

PROFILE OF A SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LEADER

OPOKU ONYINAH, THE “AFRICAN PAUL”

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Abstract

Spirit-empowered leadership takes its shape from both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. God raised up, transformed with the Holy Spirit, and set aside some men and women to impact their generations and influence the trajectory of the church. Most operated within the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, and teacher/scholar paradigms to execute God’s plan for their lives. In contemporary times, however, questions arise as to whether other individuals qualify as effective modern-day Spirit-empowered leaders who operate within the boundaries of these paradigms through the Holy Spirit’s enablement. Consequently, this research sought to examine the spiritual and theological infrastructure behind the life and ministry of Ghanaian and African Pentecostal theologian and Christian leader Opoku Onyiah and ascertain what defines and qualifies him as an effective Spirit-empowered leader. The study concludes that Onyiah’s mentoring style of leadership, apostolic and teacher/scholar paradigms, socialized charismatic orientation, and tremendous influence at national, continental, and global levels position him as an effective modern-day Spirit-empowered leader.

Introduction

Definition of Leadership/Spirit-empowered Leadership

A Chinese leader, Li Hung Chang, once said this when asked about leadership: “There are only three kinds of people—those who are immovable, those who are movable, and those who move others!”¹ Leaders move others, and at the apogee of many organizational goals is the need for good leadership. However, the subject of leadership is a complex one because of the many variables it exhibits. Leadership is an intriguing idea that affects all human structures, drives change, and is difficult to articulate for all its elements. Authors Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus have discovered over 850 different definitions of leadership.²

John C. Maxwell defines leadership as the power to influence others to do what they usually would not have determined to do. He adds that everything in life rises or falls on leadership.³ Maxwell's definition receives support from Roger Hughes, who also defines leadership as the ability to influence others to achieve goals and possess a "big picture vision that is effectively shared and decision making that is clear and decisive."⁴ Oswald Sanders does not differ, stating that if a leader does not have followers whom their influence affects, they cease to be leaders.⁵ Hence, leaders do all they can to increase their influence. Therefore, influence is at the heart of leadership, an effect a person should have on others to achieve transformational goals.

Nonetheless, since this study centers on "Spirit-empowered leadership," it is apropos to define leadership in terms of its spiritual elements. Sanders again declares that Spirit-empowered leaders "are not elected, appointed, or created by synods or churchly assemblies; God alone makes them."⁶ Perhaps Jesus' statement to his disciples in John 15:16 bolsters Sanders' assertion: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you." Therefore, this article defines Spirit-empowered leadership as being chosen by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve others and God's purposes. Spirit-empowered leadership focuses on moving people towards God's plan through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Jay Gary defines Spirit-empowered leadership based on a three-dimensional paradigm—personal development, interpersonal influence, and generational emergence—all facilitated by the Holy Spirit.⁷ Gary's definition suggests that the cardinal infrastructure for Spirit-empowered leadership is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's energizing and transformative drive activates the leader's personal qualities and charisms and gives them a vision that causes them to influence and serve others. Ultimately, such leaders leave generational imprints in the sands of history. Therefore, this research regards an effective Spirit-empowered leader as someone who utilizes the mosaic of spiritual deposits they receive from the Holy Spirit to develop their personal ministry, influence others to follow them, and ultimately create generational paradigms for the future. The personal ministry development component usually falls within the five-fold ministerial paradigms manifested in the New Testament—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. The question is, can the same be said of earthly figures such as African theologian Opoku Onyinah? Does he qualify as a Spirit-empowered leader in contemporary times?

The Man Opoku Onyinah

Opoku Onyinah, Ghanaian and African Pentecostal leader and theological scholar, is described by some of his peers as the "African Paul."⁸ In *Essays in Honor of Apostle Opoku Onyinah*, Lord Elorm Donkor describes Onyinah as a distinguished and

“efficient theologian, ecumenist, missiologist, theological educator, and Christian leader on both national and international platforms.”⁹ Donkor sees Onyinah as a leader whose theological contributions have significantly enhanced the maturity of African Pentecostalism and effectively communicated the gospel to African cultures, just like Paul was able to transpose the new covenant from a Jewish milieu to the Greek cultural milieu.¹⁰ He adds that Onyinah’s leadership acumen, tenacious ecumenical instincts, and academic insight into the subject of *witchdemonology*, which had hitherto been untouched theologically in African Christianity, demonstrates that Pentecostalism is producing the type of Paul needed for Christendom.

Donkor’s assertions receive support from David D. Daniels, who analyzes the historical antecedents of the Church of Pentecost (CoP) and describes Onyinah as a “revered Pentecostal theologian and leader who has advanced progressive Pentecostalism theologically as a movement and a phenomenon within the Church of Pentecost.”¹¹ Daniels suggests that the CoP has placed social ministry and Christian philanthropy at the apogee of its ecclesial commitments partly because of Onyinah’s influence. He concludes that Onyinah is ministerially an apostle, a university professor, a respected author, a faithful pastor, a committed disciple of Jesus Christ, and a Spirit-empowered leader who has deepened and widened social ministry within the CoP.¹²

Cecil M. Robeck Jr. notes that Onyinah’s significant work on exorcism has broadened theological understanding and created a synergy and influence on the larger ecumenical community, mainly through his many academic publications.¹³ And Allan Anderson, who became Onyinah’s doctoral dissertation supervisor at Birmingham University, describes his ministry as influential throughout Ghana’s largest Pentecostal community and further afield in national affairs and many nations where the CoP has imprints.¹⁴ Anderson surveys Onyinah’s spiritual and ministerial gifts and adds that although he is an academic, Onyinah has distinguished himself as an “inspiring minister of the church, a creative innovator, musical composer, and an extraordinary administrator.”¹⁵ Christian Tsekpoe adds his voice and describes Onyinah as a “bilingual” scholar and pastor who understands and articulates the languages of both practicing Pentecostal ministers and those in academia concisely and has elevated the elements of African Christianity to a critical zenith.¹⁶ Indeed, the reflections by these theologians agree with Gary’s three-dimensional paradigm and confirm Onyinah as an effective Spirit-empowered leader.

Another theologian who comments on the leadership qualities of Onyinah is his fellow Ghanaian compatriot, J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu. He believes Onyinah epitomizes a dalliance between the academy and the world of Christian spirituality.¹⁷ Onyinah agrees with Asamoah-Gyadu that theology and spirituality should coexist for better Pentecostalism.

Finally, the CoP describes Onyinah, who served the church as Pastor, Regional Head, International Executive Member, Rector of Pentecost University, International Missions Director, and Chairman of the church, as a “spiritual giant, a transformational leader, an exemplary and faithful steward, a team player with impeccable work ethics, a generational leader, a mentor and coach, a courageous reformist, an innovative leader, an identifier of talents, and a national asset.”¹⁸ These testimonials confer on the apostle the stature of a Spirit-empowered leader with transcendent theological and ministerial influence.

Birth and Early Education

It is said that great men are not born great; they grow great. Perhaps the humble beginnings that surrounded the life of Opoku Onyinah give credence to this claim. On July 22, 1954, he was born to Opanyin Kwame Onyinah and Maame Akosua Addai at Aduman, a small town in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, West Africa.¹⁹ As a young boy, Opoku attended the Catholic Church, so he was baptized as an infant and confirmed in the Yamfo Catholic Church in 1966.²⁰ He obtained his elementary education at Yamfo in the Brong Ahafo Region and later at Sunyani Technical Institute, where he excelled in the Intermediate City and Guilds of London Institute examination in Carpentry and Joinery in 1974.²¹

Conversion to Pentecostal Christianity—“The Holy Ghost Man”

When Onyinah attended the Sunyani Technical Institute, his love for music led him to associate with the school choir. Consequently, when he once participated in a Scripture Union (SU) meeting organized by Bible-believing Christians with mostly Pentecostal-Charismatic inclinations, he encountered the Lord and got converted through Rev. Brew Riverson’s gospel message.²² His life after the conversion was very transformational. As a result, Onyinah fully joined the SU group, which also morphed him into a full embrace of Pentecostal Christianity.²³ The CoP became his new church during this time. Onyinah got baptized in the Spirit and experienced *glossolalia* during this time, an experience that ushered him into a transformative spiritual catharsis he had never found before.²⁴ Spiritual disciplines such as fasting and prayers for many days became regular in his newfound life.

Eventually, the baptism of the Holy Spirit enabled him to pray in tongues for many hours, and he developed a passion for personal evangelism. Ultimately, the spiritual experience prepared him as a leader who attracted other “spiritual seekers” to experience their own baptism in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he founded a Town Fellowship in Yamfo, where other believers met regularly for their own Pentecost experiences.²⁵

After completing his education at Sunyani Technical Institute in 1972, Onyinah proceeded to Tamale Technical school, where he studied carpentry and joinery.²⁶ His passion for the SU's activities continued, and he was appointed secretary of the SU in the first year and later its president in his second year. Onyinah confirms that God's mighty hand was heavily evident in his life and ministrations, such that people gave him the moniker "The Holy Ghost Man."²⁷ His ministry took a strong start from then on, characterized by fervency in prayers, accuracy in prophetic utterances, and spiritual power in ministrations.²⁸

Theological Education

Onyinah is a consummate teacher-scholar whose formal theological education began in 1986–1988 when he enrolled at Elim Bible College, United Kingdom.²⁹ In 1996, he furthered his education at Regents Theological College at Manchester, obtaining a Master of Theology Degree in Applied Theology.³⁰ While there, Onyinah's impressive academic performance and insightful theological reflection attracted the attention of New Testament scholar, Siegfried Schatzmann, who encouraged him to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Birmingham.³¹ Schatzmann further introduced Onyinah to another doctoral student, Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, who linked him to professor Allan Anderson, who later became his doctoral supervisor. Onyinah's Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program was completed in 2002.³² Following his extensive research and publications, the University of Ghana conferred on Onyinah the title of Associate Professor in 2017.

Call into Full-Time Ministry

The CoP's foremost criterion for accepting someone into the full-time ministry is the demonstration of an authentic call of God in the person's life. In most of his sermons, Onyinah stresses the delicate nature of the full-time ministry and asserts that no person should entertain entry into the sacred ecclesial venture of full-time ministry without an authentic call by God. Hence, in the CoP, a superior minister usually identifies the call of God in a person's life and recommends them to the full-time ministry. Besides the call of God, leaders sometimes look for other qualifications in the person's life before their calling is authenticated. These are the critical "c"s of Pentecostal leadership, some of which include "true conversion, commitment, charism, character, consecration, class (minimum of high school education), capacity, competence, and consequences."³³

The biblical accounts indicate that when the gracious hand of God is upon a person, he or she demonstrates charisms exceptionally in ministry and life, and others take notice. Such was the experience Onyinah had before his recommendation into the full-time ministry of the CoP.

When he worked at Tamale in the Northern Region of Ghana, his Area Head at the time, Apostle A. D. Aninkorah, was convinced that Onyinah's leadership and administrative skills were relevant for the ministry, so he took a keen interest in him.³⁴ Aninkorah gave him several preaching and leadership responsibilities, which he handled excellently with grace and skill. Not long afterward, Onyinah was called into the full-time ministry of the CoP at the young age of 22 years.³⁵ After a few years as Overseer and later as a Pastor, Onyinah was called into the office of Apostle of the CoP at the young age of 32 years when leadership identified the apostolic calling in his ministry.³⁶ Furthermore, the tangibility of the office of the teacher and Bible scholar was fully recognized in Onyinah's life. However, teachers are not explicitly called into a delineated ministerial category in the CoP.³⁷

This article seeks to delineate the characteristics of the combined apostolic and teacher/scholar leadership paradigms, as articulated by Paul in Ephesians 4:11, to ascertain if Onyinah fits the category of a modern-day Spirit-empowered leader.

Apostolic Ministry

Since its founding, the CoP adopted the five-fold ministry praxis of church governance from the New Testament where apostles are the church's highest administrative and spiritual heads. David Cannistraci's study of the five-fold ministry notes that an apostle is "one who is called and sent by Christ to have the spiritual authority, character, gifts and abilities to successfully reach and establish people in Kingdom truth and order, especially through founding and overseeing local churches."³⁸ Cannistraci affirms the CoP's belief that apostles are called and anointed to plant churches, supervise and strengthen churches, raise and ordain church leaders, break new missionary frontiers, coordinate other ministries, manage crises, and share God's vision for the church's future.³⁹

In the CoP, Onyinah was called into the apostolic ministry because the church's leadership recognized that these unique gifts and abilities were exhibited in his life and ministry. Consequently, Ofoe affirms this calling to apostolic ministry of Onyinah:

He utilized the grace of God on his life to introduce projects whose impacts on Christianity are miracles in their own right. This satisfies what 2 Corinthians 12:12 presents as characteristics of an apostle. Opoku Onyinah shows himself as an apostle by consciously training and impacting people. He exemplifies those qualities that identify one as an apostle of Christ.⁴⁰

Moreover, the CoP honored Onyinah by highlighting his work in preaching the gospel, opening new frontiers, and breaking new ground with the gospel. The church recognizes that Onyinah's ministry provided spiritual leadership as he championed many reforms in Christianity, introduced miraculous projects, exhibited signs and wonders, mentored many leaders, and impacted many lives.⁴¹ Not only that, Onyinah taught and championed sound Christian doctrine in the church, vehemently opposed false doctrines, and spearheaded the church's growth, establishment, and empowerment.⁴² Once again, these assessments confirm the authenticity and ethos of the apostolic paradigm of Spirit-empowered leadership in Onyinah's ministry.

The Teacher/Scholar

Onyinah fits into the category of an Apostle Teacher. The teacher/scholar paradigm of the five-fold Spirit-empowered leadership praxis manifests palpably in his life and ministry, as evidenced by what the CoP says about him: "He has, with admirable simplicity, consistently taught the undiluted Word of God to the understanding of many. He knows how to rightly divide God's Word as if he were one of the Bible writers."⁴³ Onyinah's teacher paradigm falls within the caliber of an *academic* teacher/scholar, bringing his theological expertise and education to bear upon his teaching ministry, combining sound theological knowledge with deep spirituality, and making the Word of God relevant to the times.⁴⁴ As an astute African Pentecostal scholar, he has the creativity to theologically reflect and probe deeper meanings of Pentecostalism from the Word of God. For example, his leviathan academic work on *witchdemonology* has become a breakthrough point in our understanding of the subject.

Additionally, Eric Newberg lists Opoku on the list of academic teacher/scholars who are impacting Spirit-empowered research and elevating graduate academic education for his many authored books and articles in global Spirit-empowered journals and has served as a member of the editorial boards of the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* and *International Review of Missions*, among others.⁴⁵

Leadership Attainments

Over the past four decades and beyond, the life and leadership influence of Onyinah has been seen across the CoP, the national Pentecostal and Charismatic community in Ghana, the African Pentecostal fraternity, and the global Spirit-empowered Movement and its mosaic of theological circles. This section looks at the leadership attainments of the professor across these spectrums.

Leadership in the Church of Pentecost

The active ministry of Onyinah in the CoP spanned over forty-two years until his official retirement in 2018 at the age of 64 years. During the historic leadership journey, Onyinah served the church in many capacities of influence. He rose through the leadership ranks of District Overseer, District Pastor, Regional Head, International Executive Council member, International Missions Director, and finally as Chairman of the church globally, among many other roles. Being Chairman of the church meant he served as the administrative and spiritual head of the CoP worldwide.⁴⁶ His leadership recorded multifaceted and generational achievements.

For example, during Chairman Onyinah's ten-year leadership, membership doubled from 1.6 million to over 3 million, whereas the church's presence in the world increased from seventy to one hundred nations.⁴⁷ Again, he is credited with moving the CoP into a technological era by establishing Pentecost Television (Pent Tv) and other media platforms. He broadened the horizon of the church's national presence. Onyinah's chairmanship era foresaw the ushering of the CoP into continental and global theological forays.⁴⁸ In addition, his leadership opened the door for many young people to enter the full-time ministry of the church and accelerated the development of an epochal moment for young adults to participate in church leadership.

Further, during the chairmanship of Onyinah, the concept of Pentecost International Worship Centers (PIWCs) was conceived. The PIWCs are multinational cross-cultural churches within the CoP with a modernized and multicultural ethos, created to welcome people from all nations and cultures to enjoy Pentecostal worship experiences. This laudable vision has attracted the youth to the church, who, before its inception, were leaving in droves for other churches.⁴⁹ Thousands of young people, particularly graduates from academic institutions, were leaving the CoP for other churches each year until the establishment of the PIWCs truncated the anomaly. Currently, it is estimated that the church's youth constitute at least 40 percent of its population, a sign of a solid generational strength for its future.⁵⁰

Leadership in Ghana Pentecostalism/Ecumenism

Onyinah's influence and contributions to Christianity run beyond the CoP in Ghana and the world. An ecumenical figure, he served as the Chairman of the Ghana Evangelism Committee and as President of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), positions the Christian community in Ghana believes he served effectively.⁵¹ Mainly, Onyinah was highly sensitive to the well-being of churches and saw Christians as major players in Ghana's economic development agenda and the country's moral health. His leadership led to stronger ecumenicity among the churches in Ghana.

Leadership in African Pentecostalism

Opoku Onyinah's leadership has not only been effective and influential in the CoP and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic community, but also in the African Pentecostal fraternity. Beyond the many theological papers he has authored on African spirituality and African Christianity, Onyinah has served as Co-Chairman of Empowered21 Africa since 2013, a platform for Pentecostal dialogues and spiritual advancement in Africa and the world.⁵²

Leadership in Global Pentecostalism

Beyond being influential in the leadership of Christianity at denominational, national, and continental levels, Onyinah's leadership credentials have enabled him to serve and impact lives in the global Spirit-empowered Movement and other international fraternities. For example, as a Pentecostal scholar, Onyinah has been a member of the Committee of World Pentecostal Theologians in the dialogue of Pentecostals and Catholic Churches since 2011. He has also served as a member of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches since 2007. His leadership in these fraternities has added knowledge and Pentecostal leadership excellence to global Christianity's growth.⁵³ As an astute theologian, Onyinah has spoken at numerous international conferences and meetings on several matters related to Christianity and Pentecostalism.

Personalized or Socialized Spirit-empowered Leadership?

A critical assessment must also be made of Onyinah's leadership style through the prism of what Stephen Fogarty categorizes as the "dark side" of charismatic leadership. Fogarty's analysis reveals two kinds of Spirit-empowered leaders: *personalized* and *socialized*. Whereas personalized charismatic leaders are authoritarian, narcissistic, and centripetally manipulate church systems to enhance their power, socialized leaders, in contrast, are egalitarian and centrifugally serve the interests of their followers and organizations.⁵⁴ In this study, Onyinah is assessed to be an ethical, open-hearted, consensus-building, and mentoring leader who cherishes the decentralization of power to his followers, associates, and subordinates. He is a socialized Spirit-empowered leader who selflessly and seminally builds church structures around others, particularly the younger generation. This trait is typified by the hundreds of young men and women who joined the full-time ministry of the CoP during his leadership and many others he continuously mentors.

Conclusions

Effective Spirit-empowered leadership emanates from the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, which enables a person to marshal all innate resources and divine deposits to serve God, influence others to serve God, and raise a generation to continue to do so. Oral Roberts University's three-pronged yardstick for measuring Spirit-empowered leadership involves personal spiritual development, influences on others, and generational impact. This study discovered that Opoku Onyinah, one of Ghana's and Africa's leading Pentecostal leaders and scholars, is a Spirit-empowered leader who has a mentoring style of leadership, manifests a combination of the charismata in the apostolic and teacher/scholar paradigms, and has impacted generations significantly as a modern-day Pentecostal and theological leader.



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- ¹⁸ The Church of Pentecost General Headquarters, “Chairman’s Brochure: Retirement Service of Apostle Professor & Mrs. Grace Opoku Onyinah and Family” (Gomoa Fettah, Ghana: The Church of Pentecost General Headquarters, 2018). During the official retirement service by the Church of Pentecost for Apostle Opoku Onyinah on 26 August 2018, the brochure the Church produced for the service carried these testimonies and other tributes. The official testimony from the Church of Pentecost described Onyinah in many terms, including “a spiritual giant.”
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- ²⁰ Annor-Antwi, *Myth or Mystery*, 40–43.
- ²¹ Annor-Antwi, *Myth or Mystery*, 40–43.
- ²² Annor-Antwi, *Myth or Mystery*, 45–47.
- ²³ Annor-Antwi, *Myth or Mystery*, 48.
- ²⁴ Annor-Antwi, *Myth or Mystery*, 48.
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- ²⁶ Annor-Antwi, *Myth or Mystery*, 82.
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- ⁴⁴ Eric N. Newberg, “Paradigms of Global Spirit-empowered Leadership,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 7:2 (Fall 2022), 169-98.
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- ⁴⁶ The Church of Pentecost, “Chairman’s Brochure,” 11–15.
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- ⁵⁰ The Church of Pentecost, “Chairman’s Brochure,” 20–21.
- ⁵¹ The Church of Pentecost, “Chairman’s Brochure,” 22.
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