

Interview at the Christ Temple of the International Central Gospel Church. With Pastor Mensah Otabil

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Interview Conducted by Professor Emmanuel Akyeampong (Harvard University) with David Owusu-Ansah (James Madison University).

Opening Statement by Professor Emmanuel Akyeampong: We are here to talk about ecumenism and religious co-existence. Now we have main line orthodox or old churches, and we have new churches of the Charismatic and Pentecostal persuasion. Baptist seems to be in the middle and serving as a bridge. Within Islam, we also have the old sects but recently we have more fundamentalist Muslims. The indigenous religious aspects of the traditional religion seem to have disappeared. Some say that this is because the indigenous religion [practitioners of traditional African religion] has co-opted the Christian religion and Islam and therefore they do not need any hierarchy [descriptions as we have done for the Christian and Muslim developments]. But yet, there are [indigenous or traditional] sensitivities and one of the interesting things we are seeing is that they have been appropriated by the main line religions. For example, [issues of] witchcraft which would have been thrown out in the past by the Church is now being addressed in both the orthodox and charismatic churches. So as you look are these developments what are your thoughts on where these three religious traditions stand today in Ghana? In the past when we had state functions, we poured libation, the Muslims prayed and the Christians prayed. Lately, we see that the libation part is disappearing but the prayers of the Christians and Muslims at State functions remain. So where do we stand on these three religions with regards to your personal thoughts? Is it becoming political incorrect to talk about traditional religion or have there been a way to meet the traditional sensibilities within Christian and Muslim religions?

Pastor Otabil: It is a long question and I am trying to figure out how to address all the issues you have raised. But I think that at the heart of all religious issues is the desire or the quest for God. Of the desire of people to know about life and its meaning and significance and how to place themselves in the spectrum of creation which is vast--a situation that is at times intimidating. So at the heart of all religion is man's desire to know God or whatever they thing God to be in the universe in which they part-take. In that context, people go through different expressions in their desire to know God. I think that talking in particular about African traditional religion; it was the base religion until we had the incursion of both Islam and Christianity. Somebody has said that the African Traditional religion was the grazing ground for the world religions and as the ground thins out, we are going to see probably more confrontations between Islam and Christianity because the buffer between them [Islam and Christianity] is African traditional religion. I think that African Traditional Religion by its own character at least in my mind, is very explorative and experimental and adaptive and therefore able to turn into new forms whether with Islam or Christianity, and that measure started taking place years ago, especially in the 1920s when there was the [first] Pentecostal experience in our country. We saw African traditional religion moving closer to Pentecostal forms because Pentecostal forms [of expressions] even in America came from Black peoples, and so we can say that since Black people in America came from Africa, we can then say that Pentecostalism as was experienced in America came from and had a lot of African expressions in terms of its liturgy, clapping, dancing, verbalizations are all black African experiences. The belief in the supernatural, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the power of the

Holy Spirit as real and current. So the black people who led the Pentecostal movement such as William Seymour, who had descended from slaves, were expressing part of an African religiosity which for the Christian was experience of the Holy Spirit. So when Pentecostalism came to Ghana and for that matter Africa, it was quiet appealing to the African religious person because it affirmed most of the concerns and beliefs [they held] especially about how to balance the forces of good and evil and where we position ourselves and the way to seek protection. The Pentecostal believed in the power in the blood of Jesus and in the name of Jesus through the Holy spirit to ward off all these evil spirits. So beginning in the 1920s we saw many Africans being attracted to Christianity because of Pentecostalism. They also brought into Christianity African concepts--so we have Christian-African syncretism aspect in the Church--in what became the African Independent Church such as the Aladura, and Nkansa Movements. We had a guy from Liberia, the Rev. [Wade] Harris, who was instrumental in the Africanized Christian Movement. So at a point as the African beliefs started adapting to Christianity, it started as a blend of the two [African and Christian ideas] so if you remember that in the 1940s and 1950s, the predominant Christian experience was what we called the Spiritual Churches. It was an amalgamation of a lot of things. There was a lot of Catholicism in it in terms of the use of incense, the use of the long white rope like the Catholic priest with the red belt; there was also a lot of prayer for healing directly to effect healing because people believed that this can be achieved. This went on for a while until about the late 1960 or to the early 1970s and it peaked in the 1980s when the new charismatic movement also [came with] its expressions.

The Charismatic movement had different combinations. They made [themselves] more marketable than the Pentecostal churches.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: Would you please distinguish between the two [Pentecostal and charismatic movements] for us?

Pastor Otabil: In terms of core beliefs, the Pentecostal and the Charismatic churches are very similar. In terms of practice, they are very different and there are so many reasons for this. First, the Charismatic movement did not start as a church movement. They started mostly as student movement, as prayer group, or youth movement but usually within the main orthodox churches. So they did not have the legalism or strict structures that are common to the Pentecostal churches. They [the Charismatic] are more open, more liberal, more accommodating of things that the Pentecostals were not accepting. For example, on the issue of the role of women in the Church. Since most of these charismatic groups started on campuses--secondary schools, university campuses--through scripture unions, they saw themselves in fellowship and therefore could not contemplate ideas that this young girl that I pray with and who seems to have the gift of the holy spirit could not be called to serve God in ministry. This is not the case with the Pentecostals. If you go to a Pentecostal church, even in the seating arrangement, there is a strict demarcation in arrangement where men sit on one side and women on the other. In the Charismatic church, this is not the case. Their fashion sense is also different. The Pentecostals are very strict (against make-ups, and hair do) but the Charismatic are more liberal here too.

In terms of [religious] message, the Pentecostals limited their message primarily to people's relationship with God. To have experience with God through salvation and through the Holy Spirit and basically helping the people to live a holy life so they can go to heaven. This is a

simplification but this is basically what the Pentecostals were about. The Charismatic, because their background as coming from the universities and the secondary schools, the content of their message changed because they had to situate their message to issues of human development regarding successes in life and prosperity became crucial to the Charismatic message because of where they came from. For some reason, maybe because of their education and youthfulness, their ability to use media, even though they still had a Pentecostal call in terms of message, they spread wider and the charismatic movement did not depend on denominations so they accelerated that growth of the movement. Even its music has become the music of the [Ghanaian] society. You will find musicians from the Charismatic persuasion whose music/records sell as high [if not better] than the secular productions which you will not find in other countries where gospel music sells better or as much as secular music.

Question by Dr. Owusu-Ansah: So where will you situate the International Central Gospel Church?

Pastor Otobil: The International Central Gospel Church is essentially a Charismatic Church. We are a bit different from a typical Charismatic church in terms of our social responsiveness which you do not find among the general Charismatic churches. They talk much about personal development and personal acquisitions and do not talk social structure and do not concern themselves about society and its functions. On that level we are a bit different but at the core we are a charismatic movement. Our genesis and ethos are the same. So I will say that the growth of the Charismatic churches led to the diminishing influence of the African Independent churches. This is because we emphasize the same concerns about healing, deliverance, and so on, but over and above that, there are other things we do that appeal to the intelligentsia, the middle class, the educated, so the Charismatic therefore straddles a large segment of the population.

Question by Dr. Owusu-Ansah: Can I interject a question here please. This transformation of the traditional base that you mention, first into the African Independent Churches and the Pentecostal movement. Earlier developments, especially when we remember the Nkaba movement (the people who used to carry water and pray as if possessed), it was an alternative for those who did not want to go to the (fetish) priest, but now it has transformed into a situation where many of these traditional concerns are now being addressed by the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Is it going to get to a point where because these obligations and concerns are being dealt with through these new religious movements that not only will the traditional base disappear but these new movements can be situated in such a way that they can attack traditional customs such as the [Accra Homowo period custom] that call for no drumming period? This is an attack on the traditional system? What are your views on this?

Pastor Otobil: There are a number of concerns here. The charismatic churches have always felt as an outsider because they are a relatively younger movement. They have felt that the social and political powers always want to marginalize them. So when it comes to regulations such as customs about not making noise, the target has always been the Charismatic churches. For several reasons, the older churches accommodated the inconsistencies of their faith and traditional practices. The charismatics have not reached that point of accommodation. They are

still on a missionary route, that they have a mission to get people to conform to the gospel of Christ, and if it means confrontation, some of them are willing to take that up.

Question by Dr. Owusu-Ansah: Is there any avenue to redress such conflicts?

Pastor Otabil: It is very difficult to get the movement to respond because it is a large movement with no center. So you can have reasonable denominations in the movements that are ready for that but they will be a very small fraction. Even the organizing umbrella groups as the National Association for Charismatic Churches or even the Christian Council, they have only a fraction of the churches in their fold. If you can think of the City of Accra having about 1000 Independent charismatic churches, that is a huge number to organize by any stretch of imagination, so I think that at the leadership level the Ghana Pentecostal Council has matured and is in dialogue with the Ghana Christian Council. The Catholic Secretariat, with the Muslim Federation and the Ghana Pentecostal Council are part of the Ghana Federation of Religious Bodies so at that level we can say that yes, there is a lot of conversation. But will that trickle down to the man in a small room somewhere who thinks that the spirit is on him to act? There is also the civil argument as to whether any religious tradition [be it traditional or other] has the right to enforce its practices on others and restrain others from expressing their religious liberties. That is the question so if he feels that he has to beat the drum [for religious reasons] and you think that he has to stop because you want to celebrate a religious custom and [he must] wait until you are through with yours. We try to reach accommodation on these issues with the Traditionals by saying that we will not bother them and that they should not bother us but we are not verbally going to defy them but we will not go out and beat drums and provoke, but we can do so at our church premises. But we see that churches in very traditional locations as James Town and Korle Gonno will have difficulty drumming on such occasions. But for churches in the less traditional locations, the laws will be quite different.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: Following up on this question. Speaking about the Ga [of Accra] it looks that to them there is an issue that is not discussed. They feel that they have been overwhelmed by foreigners [non-Accra people]. The ban on drumming during the Homowo [festival] probably is less about religiosity than an endeavor to remind all of us that we are guests in Accra and that Accra belongs to them [hence their traditions much be respected, at least on this festival period].

Pastor Otabil: We know that but that is why the Charismatic churches [respond the way they do] because why do they pick on us to resolve that issue? Because if you have a larger issue dealing with this sense of dis-empowerment because of the nature of Accra and how the power dynamics are shifting, even regarding land usage in the capital, then you address that [in a different way]. As we have told them [in the past] for all you know, we may even be on your side to address that. This is because some of us who are [members] of the Charismatic [churches] are also Ga [people by ethnicity], so you cannot treat us as if all the pastors [of the Charismatic churches] are foreigners. Some are Ga [people]. I think therefore that there should be more dialogue, but unfortunately, there are extremes on both sides that stoke the fire and make provocative statements and then everybody is included and [it becomes difficult to address the core issues].

Question/Observation by Dr. Owusu-Ansah: Along the same line in my interviews with Muslims on the issue of peace and tranquility with the religious bodies, the observations have been that the "main churches" (here in reference to the old churches as the Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians) have always respected the right of Muslims with regards to the sacred nature of the Quran, and they have not interfered [with the Muslim faith and its teachings]. But there are these Charismatic young people who preach [at street corners] in Kumasi, for example, who [quote] from the Quran and argue that the Quran does not tell the truth. These [preachers] know a little Arabic and preach and abuse the Quran. They mentioned two cases--one in Kumasi and the other in Sekondi-Takoradi--that led to conflict and needed to be redressed. Who are these Charismatic [preachers] who preach from the Quran? I know that you have made the statement that there is no central body to regulate Charismatic churches, but is this an issue that Charismatic churches have talked about?

Pastor Otabil: I think that the particular issue you raised cut across Christian and Muslim evangelism. As far as I can remember as a child, I heard Muslims preaching from the Bible and really denying what we believed about Christ and so and so. The Ahmadi Muslims used to set their tables and sing their songs and we all went to listen [to them preach]. As children, we heard them quote from the Bible and there are Muslims who still do that right now. I think that we have to accept that both sides do that. It may not come from the core bodies, because you will not find the National Chief Imam doing that neither would you find the Head of the Church of Pentecost doing that. But there are people down there who do this because they believe that the way to evangelize is to confront. First, I think there has to be tolerance. I really don't think that anybody can quote from the Bible or the Quran to dissuade me from my core belief. No matter how you twist it or use it, you are not going to change my mind, nor do I think that I am going to change the mind of a Muslim by quoting to him from the Quran. I wonder how many Muslims will change their belief because a Christian took the Bible and tried to convince them that the Quran is wrong. I think people make transitions either they themselves were questioning part of their beliefs or that they were dissatisfied with something but not because somebody picked the Bible and told them what they think was wrong. So, I think we don't have to put too much value on those efforts because I wonder what is achieved from this. [Of course] there are Christians who used to be Muslims and after becoming Christians, they consider it as their responsibility to bring their brothers to join them in the new faith. I suspect that there Muslims who used to be Christians and after becoming Muslims also feel that it is their responsibility to change others. For such people, it is a personal crusade that they are fighting or struggle about their fulfillment in life so I do not know who can legislate against them or to stop them. At the top level however, there is a lot of dialogue that goes on [and this is what contributes to religious tolerance in Ghana].

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: So when we talk about ecumenism [with regards to institutional structures] are the Charismatic [Churches] represented at the Christian Council of Ghana or are they member of the Ghana Religious Bodies Forum?

Pastor Otabil: No, we have for the Christians at the national level, we have the Catholic Secretariat (basically represents only Catholics), then we have the Christian Council as the organizing point for the main line Protestant Group of Churches--the Anglicans, the Methodists, the Presbyterian, the Baptists, the Salvation Army and so on. As of now, I understand that the

Anglican Church has pulled out from the Ghana Christian Council to form their own body just like the Catholic has done. Then you have the Ghana Pentecostal Council which originally represented the historic Pentecostal Churches--the Assemblies of God, the Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church, and so on but they do not embrace the Charismatic Churches. Then we have the Pentecostal Association of Ghana which is an umbrella Group for the IAC (Independent African Churches of Ghana). Then the Charismatics when they came to the scene started agitating and tried to form their own association/body but it did not work well, so eventually, some of them were incorporated into the Ghana Pentecostal Council. So you have the main or the big Charismatic Churches involved in the Ghana Pentecostal Council.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: Is the ICGC (International Central Gospel Church) in any of these associations?

Pastor Otabil: [No], ICGC is not in any of them. As of now we are not in any of the groupings but we relate very well with all of them. Although some of the Charismatic churches went along with the Ghana Pentecostal Council, some still did not go. So they form the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches. It also has some Charismatic Churches, but the vast numbers of Charismatic churches are not represented in any of these groups. So this is the state for the Christians. The Muslims have the Ahmadiyya Movement, the Ghana Muslim Council, and the Federation of Muslim Associations is the umbrella organization for all of them. But on top of that, we have the Federation of Religious Bodies which represents both Christians and Muslim organizations. But that Body does not exist as such. It is a grouping that is called in mostly for dialogue purposes when there is a need for it to sit. I am not sure where the Seventh Day Adventists feature in here because I am not sure that they are part of the Ghana Christian Council. The Mormons will not be in the Christian Council, nor would the Jehovah Witness people and they function on their own.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: The Christians, Muslim, and Jews have always respected each other by calling themselves "The People of the Book." So maybe that is the position of the orthodox churches to form the basis of Ghana ecumenism. But as the Charismatics gain in popularity, can their position change the basis for inter-religious relations in Ghana?

Pastor Otabil: You see what has happened in Ghana is very interesting. The Charismatic churches have to be understood both as a movement and as denominational expression. As a movement, it cuts across all Christian expressions. So you have Catholics in the Charismatic movement, the Presbyterians through their Prayer Groups, the Methodist Church etc. so the movement is very widespread, and therefore the movement influences behavior in the denominational churches. So what we see increasingly is that the older churches are adopting more and more the Charismatic positions so you go to a Methodist Church and you will think that you are at a Charismatic Church etc. I have even been to a Catholic Church [service] and I have observed so much charismatism, even in the homiletics--how the preachers preach etc are being influenced almost chatting with the congregation as [opposed to the former style where their preachers were very formal in the presentation of the sermons and talked down to the people]. We have seen a lot of change even in church architecture. The charismatics have a different concept of church architecture. The church is not only a sacred place of worship. It is also a place of meeting so the structure of the auditorium [the main Temple] is not just for

religious purpose but also for meeting and gathering. This is the case because the Charismatics started their movement through meetings and gatherings--they used to meet at cinema halls and not only at churches. So if the person met at cinema halls initially and now they want to build a church, the images of the cinema hall [architecture comes to mind first] so you find that concept of the cinema hall will come into his thinking of the architecture of the church.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: For time purposes, let me make a list of topics here that you can respond to if your next appointment presses us for time. Let me go back to indigenous religion and ask a question about that. It looks like it revolves around the meeting of needs. You get something to protect yourselves [spiritually] , and when something happens in your life and you do not understand, you go to seek explanation [at times through divination], but still even though we believed in Onyame (God) the indigenous religion did not appear to revolve around any central doctrinal core. Do you see this to have been the case?

Pastor Otabil: Maybe not in any documented central doctrine. The needs were there. They propitiated for sins, they made sacrifices and appeasements, and they did divination. But the Charismatics have alternatives for all of these. The Charismatics take the Bible literally and they believe that if it happened in the Bible, then it is possible. The prophets who did things are recorded in the Bible, so they believe that their prophets can do these things too. They take the Bible literally and trust that whatever happened then can happen again.

Question/statement by Dr. Akyeampong: The point I was making was this that I think that [literal interpretation of the Bible] is very central to why people who would have gone to the indigenous priests now go to the new Pentecostal and Charismatics because the orthodox churches did not deal in these things. They did not deal with witchcraft because it was thought to exist only in people's mind; but the Pentecostals will say that it is there and we will help you be protected against that. So in a sense it has enabled many to turn to the Charismatics. I raise this issue because I have been visiting some of the shrines [for the purpose of this research] and I raise this issue and [I find out that] people continue to visit these shrines, but no one wants to talk about [the fact that they have been there], and people do not want even to describe what a day was in the experience of a traditional religious life. I can tell you how my day goes--I have breakfast, and I do [this and that] but nobody is willing to tell me anything about their life at a shrine almost as if it is politically incorrect to say anything about it even though they all live by the shrine. So in terms of faith [?] what do they believe in?

Pastor Otabil: I think what happens it that some shrines have strong adherences and strong codes [not written but oral]. They may have a shrine in the village in the North with [followers] not restricted to the North, but are spread all over Ghana. They come for the annual event and all that. What I think is lacking is that the concerns that are expressed for their adherence is very limited to very core basic needs--such as for protection, crime, safety, blessing for things to go on well, and added to that they will have a few injunctions such as that if you want this to happen then you should not do this or that--don't steal or take somebody's wife. But most of the time there is no consistency. You may find a deity that hates one wrong but tolerates others so there is no consistency in morality compared to the Ten Commandments (for example). So that doesn't help them so you may say that the deities chose what they like and what the priests

practices is up to him. So if the priest is a polygamist, then everybody can be polygamist and so on.

Question by Dr. Owusu-Ansah: Let me ask a last question here. Several years ago when I visited home [Ghana] and I was having conversation with my aunt who is a strict Methodist, she cautioned me that the research that needs to be done was how to resuscitate the Church and not to spend my time working on Muslims. She was concerned about the Charismatic churches and their ability of taking the young people away and when you go to the church, all you find are the old people and in our conversation we talked about the influence that the Charismatics are having on the behavior and the organizational abilities of the orthodox churches. Is there some truth to it that the Charismatic churches are affecting the very existence of the old mainline churches and what are your views as a Pastor of a Charismatic organization looking at the old churches from your perspective?

Pastor Otabil: Definitely the Charismatic Churches exert a lot of influence, some consciously and some unconsciously, some direct some indirect over the general religious atmosphere in Ghana, even over Muslims who are now adopting some of the language and phrases of the Charismatic movement, so we have to accept that. But how would it impact on the older churches--I think that those who have acclimatized and adopted are doing quite well. The Methodist church and the Presbyterian churches [have adopted]. You will find enclaves [of the traditional Methodist and Presbyterian churches still in place] which will not adopt because of historical linkages. But you will find a lot of them adopting. The advantage is that they are keeping a lot of their young which is the future of the church. Their young people may come to our churches and learn something to take back to their churches. It used to be that the older pastors and priest discouraged that [visiting of the Charismatic churches for fear of losing the youth] but now even some of the young people have become pastors and priests [of the old orthodox churches] and they are more accommodating. I have seen a Presbyterian church close to where I live and it is a very vibrant church with a lot of young people all the time dancing and praying like the way we do it here. They have responded to the change and at least they are keeping their young people in their churches. For me that is so crucial because if you lose your young people, your church is in crisis. I think that the church [in Ghana] which needs a lot of work is the Anglican Church of Ghana. The Anglican Church for some reason has been very unresponsive to change and that is the church I am worried about because I used to be an Anglican myself but if I had stayed there, I wouldn't be doing what I am doing now [as a church leader]. So you have to think of how you can keep the next Mensah Otabil within the Anglican Church and still help him to grow within the church. I think I know how you can do that. Even in the Methodist and Presbyterian [Churches], the changes they have made are superficial. They need to go deeper into so many areas to bring about the real stability they need for the church. If you look at the United States and Europe, you will see that Churches in Europe are dead literally, [but they are very much alive] in America and people are buying stadiums to hold churches, so why is it so in America? America supports freedom of religion and freedom of religious expression. Individuals can go and set up churches and that freedom in America is important whereas in Europe State[ism] is destroying the church. You have to encourage individuals to step aside and venture. You see that the Charismatic churches are very entrepreneurial. I have ICGC but the pastors within my church have so many liberties, they are like franchises and they are so motivated to grow this church. They should not feel that if they grow the church they will



be doing it for somebody and in two years or so they will be transferred. If you do that, there will be no motivation. That is how the Charismatic churches have grown, but that is also why I say that what the other churches are doing is good, but they have to go deeper for the core reasons for the growth of the charismatic churches.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: [Another] small question. As I look at the religious landscape of the Charismatic churches, I can identify three main strands from which it emerged. One is the scripture union; the other is the Joyful Way Singers; and then the work of the Rev. Duncan Williams. Can you comment on this?

Pastor Otabil: The Charismatic churches grow from different avenues. There is no common root. It is not like you can say that Wesley was the root of Methodism or say Calvin for the Presbyterian. You cannot say that about the Charismatic movement. It was different people at different times responding to similar experiences and expressing them, though not coordinating they were doing similar things. That is why we think there is something divine about our experiences. I grew up in Tema, and there were people in Accra and Takoradi and when we met we found out that we have the same experiences and responded in the same way. So that is how the charismatic movement started but there is no one strand or root [scripture union or others from which we emerged]. The Scripture Union was influential though it was not charismatic because it even opposed charismatic [features] such as speaking in tongues. So you cannot say that it gave birth to Charismatics, but it afforded young people opportunity to explore their spiritual life. Assemblies of God were more accommodating than the Pentecost church because it was American and therefore more modern than the Church of Pentecost. But by far the Town Fellowships that were set up by different people [were the most central] and it was a Bible study group by people from various denominations who gathered for fellowship. They prayed and formulated their own rules and that is more charismatic because they formulated their own beliefs as they grew along. Then out of that you had groups like the Joyful Way Singers, Jesus General in Kumasi and Calvary Road. Duncan William was very influential in popularizing a certain way of Christian ministry. Up till then the church was a little stale but he is a very flashy character and gave a totally new definition to this whole thing. One of his major contributions was that he opened and brought in a new generation of Christians. People that we call “Dadda Ba” [children of the educated who would not have participated in acts of seeking religion] who have stopped going to church saw in Duncan William a new kind of preacher and all of a sudden they started going to Church. He facilitated the movement by bringing in the middle class to the church. These were different streams that fed into what became the Charismatic movement.

Question/Observation by Dr. Akyeampong: The Catholic Church began to respond to the need to indigenize Christianity and in Ghana I was struck by two people--one being Dr. Bishop Sarpong. He stayed within the Church. Then there was Rev Damoah who was also a Catholic priest but he went out of the Church. What are your thoughts about the Catholic Church and why two of its priests responded so differently?

Pastor Otabil: I think they were both bold and their efforts were intellectual responses and individual responses but it was not by the Church. The responses lacked the power dimension because the African is power conscious and the power is not theoretical power. The African wants to see something happen [spiritual demonstration of power]. You can not approach this

from an intellectual way. People want hands to be placed on them and prayers made so they can feel well. If he can not see that, then the response is not going to be positive. That is why the Afrikania Church, even though they tried to Africanize the Church, did not succeed. It was a formal adaptation but not the power that goes with it. This is what the Charismatics do. They do not intellectualize it, they demonstrate the power. We say come and see and we will show you. The elite appreciate Bishop Sarpong's mind and his work, but for the people it does not answer their concerns.

Question/statement by Dr. Akyeampong: Your University! There is a need for higher education in Ghana and also a need for mission-based and private education. Can you share some thoughts with us why you decided to establish this university? How does it fit into your mission?

Pastor Otabil: My feeling is that Ghana is going to get more and more closer to what I call a faith-based society. Unless something radical changes the trajectory. Look at the primary schools though not set up by the church there are individuals who are Christians who think that they have to do something about the educational system. I am a church leader but I am very interested in individual actions. I think that as more and more faith-based education [occurs] at the primary level, you will also find more people wanting more and more of their wards to enter faith-based upper level education or university. Parents will want their children to have at least their first degrees from faith-based universities. This is one of the reasons for my action but obviously to deepen intellectual education here.

Statement/Question by Dr. Akyeampong: The national awards were given recently. The list of awardees who were religious leaders was great. What message does it send? And congratulations to your award.

Pastor Otabil: Thank you. I was surprised by the number of religious leaders that were awarded the honor. I think two of them were deserving.--we could not argue against Cardinal Turkson (the first Cardinal in Ghana's history) and Cardinal Dery was quite appropriate. The rest of us, I could not think of the basis. Looking at these two, I will say that they deserved it and Bishop Sarpong was honored with the Order of the Volta and I agree to that. From my position, I thought that the government was honoring the Churches and not individuals and my reasoning for saying that is this: some of the people honored were recently elected leaders of their denominations. The Bishop of the Methodist church was recently elected but that did not [dis]qualify him; his selection to me was a way for the government to honor the Methodist church for its historic contributions to the country but since you could not honor the church you honor its head. The church of Pentecost as body is a significant body in the country as the largest Christian group in the country so its head was honored. And they could not leave the Charismatics out, so they chose Otabil and Duncan Williams; and the head of the Adventists, the Muslims and the Ahmadiyya Mission leadership. It was significant that the religious bodies are honored in the history of Ghana and many people think that had it not been the role of the Churches this country would have imploded long ago.

Question by Dr. Owusu-Ansah: Would this mean that the religious tolerance has a longer history than identified?

Pastor Otabil: I do not know what would have happened had the percentage between Muslims and Christians been different in this country. Let us say if we had like 45 percent Muslims and 55 percent Christian population. The dynamics could have been different. The Christians are so large and so radicalism is tamed. We don't know how things will be and I think that the trend will continue to be with the Christian advantage.

Dr. Akyeampong: You spoke like a true Christian [advocate]. Thank you very much.