

Televangelism: A study of the 'Pentecost Hour' of the Church of Pentecost

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The liberalisation of the Ghanaian media since the 1990s has drastically changed the media landscape of Ghana and given rise to the use of the mass media for evangelism purposes. The advent of the mass media offered churches and televangelists a unique opportunity to fulfil the Great Commission, and it is the Pentecostals who continue to use it effectively. Many Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches in the past 20 years have made good use of the mass media (radio and television) for the propagation of the gospel. In this article the televangelism ministry of the Church of Pentecost, named 'Pentecost Hour', and how it has influenced the mission and discipleship agenda of the Church of Pentecost in their endeavour to participate in the *missio Dei* are discussed.

Introduction

According to Niemandt, a missional church is a church sent to bring the gospel everywhere and into everyday life (2012:4). This implies that if the church is to reach this goal and sound generation for Christ effectively, we must utilise the same media roads much more than they are being used by the society every day (Brawner 1997:369). The media in this regard becomes an extension of the human body, the microphone becoming an extension of the voice and the camera an extension of the eye (McLuhan 1996:13).

The liberalisation of the Ghanaian media since the 1990s has drastically changed the media landscape of Ghana and given rise to the use of mass media for evangelism purposes. Notable among the use of mass media for mission purposes is television (televangelism). Television has offered churches and televangelists a unique opportunity to fulfil the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), and it is the Pentecostals who continue to use it effectively (Asamoah-Gyadu 2012:126; Gifford 1988:101; Hadden 1993:114; Ihejirika 2006:227; Walton 2009:3). The appropriation of the electronic media by African Pentecostal churches has grown to such a point that it has become part of their self-definition (De Witte 2012:144; Maxwell 1998:255). The reason being that television can make objects and people appear more beautiful and attractive than they really are, while at the same time presenting them as true and accessible (De Witte 2003:174). Furthermore, the characters on television are not just representations of individual people but are encodings of an ideology, 'embodiments of ideological values' (Fiske 1987:9). Thus television increases visibility and the importance of churches and individuals who use it as a means for the propagation of the gospel (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005:12). Thus the television serves as a kind of marketing and promotional tool for churches and televangelists.

Mitchell submits that many Ghanaians have cultivated an indigenous film and video culture (2004:110). Kalu refers to this culture as an evangelical strategy for African Pentecostalism to engage with both the indigenous and contemporary culture through the use of media (2008:103).

Mitchell and Kalu's claim reflects in how Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches in the past 20 years have made good use of mass media (radio and television) for the propagation of the gospel. For historical purposes, it should be noted that, before the advent of privately owned media houses in Ghana, the Assemblies of God-Ghana began their radio ministry called 'Bible Time', which was hosted by Rev. James Kessler and was aired by the Ghana Broadcasting Cooperation in 1968 (Assemblies of God 2015). The Church of Pentecost also started broadcasting 'the Pentecost Hour' on Ghana Broadcasting Cooperation Radio 2 in the 1970s (Pentecost Fire 1974:29). Meyer notes that the massive presence of the Pentecostal churches in mass media has impacted much on the social structure leading to the creation of a *pentecostalist culture* (2002:121–144). DeWitte refers to this culture as the *pentecostalisation of the public sphere* (2005:22–26).

Religious broadcasting has moved, over the past decade, from the margins of social and religious life to the centre stage. This intersection first came to public and scholarly attention in the middle

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of the twentieth century (Hoover & Clark 2002:39). For this reason, this article seeks to contribute to the various discourses on mass media evangelism, with special emphasis on the televangelism ministry of the Church of Pentecost named *Pentecost Hour*. This article is a further study on the media evangelism discussed in White and Niemandt's article titled: *Ghanaian Pentecostal Churches' Mission Approaches* (2015:257–259). The article also seeks to fill the research gap of the missional and discipleship perspective of televangelism that is lacking in much of the research and literature available on televangelism. The study would therefore look at how the Pentecost Hour has influenced the mission and discipleship agenda of the Church of Pentecost in their endeavour to participate in the *missio Dei*.

What is televangelism?

Televangelism is the use of television for evangelistic activities (Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2015). It is a term derived from the word television and evangelism. Televangelism refers to deliberate efforts by religious organisations and interests to buy airtime for the purpose of mediating their activities to the public for very specific ends, including the 'winning of souls' (Asamoah-Gyadu 2012:127; Biernatzki 1991:1). It emerged after World War II as an outgrowth of evangelicalism. The term was first used by Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann in *Prime Time Preachers: The Rising Power of Televangelism* to describe a new form of religious broadcasting combining television and evangelism (Encyclopaedia of Religion and Society 1998). Televangelism boomed in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) changed its policy of mandating free time for religious broadcasts to allow stations to accept money for religious programmes. This regulatory change inspired more than a few preachers to use television as a means of funding their ministries (Dictionary of American History 2003).

Three decades ago, Cox predicted that televangelism would have enormous significance for the future of religion (1984:43–44). This prediction has been fulfilled in many parts of the world. The use of television for missional purposes is now the order of the day. Asamoah-Gyadu (2012) submits that:

Televangelism has become a means of participating in religious globalization, and for a continent that feels marginalized in the modern world events, its contemporary Christian representatives feel obliged to make their presence felt on the world stage. A lot of that happens through placing religion in the media and building up new virtual communities beyond physical audiences. (p. 126)

The liberalisation and commercialisation of Ghanaian airwaves since the 1990s has had a tremendous impact on religious use of the media (Meyer 2006:295, 2009:116). Televised church services and radio programmes have become increasingly abundant in the Ghanaian media. In contemporary Ghana, there are a number of Christian televised church services on various television channels, particularly by Pentecostal churches.

Pentecost Hour

Pentecost Hour is the religious broadcast of the Church of Pentecost. It started as radio evangelism on Ghana Broadcasting Cooperation Radio 2 in the 1970s (Pentecost Fire 1974:29) and later aired on some national television stations such as GTV, TV Africa, TV 3 and more recently PENT TV (Pentecost Television). The Pentecost Hour usually starts with the song, *the fire is burning*. According to Walker, *the fire is burning* became a common tune among members of the Church of Pentecost and other believers, as well as the theme song for the Pentecost Hour (Walker 2010:1).

It is good to note that the Pentecost Hour was previously aired on TV3 but has recently been suspended by the leadership of the Church of Pentecost due to changes in management policies regarding the religious programme of the television station. The new management of TV3 directed that all religious programmes including Pentecost Hour should stop running (Table 1).

Although TV3 is not part of the current television schedule for the Pentecost Hour, it was however used as part of the analysis for the television station respondents watching the Pentecost Hour.

On 07 May 2014, Apostle Dr Opoku Onyinah, the Chairman of the Church of Pentecost presented the 2013 State-of-the-Church address at the opening of the 14th Extraordinary Council Meetings at the Pentecost Convention Centre (PCC) in Gomoa Fetteh - Ghana. In his address, Apostle Onyinah revealed that the year 2013 witnessed a remarkable growth and expansion in the Radio and Television ministry resulting in a tremendous increase in listenership and viewership. He revealed that a total of 3030 messages were preached on 'Pentecost Hour', which resulted in 4954 phone calls and text messages from listeners and viewers in Ghana and abroad. Through the 30-minute 'Pentecost Hour' broadcasts on 113 radio stations and four TV networks nationwide, 1415 souls were won, with 311 of the converts undertaking water baptism (The Church of Pentecost 2014).

Production of Pentecost Hour - Pent Media

As Pent Media is responsible for the production of Pentecost Hour, it would be relevant to give a brief background of this department of the Church of Pentecost. Pentecost Media which is popularly known as Pent Media started as the Audio-Visual Department of the Church of Pentecost.

TABLE 1: The current schedules for televising Pentecost Hour are as follows.

TV Network	Day/Time	Language
GTV	Thursday 5.30 am	English and Akan
TV Africa	Wednesday 5.30 pm	English and Akan
Multi-TV - Joy Prime	Sunday 5.30 am	English and Akan
Pent TV	Daily 6:30–7:30 am, and 12:30–1:30 pm	English and Akan

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

In an address presented by the then General Secretary of the Church of Pentecost, Apostle Dr Alfred Koduah at the meeting of the National Radio and Television Ministry Committee held at Tesano Transit Quarters, Accra on 31 October 2006, it was noted that:

From the early days, when the church initiated moves to use the media in reaching out to lost souls, the Church had intermittent broadcasts on radio. Through the efforts of the late Evangelist L.A. Nyarko and others, the ministry has gradually grown to include television productions, with the support of the Audio-Visual Department, which has now metamorphosed into a corporate entity, PENTMEDIA.

Pentecost Media (Pent Media) is the outfit of the Church of Pentecost responsible for the recording of documentaries, personality profiles and interviews, church programmes and activities on audio or visual cassettes, CDs and iPods intended for sale. Most of the sermons or teachings of the clergy, broadcast on 'Pentecost Hour' on radio and TV, are produced by Pent Media.

Methodology

The research employed a mixed method for data gathering (i.e. literature study and questionnaire). The questionnaires were administered to 300 people in some selected churches of the Church of Pentecost in the Kumasi Metropolis in July 2015 through random sampling. Out of the 300 questionnaires administered, 229 were retrieved, and 192 of the 229 questionnaires retrieved were fully answered. The 192 questionnaires were therefore analysed by using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and the results were presented in a descriptive statistics format under various subheadings.

Findings, analysis and discussions

This section of the article has three main divisions. The first part discusses the viewership of the Pentecost Hour, the second part discusses how the Pentecost Hour has influenced mission and soul-winning activities of the church (individually and corporately) and the final part focuses on how the programme has contributed to the discipleship of members.

Out of the 192 respondents who indicated that they have been watching Pentecost Hour, a little over 80% of them have been watching it in the last four years while only a little less than 20% have been watching it either beyond four years or less than a year as shown in Table 2.

A majority of the respondents (70) representing 36.5% indicate that TV3 is their preferred television station for watching Pentecost Hour, followed by GTV (32.8%) and then TV Africa (22.4%). Only 13 (8.3%) of the respondents watch this programme on other television channels (Table 3).

With regard to the duration that respondents spend watching the programme per broadcast, more than half (110 [57.3%])

watch the Pentecost Hour for the full 30 minutes, and 35 (18.2%), 26 (13.5%) and 15 (7.8%) of the respondents spend 20, 15 and 10 minutes respectively in watching a single broadcast of Pentecost Hour. Only six respondents watch this programme for the duration other than 10, 15, 20 and 30 minutes. According to this category of people (3.1%), their time spent watching the programme is often affected by their personal schedules and sometimes loss of interest in the sermon being aired (Table 4).

The results shown in Table 5 indicate that, out of the 192 respondents who have been watching the Pentecost Hour, 107 of them (55.7%) do watch the programme once every week, while 38 people representing 19.8% watch it twice every week; 14 (7.3%) and 12 (6.3%) respondents watch Pentecost Hour monthly and daily, respectively. Twenty-one respondents, representing 10.8%, do watch the programme more often than daily, twice a week, weekly and monthly.

For the purpose of this research, the respondents who watch Pentecost Hour were asked to reveal what informs their decision to watch the Pentecost Hour. Out of the 192 respondents, 119 (61.98%) have been watching the programme

TABLE 2: How long respondents have been watching.

Duration	Frequency	%
1–2 years	77	40.1
3–4 years	80	41.7
5–6 years	19	9.90
7–8 years	4	2.10
Others	12	6.30
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

TABLE 3: Television station respondents watch Pentecost Hour.

TV Station	Frequency	%
GTV	63	32.8
TV3	70	36.5
TV Africa	43	22.4
Others	16	8.3
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

TABLE 4: Time spent watching Pentecost Hour.

Time spent	Frequency	%
10 minutes	15	7.8
15 minutes	26	13.5
20 minutes	35	18.2
30 minutes	110	57.3
Others	6	3.1
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

TABLE 5: How often respondents watch Pentecost Hour.

How often	Frequency	%
Daily	12	6.3
Twice a week	38	19.8
Weekly	107	55.7
Monthly	14	7.3
Others	21	10.9
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

as a result of their membership of the Church of Pentecost; 44 (22.91%) watch it because of their interest in the sermons being preached; 18 (9.38%) watch it because they want to be informed, while 8 (4.17%) watch it simply because they like the programme.

Pentecost Hour as a tool for participating in the *missio Dei* (evangelism)

Any activity of the church which is not in the context of the *missio Dei* is just entertainment and human activity and would not likely yield any results for mission and discipleship. The concept of *missio Dei* says God is the agent of mission (Balía & Kim 2010:4; World Council of Churches 2013:191). Flett (2010) argues that:

Without the *missio Dei*, the mission of the church would simply be grasping at mere straws; it would be salvation by works alone. Mission is more than mere human activity, reliant on the emotion, volition and action of finite beings. Mission, rightly, belongs to God and anything other than the *missio Dei* being the starting point and climax of redemptive action is no more than an impediment to the proclamation of the true gospel message. Any other conception of the ground, motive and goal of mission apart from the *missio Dei*'s Trinitarian location risks investing authority in historical accident and human capacity. (p. 9)

According to Tennent, the *missio Dei* involves, 'all the specific and varied ways in which the church crosses cultural boundaries to reflect the life of the Triune God in the world, and through that identity, participates in His mission' (2010:23, 59). To this end the World Council of Churches states that all Christians, churches and congregations are called to be vibrant messengers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the good news of salvation (2013:53).

Evangelism is a confident but humble sharing of our faith and conviction with other people. Such sharing is a gift to others which announces the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ. It is the inevitable fruit of genuine faith. Therefore, in each generation, the church must renew its commitment to evangelism as an essential part of the way we convey God's love to the world (WCC 2013:53–54). It is a mission activity which makes explicit and unambiguous the centrality of the incarnation, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ, without setting limits to the saving grace of God. It seeks to share this good news with all who have not yet heard it and invites them to an experience of life in Christ and to discipleship (WCC 2013: 68–69). This is what Krintzinger, Meiring and Saayman call the 'kerygmatic' dimension of mission (1994:37).

Pentecost Hour is one of the means through which the Church of Pentecost reaches out to people with the gospel (The Church of Pentecost 2014). The Church of Pentecost believes it has been able to achieve its numerical strength primarily because of its uncompromising stand

in three main areas: prayer, evangelism and discipleship (Larbi 2001:180). The Church of Pentecost has in place strategies for mission and evangelism which it gives a strict adherence to as a church. To a very large extent, Pentecost Hour is part of the church's strategy for accomplishing mission and evangelism. It is against this backdrop that the church intends to continue using the programme as part of its strategy in the said endeavour. Our survey revealed that the programme is not only used for evangelism purposes but it has also influenced and changed the viewers' attitude towards soul winning (Table 6).

As many as 179 (93.2%) respondents revealed that their patronage of Pentecost Hour had influenced their attitude and concern for soul winning, which shows the impact of Pentecost Hour on the attitude of viewers towards soul winning. However, 13 (6.8%) respondents still maintained their original position towards soul winning as shown in Table 7.

With further investigation, Table 8 shows that 76 (39.6%) of the respondents indicated that their understanding of soul winning had been deepened, while 42 respondents representing 21.9% revealed that their soul winning strategies and skills had been sharpened. Thirty-seven (19.2%) respondents admitted that they had developed the desire to win more souls for God, and 23 (12%) revealed that their passion to win souls had grown deeper. Only 1 (0.5%) of the respondents revealed ways other than the responses provided by the before-mentioned respondents shown in Table 8. Thirteen (6.8%) people made no revelations about how the programme had influenced their attitude towards

TABLE 6: Reasons for watching Pentecost Hour.

Reasons	Frequency	%
Because I am a member of the church	119	61.98
Because I want information	18	9.38
Because I like the programme	8	4.17
Because I like the sermons preached on the programme	44	22.91
Others	3	1.56
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

TABLE 7: Influence on attitude towards soul winning.

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	179	93.2
No	13	6.80
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

TABLE 8: How attitude towards soul winning has changed.

Response	Frequency	%
It has sharpened my soul-winning strategies and skills	42	21.9
It has influenced my understanding of soul winning	76	39.6
It has influenced my desire to win more souls	37	19.2
It has deepened my passion to win lost souls	23	12.0
Others	1	0.5
None	13	6.8
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

soul winning because they actually had not been influenced by the programme in relation to soul winning.

Pentecost Hour as a tool for Christian character formation (discipleship)

Mission is the disciple-making assignment of the church (Bosch 1991:56). This was why as part of the Great Commission Jesus Christ assigned the church to disciple believers. With this view, it is therefore impossible to participate in evangelism without discipleship (Walls & Cathy Ross 2008:24–35). Both evangelism and discipleship move together. 'The founding of the whole Christian movement was initiated through the simple acts of Jesus investing his life and embedding his teachings in his followers (disciples) and developing them into authentic disciples' (Hirsch 2006:102). He therefore commissions the disciples to go out and disciple others by creating communities of obedience among the nations ... 'Mission is replicated discipleship, learned through ethical obedience and passed on through teaching' (Wright 2006:391, Matthew 28:18–20).

The two major purposes of the Great Commission are the salvation and discipleship of believers. According to Bonhoeffer, 'Christianity without discipleship is Christianity without Christ' (1995:59). The ultimate purpose of discipleship is to help believers to be nurtured spiritually and develop a Christ-like character. Discipleship involves diligent teaching of the gospel and practices that promote a lifestyle of becoming ever more like Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer submits that discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend - it must transcend all comprehension. It is a life of strict adherence and obedience to Christ and his commandments. It is also a strict adherence to Christ as the object of our faith (1995:54, 87, 93).

For this reason, many of the topics that are discussed on Pentecost Hour are geared towards soul winning and discipleship. These topics include but are not limited to: Salvation, Repentance, Healing and Deliverance, Spiritual Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit. Many of these topics are centred on the theme of the year as given by the chairman of the church together with his executive council of the church.

It has been the practice of the church that at the end of every year, the chairman in consultation with the executive council announces a general theme for the coming year. Since the year 2010, the following were the various themes for the subsequent years:

- 2010 – Being transformed into the image of Christ in a changing world - 2 Corinthians 3:18
- 2011 – Being led by the Spirit of God - Romans 8:14
- 2012 – Being disciplined to make others disciples for Christ - Matthew 28:18–20
- 2013 – Worshipping in Spirit and Truth - John 4:23–24
- 2014 – Fanning the Pentecostal Fire to impact generations - 1 Timothy 1:5–6
- 2015 – Being a Good Steward of God in my generation - Matthew 25:21

- 2016 – Hearing and obeying the Lord's voice in my generation – 1 Samuel 3:9–10

These themes are discussed thoroughly by the Chairman and presented as sermons on Pentecost Hour; in addition other pastors will be requested to preach on the said topic throughout the year. Table 9 shows the views of respondents on how Pentecost Hour has influenced their Christian life and character.

In Table 9, 40.6% reveal that the programme has influenced their Christian life by enhancing their spirituality as Christians. Sixty (31.3%) also indicate that their Christian life has been influenced because the programme has improved their knowledge of the Bible. Approximately one out of every five (19.8%) respondents has also been influenced due to the increase in their understanding of the Christian faith, while 16 (8.3%) say their character has been impacted. It is, however, important to note that Christian discipleship is a life-long journey of obedience to Christ that spiritually transforms a person's values and behaviour and results in a ministry in one's home, church and the world.

Conclusion

The liberalisation of the Ghanaian media since the 1990s has drastically changed the media landscape of Ghana and given rise to the use of mass media for evangelism purposes. This article has made a case for how the Church of Pentecost has used the media for evangelism and discipleship purposes. This was executed through the study of the Pentecost Hour (a televangelism programme) of the Church of Pentecost.

The findings revealed that Pentecost Hour had a positive effect on the viewers. The study also indicated that through 'Pentecost Hour' broadcasts, about 1415 souls were won, with 311 of the converts undertaking water baptism in the year 2013 (The Church of Pentecost 2014). It was also established that the programme affected the respondents in terms of their character and attitude towards soul winning and discipleship. It can be concluded that most of the members of the Church of Pentecost who watch Pentecost Hour on regular basis are affected by what they watch.

Area for further research

This article did not explore the effects of Pentecost Hour on non-members of the Church of Pentecost. Furthermore, it did not investigate why some members of the Church of Pentecost do not watch Pentecost Hour. It is therefore recommended that researchers who may want to carry out further studies on Pentecost Hour should consider these aspects.

TABLE 9: How Christian life has been influenced.

Response	Frequency	%
It has enhanced my knowledge of the Bible	60	31.3
It has enhanced my spirituality as a Christian	78	40.6
It has increased my understanding of the Christian faith	38	19.8
It has influenced my character as a Christian	16	8.3
Total	192	100

Source: White & Essimeng Field work 2015

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

P.W. was responsible for the conceptual and theoretical aspect of the research and finalisation of the article. A.A.E. did the field work and data collection as well as prepare the first draft of the article.

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