and social resistance movement among the church members against European political and cultural domination.

Scholars have classified the types of Independent Church movements.<sup>(7)</sup> Kedourie classified them into the 'Ethiopian' and the 'prophet-led' and wrote that the Ethiopian church was one in which 'the white man would have no share' (Kedourie, 1970: 119). The typical Ethiopian church, which was related to Black Methodist churches in the US, was a totally black version of Christianity with a black Christ and worship exclusively for blacks. On the other hand, the 'prophet-led' church resulted from the amalgamation of traditional beliefs with Christianity introduced from the West. The Ethiopian churches later impressed some black philosophers including Marcus Garvey by their role in building black identities and political consciousness. By contrast, 'prophet-led' churches were naturally more mixed with indigenous religious culture. In fact, their way of worship still retained much of the tradition, although they always tried to exclude such traditional practices as fetishes, 'jujus,' or taboos.

In West Africa, where the early nationalist movement had already emerged by the beginning of the twentieth century, there were few Ethiopian church movements. The 'prophet-led' church was generally more popular and influential in those areas.<sup>(8)</sup> A series of Independent Church movements successfully absorbed the frustrations of the indigenous people in West Africa, because the movement provided alterna-

tives to Western Christian missions.<sup>(9)</sup> African Independent Churches acted as a political safety valve. The Ethiopian church successfully became the forum for politically radical leaders in southern Africa in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, the ‘prophet-led’ church in West Africa, whose function to some extent included providing the religious-political forum for indigenous people, was less political than the Ethiopian church.

The most influential and successful prophet of the African Independent Churches in the Gold Coast was William Wade Harris. His style of prophetism was very influential especially in the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast after he moved east from Liberia and began to convert in 1912. Whether it had been his intention or not, he became involved in politics, when he started conversion in the Ivory Coast. Because he usually commanded and taught in English, the French colonial government of the Ivory Coast became very suspicious of him as an agitator against French colonial policy. However, Harris’ creed led to the abandonment of fetishes, and moreover provided a third choice between traditional religion and the Western mission-led Christianity.

The reason for the rapid increase of the African Independent Church movement in West African society mainly resulted from two elements: firstly, racial discrimination in the Western missions, and secondly, cultural adaptation or syncretism. Firstly, not so many sects of Western missions positively helped indigenous people to be promoted to higher ranks in the mission. The exception is, for example, the Bremen Mission, which planned a self-governing body by indigenous people rather than inviting missionaries from abroad, and began to train indigenous elder people for the posts of the leaders.<sup>(10)</sup> Most of the Western missions, however, did not absolutely trust local ministers to run the missions.

Secondly, the African Independent Churches were more prepared to adopt Christianity to local cultural practices. For instance, Harris told his church members to follow the strict disciplines in the church and furthermore to burn all the fetishes, but his creed was still open to polygamy.<sup>(11)</sup>

This syncretism was an important element which was needed in order for the African Independent Churches to gain many members. Fetish belief, witchcraft, traditional taboos, idols, charms, belief of guardian spirits, or magic in traditional religion were abolished in all the missions. All traditional factors which were not considered rational and liberal were forbidden. Traditionally, however, indigenous priests were expected to perform ‘healing.’ In terms of prophetism, Harris effectively showed his miracle healing to the masses. Miracle healing originally was performed by witchdoctors. Harris’ performance in his capacity as a healer was perceived as demonstrating his superior power to that of the witchdoctors.

Symbolism was also very important for prophets. Generally speaking, visibility of garments as symbols is a very useful tool which influences people. While Harris prohibited any idols and fetishes, he invented instead a new symbol: a white robe. African prophets were generally very interested in their styles of clothes. One South African prophet, Isaiah Shembe, loved to wear a black dress with a white collar and a necklace of Zulu beadwork and a European sun-helmet (Sundkler, 1961). A Ghanaian prophet, Sampson Oppong, always put on a black robe with red crosses.

While robes made church members feel that the prophet had a sort of divine aura,

prophets also provided a special style of appearance, and a unique way of speech. They also built compounds. The Twelve Apostles Church invented 'the garden,' the special settlement where prophets stayed and were isolated from the rest of the society (Baëta, 1962). This garden provided seclusion and obscurity within the church.

Tolerance toward polygamy, ceremonies, symbolism and the use of healing helped Harris attract church members. There was, however, a far more important element for the success of his mission: his charisma. Harris proclaimed that he was selected by God to be the last Messiah, and his task was to convert pagans to spread Christianity.

Sociologically, what were the factors that encouraged prophetism in the Gold Coast and to what classes of people did it appeal? The suppressed and deprived people, were in a situation of social anomie, and sought for a new authoritative figure. The prophets including Harris provided new moral guidelines for these suppressed and deprived people. Jeffries (1970) wrote that Voget's analysis of native Americans' prophetism could also be adopted in the West African context, and that prophetism was a process for a subordinate people to obtain a personal and social re-integration through a selective rejection, modification, and synthesis of both traditional and alien cultural components (Jeffries, 1970: 5).

Generally speaking, prophecy is popular in places and periods of rapid transition. Even in 'modernised' countries, disillusionment within the society and uncertainty easily allow new religious movements and prophets to emerge. Prophets of recent religious cults in the United States and Japan are good examples.<sup>(12)</sup>

The 'prophet-led' churches were not directly involved in the political resistance or nationalism of the West African colonies. But the prophets became very powerful and influential due to their vision and style. This element of charisma was what Nkrumah had in common with the prophets.

For the Akan people, it was the traditional chief who represented the community before the prophet in the African Independent Church appeared. Prophets were more autocratic and charismatic, while the traditional Akan chiefs, except the very centralised Asantehenes, had collective authority of the whole community rather than personal charisma. Small traditional chiefs in the southern Gold Coast did not really oppose British domination, because they expected the British to weaken the Asante, who dominated many coastal regions, including Ga, Nzima, Akuapim, Fanti before the nineteenth century. These chiefs were losing competence and power to the British and the Asante. Then Prophets emerged to be new charismatic leaders. They also had many functions, such as healing, which used to be conducted by witchdoctors, not traditional chiefs. Whilst traditional chiefs gradually lost prestige, securer authority was provided by the colonial administration and Western 'historical' church missions.

The 'prophet-led' churches were very significant, because they provided the third choice for the masses, along with the Western Church missions and traditional religion. The churches offered social opportunities for young local leaders who did not identify with either the colonial authorities or the elitist nationalist movement. Pobeë (1991) wrote that:

Religion is one of the important institutional structures making up the total social sys-

tem. In African societies it is all-pervasive. Most of the communal activities and other social institutions of African peoples are inextricably bound up with religion and the spirit-world. (Pobee, 1991: 11)

Religion anywhere is rather inseparable from other social elements, such as politics, traditional values, and social activities. There is no obvious evidence that the creed of the African Independent Churches in Ghana was political or nationalistic; however the existence of the churches itself and the circumstance in which the African Independent Church Movement emerged are quite political<sup>(13)</sup>. Prophetism was a very important movement in the early twentieth century in the Gold Coast, not because it directly related to the emergence of nationalism, but because it realised a new mode of leadership of charismatic authority.

### Nkrumah's Charisma

It was the institution of prophetism which responded to and satisfied the needs of a people for a new mode of psychological ‘belonging’ and stability. Even if African Independent Churches had practically provided much less materialistic contribution to their members than Christian missions had,<sup>(14)</sup> their creeds promised the general welfare of the members, including personal health and wealth. Christianity often emphasises materialistic and psychological benefits and Christian creeds ‘have consisted of health, a long life, and wealth’ (Gerth & Mills, 1991: 277). Similarly, Nkrumah succeeded in collecting huge support, when he promised a better economic future under his leadership.

Successful prophets in West Africa, such as Harris, always possessed charisma, and instituted a distinctive style of worship in the church. Political leaders of new independent states after World War II, such as Nehru, Sukarno, Kenyatta and even Mao, usually possessed charisma, and people came to expect to a better future through the leaders’ vision for the independence of their state. A charismatic leader with an adamant vision in policy-making must retain huge popularity, in particular, in the revolutionary years, when the masses can share the same optimistic outlook. A charismatic leader would not emerge, if the masses did not share his same social expectation and vision.

Nkrumah's charisma and performance resembled the style of prophets of African Independent Churches. Although he was not a religious healer, he effectively used Christian-derived symbols,<sup>(15)</sup> slogans, and political vision through election campaigns in the 1950's. During a sermon delivered in the United States, Nkrumah felt that he had a mission to deliver the message of a return of the diaspora to Africa. His use of words was indicative of Nkrumah's knack for prophecy:

‘Be prepared, ... so that you are ready when the call comes, for that time is near at hand.’ I had not realised at that time that I would contribute so much towards the fulfillment of this prophecy. (Nkrumah, 1957: 166)

Christian chant-like slogans were often used in the CPP campaigns. Kedourie

wrote on the similarity between the CPP campaign and Christianity:

... the Convention People's Party parodied the traditional phraseology of Christianity in order to invest Nkrumah with a religious aura and to harness religious emotions to his cause (Kedourie, 1970: 129).

Beckmann also described Nkrumah's dependency on prophetic style:

Nkrumah combined science and technology with continued attention to charms, soothsayers, animal sacrifices, and magic. He was at once progressive and proud of his cultural heritage (of the tradition of prophetism) [sic]. (Beckmann, 1975: 36)

Nkrumah appealed to the masses, in particular, when he recreated the psychological atmosphere of Christianity in his political rallies. The CPP campaign resembled Christian services by using the name of God and hymns. Enthusiasm surrounding Nkrumah was also attached to Christian symbolism. When Nkrumah announced his resignation as secretary of the UGCC, a woman became enthusiastic and started blessing him. Nkrumah noted in his *Autobiography* that:

The reaction was immediate and their cheers were deafening. Then one of the women supporters jumped up on the platform and led the singing of the hymn 'Lead Kindly Light,' a hymn which from that time onwards has been sung at most C.P.P. rallies.

What with the strain of it all and the excitement, the singing of this hymn was as much as I felt I could take. (Nkrumah, 1957: 107)

Even Nkrumah became very emotional after this episode, which emphasises the Christian nature of the CPP rallies in the early years.

Nkrumah's political leadership often manipulated the symbolism and style of Christian services. For example, in the 'Verandah Boy's Creed,' they recognised that the CPP was 'the opportune Saviour of Ghana,' and that Nkrumah was born to liberate Ghana.<sup>(6)</sup> Bennett named the CPP supporters 'the Nkrumah Cult,' because of their enthusiastic style towards Nkrumah.

Weber wrote that charismatic leaders had to maintain their authority by showing their strength in activities. He wrote that these leaders legitimised themselves by winning an honourable war and offering material benefit (Gerth & Mills, 1991 ; Weber, 1947). Nkrumah showed his strength when he called for the establishment of self-government. He declared that the African man was not inferior to the British colonialist, and they were able to replace the British bureaucrats in the colonial government. The readiness to challenge and compete against the British was not previously perceived among other politicians. In the case of Nkrumah, winning the war meant challenging the British and realising independence.

But what really made the masses support Nkrumah and accept him as a charismatic leader?

There are two answers to these questions. Firstly, Nkrumah obviously possessed a charismatic personality. Secondly, the masses expected a leading figure to develop Ghana, and bring economic benefits from outside.

Nkrumah also had a distinctive style of speech. He could employ the Christian uplift and prophetist tradition. This skill attracted the masses to his dynamic vision. Another potential leader, J.B. Danquah was born of a local elite family, and educated in the 'historical' church in Ghana.<sup>(17)</sup> In contrast to Nkrumah, Danquah lacked dynamism in his leadership. He was too conventional to accept a revolutionary concept of dramatic change for a new state. His goal was very limited to a constitutional reform. Nkrumah did not hesitate to cultivate the Christian symbolism in political context, and was thus superior to Danquah in popularizing his vision.

Owusu wrote that the people in Ghana supported the CPP, not because of Nkrumah's charisma but simply because they expected economic benefits from the CPP's populist economic policy. It was a patron-client relationship (Owusu, 1970). Is Owusu's argument incompatible with the discussion by Weber and Apter in the Ghanaian context, that a charismatic leader would appear in a transitional period? Economic benefit to the masses was one of the major factors which boosted and accelerated Nkrumah as a charismatic leader. A charismatic leader often legitimises himself by providing economic benefit and material welfare (Weber, 1947). Dunn compared the Gold Coast enthusiasm for Nkrumah's leadership to the Melanesian Cargo Cult:

When he comes actually to *explain* Nkrumah's success, crucial, as Apter himself insists, in displacing the U.G.C.C., Owusu is unable to go beyond an explanation in covertly charismatic terms of Nkrumah's superior *plausibility* as a bringer of cargo. (Dunn, 1972: 115)

The 'Cargo Cult' is understood to be a combination of Messianism from Christianity and traditional religious belief that the dead (ancestors) would bring 'Cargo' (for example, food) to this world. People in Melanesia were very attracted to the materialistic aspect of the Western missions and colonialism, and 'Cargo Cult' became a popular religious movement in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>(18)</sup> They worshipped and were traditionally dependent on the 'big men,' often equivalent to God, and their gifts. According to Cochrane, traditionally the 'big men' implemented economic activity and were responsible for the religious rituals at the same time. For the cult members, the prophet was supposed to possess considerable organisational power, and his creed consisted of 'religious formulae and spells, individual comments, and commands given to followers' (Cochrane, 1970: 147-148). The 'Cargo,' in fact, represented the members' optimistic anticipation for a better life. However, once they understood that the 'cargo' did not come, the cult memberships waned. The district officers and the Magistrates in power, usurped the role of the 'big men' from the local chiefs after colonial rule was established.

Worsley (1970) noted that there was little nationalistic tendency within the millenarian cult leadership. Still he illustrated the cult's political significance stating that:

The new pressure shaping the future of the region will cut across these units as they cut across village, tribe, clan. As in India, and now in West Africa, ancient cultural ties may become factors of revived importance in shaping the ultimate political units of the

region. If one can discern only the most tentative regional groupings, then, this is because the region is only giving birth to what I have called 'proto-national' formations of a transitional kind. M. Jean Guiart was therefore correct in referring to these movements as only "forerunners of Melanesian nationalism." (Worsley, 1970: 262-263)

The cult movements were consequential to dissolving the traditional society; nevertheless, they never became the main actors of the nationalist movement.

In Ghana, the African Independent Church movements were in a similar situation. It is important to understand that these churches also were one forerunners of nationalism, but they never lead the nationalist movements. It was in fact the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society,<sup>(19)</sup> the UGCC, and also the CPP led by Nkrumah who accelerated the nationalism of the twentieth century.

The most prominent and successful politician was Nkrumah, since previous political organisations did not enjoy nation-wide success. Nkrumah seemed eager to listen to the masses. Before him, politicians, including Danquah, were so elitist that they were out of touch with the masses.

This willingness to listen to the masses is a requisite aspect for a charismatic leader in both politics and religion. Prophetism and millenarianism retain popularity among the masses, especially amongst the lower classes, because these religions preferred to 'heal' people who feel neglected, marginalised, and unsatisfied with their own society. Talmon (1962) argued that millenarianism was essentially a religion of 'the deprived' groups, such as the oppressed peasants and wage-labours. However, severe deprivation is not in itself sufficient for people to believe in such religious cults. The most important motivation in the popularity of these cults is a huge gap between their expectations and their real lives. The 'uneven relation between expectations and the means of their satisfaction' causes such a popularity of the cults (Talmon, 1962: 136).

Nkrumah and the CPP were extremely popular among the lower and lower-middle classes. The 'Standard VII Boys,' the first generation with both primary and secondary education, realized that their certificates at school would not benefit them. The gap between their expectations and realities was widened in the 1940's.

Nkrumah maintained his populist stance throughout his campaign. He promised to create more jobs and to maintain the high price of cocoa to satisfy the producers as much as possible. These economic policies attracted the commoners very much.<sup>(20)</sup> Cochrane (1970) wrote that the nature of the success of the 'prophet,' was in him said things the people hoped to hear (Cochrane, 1970: 148). Nkrumah told the people exactly what they wanted to hear. Moreover, he was a genius in his use of simple slogans which appealed to the masses in election campaigns. For example, 'Freedom Now,' 'Positive Action,' and 'Self-government Now' were very effective for the CPP and enabled them to gain victory over the UGCC.<sup>(21)</sup> Nkrumah frequently used the mottos, saying, 'We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquility,' 'We have the right to live as men,' 'We have the right to govern ourselves;' which appeared everyday on the Accra Evening News which he founded (Nkrumah, 1957: 94).

Nkrumah recognised at an early stage the importance of public relations,<sup>(22)</sup> and

thus proposed to establish a newspaper, although his colleagues rejected his proposal at the working committee of the UGCC. Furthermore, Nkrumah continued his prophet-like open-air campaigns, where he directly met the masses face to face especially in the early years of the CPP. Nkrumah’s distinctive style of speech evolved through his experiences as a lay preacher in Philadelphia, as a vice-president of the West African Students’ Union in London, and as a secretary of the West African National secretariat and his distinct and even exaggerated political vision resulted in his gaining the support of the people just as the religious prophets had done (Davidson, 1989: 34-40, 48; Nkrumah, 1957: 55, 166).

In fact, when Nkrumah announced the demand for self government in 1949, the crowd responded enthusiastically. The atmosphere of his campaign bore resemblance to the call-and-response in gospel singing at some Baptist churches in the United States, because of the crowds’ electrified response to the speaker.<sup>(23)</sup> Bourret wrote, ‘Henceforth Nkrumah used his outstanding gifts of leadership and his very considerable powers of oratory to build up the Convention People’s Party (CPP)’ (Bourret, 1960: 173-4). The Kimbanguist Church became an important ‘intermediate power between the State and the people’ in Republic of Congo after independence (Doutreloux, 1967: 337). On the other hand, the prophet-like style of Nkrumah effectively prevented any intermediate power from emerging between Nkrumah and the people, because his style helped him directly communicate with the people in the early years of the CPP.

## CONCLUSION

### Political Significance of Nkrumah’s Leadership

The similarity in circumstance in which prophets in African Independent Churches and Nkrumah emerged is very instructive. They were all charismatic leaders, and appeared in a transitional period:

Apart from purely personal ambition, the reasons for the appearance of prophets are predominantly of an economic and political nature, exclusively religious only in the rarest cases. (Schlosser quoted through Baëta, 1962: 5)

Harris, Opong, and Nkrumah emerged as political leaders in rapid modernisation, brought on by Christian missions and colonisation.

Weber pointed out that a charismatic leader emerged when a traditional society weakened and encountered superior aliens and was culture-shocked. I believe that Nkrumah and prophets all provided:

- (1) a charismatic figure to lead the deprived masses in transitional period
- (2) a new moral guideline revising or replacing conventional values
- (3) an adamant vision for better world
- (4) promises to offer economic welfare and materialistic contribution
- (5) psychological ‘healing’ and security

- (6) capabilities to realise what believers really want
- (7) frequent use of Christian symbolism and influences

Prophets in West Africa are expected to provide both materialistic and psychological welfare through their extraordinary strength and supernatural powers. Baëta (1962) illustrated the characteristic of prophets as ‘Powers traditionally credited to such persons, of healing, of revealing hidden things, predicting the future, cursing and blessing effectively, etc., will be attributed to him ...’ (Baëta, 1962: 7). Nkrumah was the first politician in Ghana who had the same characteristics as prophets. He offered security, economic wealth, and new morality, through his extraordinary personal qualities and using various types of Christian symbolism.

Of course, the CPP’s populist economic policies were very effective in influencing the public to vote for the CPP. There are certain debates about the function of these economic policies. Owusu (1970) concluded that only economic benefit, which these policies would bring, interested the masses. However, as Dunn (1972) suggested, Nkrumah should be viewed ‘as a bringer of cargo’ in a process of building charisma. That is, Nkrumah succeeded in establishing himself as a charismatic leader, because the masses expected him to contribute in materialistic terms to them. As Weber (1947) pointed out, economic achievements and materialistic welfare strengthen charismatic legitimacy. Therefore I conclude that the masses supported the CPP’s economic policies especially in the 1950s, not simply because of the content of the policies, but because it was the charismatic Nkrumah who introduced them and promised cargo-like rewards.

It is very significant in a Ghanaian political context that Nkrumah appeared as the first major charismatic political ‘prophet’ who was to realise the importance of materialistic contribution to the masses, while traditional authorities and the indigenous elite revealed their impotence in a rapid transition of the Gold Coast society. Later once his charisma faded, he transformed his authority into a ‘legal-rational’ one. Consequently, he needed to build his political religion, Nkrumaism, to maintain his regime and to strengthen his legitimacy.

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## NOTES

- (1) Apter (1972) revised his analysis in his new preface to *Ghana in Transition* and restricted Nkrumah’s charismatic years to just a few years before 1954.
- (2) Austin (1970) first used the term, ‘Standard VII Boys,’ for men with the secondary school certificate.
- (3) Dunn claimed that Owusu’s use of ‘economic’ was inappropriate in this context, and

- suggested the use of the term ‘materialist’ instead (Dunn, 1972: 115).
- (4) Kaunda did not hesitate to call Christian ministers and himself ‘we, as Christian leaders.’ (Bennett, 1968: 66-67).
  - (5) New denominations of African Independent Churches as ‘the new generation’ continuously emerged even after the 1950’s. The new generation included the Bethany Chapel (formerly-His Father’s Holy Trinity Healing Church) of Asante and the Divine Healer’s Church (or the Lord Is There Temple) of Ga. Their conversion was mainly aimed at members of ‘historical’ churches, not pagans. Although Harris hugely succeeded in converting pagans before 1914, it became very difficult to expand church members without recruiting members from other sects of Christianity in the late twentieth century. In Fanti, ‘spiritual churches mushroomed after 1960, often mainly ex Roman Catholic Church in membership’ [*sic*] (Barrett, 1968: 289).
  - (6) Weber illustrated various combinations of these three authorities for example, the Dalai Lamas and the Roman magistrates (Weber, 1947: 364-365). E. Shils developed his argument about combined authorities. See also (Shils, 1958).
  - (7) Sundkler classified this church movement as three: Ethiopian, Zionist, and Messianic (Sundkler, 1961: 53-59 and 302-307). Coleman, had classified them as ‘Puritanical’, ‘Chiliastic’ which included ‘Watchtower’ or Millennium varieties, and ‘Nativistic’ (Coleman, 1955: 100).
  - (8) Why was the Ethiopian church so unpopular in Ghana? There were two ‘Ethiopian’ Churches in Ghana; the National Baptist Church (founded in 1888) and the Accra Congregational Church (1924). The emergence of the nationalist movement earlier interested political leaders, and would possibly prevent the Ethiopian churches from being popular in the Gold Coast (Jeffries, 1970).
  - (9) ‘Zionist’ or ‘spiritual’ churches in West Africa included the Musama Disco Christo Church (in Sekondi-Takoradi), the Church of the Lord (Aladura Movement, in Yoruba Communities), John Swatson (in the Gold Coast), and Garrick Braide (on the Niger Delta). One of the successful modern spiritual church movements was the Apostolic Revelation Society founded by Prophet Wovenu in the 1940’s.
  - (10) Debrunner, 1967: 263. The Bremen mission was more tolerant of the traditional aspect of local religion and custom than other missions, such as the Basel, the Wesleyan, and the Roman Catholic Mission.
  - (11) Harris justified polygamy because ‘there’s no harm in that ... God did not intend to make the same law for black and white people. Blacks could take as many wives as they could look after’ (Haliburton, 1971: 74). He, in fact, had several wives.
  - (12) These cults of recent years (the Branch Davidians, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons of the United States and the Aum Divine Truth of Japan) are more millenarian than messianic. B. Jules-Rosette classified Prophet Harris as more messianic and syncretist (Jules-Rosette, 1979).
  - (13) By contrast, in South Africa, prophets became very direct political figures. Sundkler wrote, ‘During the period 1913-45 the prophet’s theme was protest: against the Natives’ Land Act of 1913; against the domination of the missions; against the cultural patterns of the Whites in education and preservation of life’ (Sundkler, 1961). Indigenous people were exploited and in far severer political situation in a gap between English settlers and the Afrikaner than in West African colonies. They had to face political realities.
  - (14) As far as the conversion of indigenous people by Christian missions was concerned, material contributions such as food distributed to local societies by the missions was the most important tool for the rapid expansion of Christianity. Western colonialism and Christianity simply adopted this method distributions without regard to social implications. As a result, such intentions increased indigenous people’s dependency on external

- contribution. In Islam, begging is a deserved right of the poor free of any guilt. The Catholic churches in Brazil distribute Western goods to the indigenous Indians to convert them even today. The Japanese come to fear the United States less partly because of free distribution of tobacco and chocolate on the streets by the Allied Occupation Forces after the World War II.
- (15) G.P. Hagan illustrated Nkrumah's use of symbols, such as flags composed of the colors red, white, and green, which Ghanaians love most, Nkrumah's white handkerchief, and white and Kente togas (See Arhin et al., 1993: 184-187).
  - (16) Timothy, 1955: 81. The 'Verandah Boy's' creed went: 'I believe in the Convention People's Party/The opportune Saviour of Ghana/and in Kwame Nkrumah its founder and leader/Who is endowed with the Ghana Spirit/Born a true Ghanaian for Ghana/Suffering under victimisations/Was vilified, threatened with deportation ...' Nkrumah was understood to be a new Messiah.
  - (17) Danquah was educated at the Basel Mission school, and became a minister in the Church of Scotland (See Ofofu-Appiah, 1974: 17-18). Zolberg (1964) wrote that Houphouët-Boigny, a much more moderate leader of the Ivory Coast, akin to Danquah, was more charismatic than Nkrumah. I completely agree with Apter's objection (1968) to Zolberg 'charismatic.'
  - (18) The prophet, Ndugumoi (Navosavakandua) of the Tuka Cult shared the same tendency of "Ethiopian" churches, whose doctrine emphasised the Black-White division and anti-White feeling (Worsley, 1970).
  - (19) The Aborigines' Rights Protection Society was founded in 1897 as the first major nationalist organisation.
  - (20) Owusu (1970) wrote that economic benefit and motivation were supreme whenever people supported Nkrumah.
  - (21) Nkrumah may have learned these tactics through union activities in the United States and the Great Britain.
  - (22) When he adopted the new name for his new political party, he left the word, 'Convention' in fact. It is because the masses would understand that the CPP would not completely ignore the policy of the UGCC. He was very conscious about the public image of his new party (Nkrumah, 1957: 101).
  - (23) Nkrumah, 1957: 103-4. Although his expression may be exaggerated, this mass rally was an overwhelming success.

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