

LETTERS TO A SPIRITUAL FATHER

by Kofi Asare Opoku*

One of the rewards for studying Spiritual Churches which are on a wave of rapid expansion and popularity in Ghana, in particular, and Africa in general, is to know the reason for their appeal to their many adherents. Scholars have dealt with this question from the point of view of their various disciplines, and sociologists, political scientists and theologians have all made their contributions to our understanding of the phenomenon of mushrooming spiritual churches.

Oftentimes, the reasons for the appeal of spiritual churches to their members is straight-jacketed into the narrow interpretations of academic discipline, and although the interpretations and analyses may be scholarly, they have a tendency to becloud the opinions of adherents themselves, or even sometimes, replace them.

In this brief article, I intend to let the adherents themselves do the talking through correspondence with their leader; and this necessarily leads us into an enquiry into the nature of faith, which is a dynamic and vital context of man's meaningful dependence upon the activity of God in Christ, in the Christian context. But this enquiry is handicapped by the fact that the subject under enquiry defies adequate objectification and rational analysis. But we can descriptively say that faith is trust and confidence in God.

For an appraisal of this faith, a veritable source of relevant information is found in the testimonies given by adherents of spiritual churches, both on occasions of public worship and also in correspondence with leaders of these churches. In this article, I have deliberately concentrated on correspondence, which is strictly between the devotee and the leader, without any audience looking on. This, of course, is not to ignore or discount public testimonies which are obviously meant, in part, to appeal to non-members, and also to strengthen and increase the faith of members of the particular group. Testimony through correspondence is usually not available to the general public, and yet it has the unique value of helping to further our understanding and appreciation of what

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spiritual churches are doing for their followers.

A regular feature of worship in spiritual churches involves "prayer requests" which are periodically sent to spiritual leaders. This is done in the faith that "God through Jesus Christ, will undertake the need for which you ask". And, as always, the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:19: "Again; I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in Heaven", are quoted in support of the prayer requests.

The letters below were sent to Brother Lawson, Founder and Leader of the Divine Healer's Church (Christ's Ministry of Salvation, Healing and Teaching). The church, formerly known as the "Lord Is There Temple", was founded in 1953. A 1966 pastoral release from the Founder stated that the church had 190,000 members, with branches at Korle Gonno, Accra (Headquarters), Nsawam, Kumasi, Sonanya, Teshie, Asesewa, Accra New Town, Agona-Swedru, Winneba, Tema, Dodowa, Labadi, Ada Foah, Nungua, etc. etc.

The mission of this spiritual church is for "worship and for preaching the Word of God which is able to heal people of diverse diseases and will teach them to deny ungodliness as well as worldly lust so that they will live sober, righteous and godly life, that is, to become useful citizens". It is important to point out that this church sees itself as a "non-profit making organisation. It thrives on faith - faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that provides freewill offerings for its upkeep; faith that strengthens the inner man with might and gives him joy and hope".¹

The Divine Healer's Church does not rely on missionaries or specially ordained clergy to propagate the Word. Instead, it relies on persons for whom it has provided healing in spirit and body and also on converts who, like the early Christians, are "anointed by the Holy Spirit".

The letters under consideration, 24 in all, cover a wide spectrum of answered prayers, and do indicate the kinds of problems with which devotees approached a spiritual leader. The letters were contained in the Church's Easter Convention Reports of 1967 and 1968 and are reproduced here in full with the names and addresses of the writers omitted to avoid possible embarrassment.

1. "Short History of 'The Lord Is There Temple'", Brother Lawson.

1.

Wife Healed of Menstrual Troubles

"We have experienced a miracle! Soon after your letter arrived together with the blessed handkerchief and the affirmation card, I started using it on behalf of my wife. Within some few weeks I realised that the obstacle has wonderfully been removed and she has started running her monthly period regularly. At first a doctor suggested that an operation would release her of the trouble but God in His abundant mercy worked wonders on her without any operation.

It will also interest you to learn that she became pregnant a few months ago and God wonderfully answered our prayers by giving us a handsome baby boy. I thank God and I thank you too for your prayers".

(Couple, Zaria, Nigeria)

2.

Healing and Deliverance

"Sometime ago I came to you for prayers so that the Lord might heal and deliver me. You made me know more about Jesus Christ and therefore I accepted Him as my Lord and Saviour. It will greatly interest you to know that I had my healing as I was going home from your place and now I am perfectly well."

(Male, Accra)

3.

Wife Miraculously Healed

"My wife was sick for six and a half years. The illness started immediately after her fifth child. Many doctors were consulted and it was finally decided that her womb be removed. But before going to the hospital, I accompanied her to your Church

for prayers. You prayed to the Almighty God for her recovery and stated after the prayers that God created women to bring forth children from their womb and that my wife had been healed in the Name of Jesus.

I sent her to the hospital as I planned since my only hope by then for her recovery was through medical treatment. But this was later proved wrong. The day for the operation was due and something unusual happened as she was injected. She developed palpitation of the heart which caused great anxiety both to the doctors and the nurses on duty. Therefore the operation was postponed and she was discharged.

She continued with the prayers at home and now she has been healed in the Name of Jesus as you said. She became pregnant just after her miraculous healing and she has now given birth to a beautiful baby girl whose photograph I attach herewith".

(Male, Accra)

4.

Healed of Throat Disease

"I wrote to inform you that I was under pregnancy and that apart from my daily sickness, I felt something moving in my throat like a worm and therefore requested you to pray for me.

Four days after I had written to you I dreamed of an object like a ball coming out of me and in a few seconds it stretched in the form of a sea-lobster and started moving. It was frightful and wonderful. I do believe that was the day on which the prayers were said for me. Since then that sort of feeling in my throat has stopped. The "Lord Is There" indeed".

(Female, Ho)

5.

Diseased Hands Healed

"I wrote to you sometime ago to pray for my nephew Ayitey Kortor Okine who was then stricken with a kind of nasty skin disease which attacked his hands for almost four years. Doctors were consulted, African jujumen were also invited but none of them was able to cure him. Instead, they made matters worse and the boy's hands were almost rotten.

Three weeks after I had received the reply to my letter from you, the hands of my nephew were completely healed and he went back to school. Glory be to Jehovah through Jesus Christ. Amen".

(Male, Accra)

6.

Baby Samuel Saved From Death

"My heart is full of gratitude and joy for the wonderful healing that has taken place on my eleven months old baby Samuel.

My wife and I approached you asking you for prayers when Sammy's condition was very fierce. Indeed, your prayers are wonderful. My child is healed, so sweet and handsome. His dear smile radiates the pure and innocent love of God which fills his tiny heart. I do wish you could see him. I thank Father God for the miraculous aid rendered in time of anxiety and need. I also thank you and Sister Lawson".

(Male, Accra)

7.

Healed From Testis And Urethra Pains

"I have some wonderful news to tell you. On the 8th of this month I came to you for healing and prayers were offered to me accordingly. In the evening of that very day the pain which I had been suffering from the testis and urethra for nine years left me and I felt as if I never had them. It was amazing!

All that I can say is simply to thank our Father God for answering my prayers as well as those of my dear friends. Thank you too Brother Lawson, and may God bless you."

(Male, Suhum)

8.

Delivered From Blasphemy And Healed From
Deadly Disease

"I was a student who did not fear God, nor regarded His greatness. I claimed that the Bible was a story book, and that Jesus never existed as narrated in the Bible, but that He was a man like ourselves whose life had been so exaggerated by sheer ignorance of the people at His time.

I studied more about the universe, famous scientists, but had rather bad impression about God's greatness. I loved to read other books and ignored the Holy Bible which I hated very much. I convinced many friends to disbelieve the Bible. I defeated those who did not agree with me by giving them instances about world affairs and quoting some famous passages from various books to support my argument. While doing all these, I thought I was very perfect. How happy was Satan then!

But one day I was attacked by a very deadly disease and suddenly I began calling the name "Jesus! Jesus!" The devil tormented me severely and the burden upon me was like a whole storey-building.

I was sent to you at the Divine Healer's Church and there Jesus showed to me His capacity as the Son of God. A mere rebuke from your lips removed the "devil's uniform" from me and I was completely healed in body, spirit and soul. It was during this time that I fully repented and realised the greatness of God and believed immediately that the Bible is the Word of God. The Name of Jesus is indeed wonderful. May this holy Name be praised always! Amen".

(Male, Accra)

9.

Wife Healed Of Miscarriage

"My wife was for four years having miscarriages (six in all) ranging from two to six months. We consulted some medical Practitioners for help, but all their efforts to check it proved futile. We therefore lost hope when she again missed her period. For five months there was no development of the foetus. She had to stop attending ante-natal clinic at the hospital because whenever she was examined "Nothing Felt" was written on her card.

It was during this time that she called at your church for prayers. A few days after that her abdomen began to enlarge rapidly. Everything then seemed to move on smoothly when another trouble started. Her time for delivery became long overdue and we feared she might be operated upon. She came to you again on Monday for prayers and exactly six days after the prayers she delivered safely. Praise God! This has greatly increased my faith in the Lord. I have now realised the hundred per cent truth in the 1st verse of Psalm 127. I give many thanks to God and ask His abundant blessings upon you".

(Male, Kumasi)

10.

Child Delivered

"I was a victim of miscarriages. I had lost every hope of ever having a child when a co-worker asked me to have faith and write to you for help, which I did.

In your reply to my letter you said I should expect a baby boy, and it may interest you to know that surely I delivered the baby boy a year exactly after the receipt of your letter. May the Name of the Lord be praised! Amen".

(Female, Accra)

11.

With God All Things Are Possible

"I am physically fit in the name of the Lord. Thank you very much for all your prayers. God has granted my request, for my wife has conceived as you said. I want your prayers for the development of the baby. Thank you.

This amount of two pounds is my gift to the Lord. God has helped me greatly indeed and I have got nothing to give as thanks except this little gift. May He help me always".

(Male, Accra)

12.

Success In The City And Guilds of London
Institute Examinations

"I wish above all things, all members to help in thanking the Lord Jesus by singing the following song "Meda w'ase me Nyanku-pong": I thank you, my God; for by His powers alone, I've been able to secure 1st class results in all the four subjects which I offered in the above named examination. Oh, sing aloud for His mercies endureth for ever!

My offering to the Lord is 10/6d. herewith".

(Male, Accra)

13.

I Am Delivered From The Fetters of Satan

"I wish to testify to brothers and sisters how our Lord God delivered me miraculously at the last week-end from a very serious trouble in which I had been involved for the past two years and over.

The trouble originated from the course of my official duties as a civil servant. During this long period of two

years I had always been at the mercy of the police. In September 1964, I was interdicted from duty and from then onward, I appeared in Court before different Judges for more than twenty times. My regular prayers with our dear Brother Lawson and his promise to me that our dear Lord will not suffer me to suffer any disgrace and that I will succeed in the case so much strengthened my faith that I feared nothing. The prayers which I received from the Temple were always on my lips.

I visited Brother Lawson on Friday, the 12th of February for prayers because I was to appear before the Judge and my prosecutors on the following day which was Saturday. I was assured of success in the court case and reinstatement in my work.

When I appeared before the Judge with silent meditation in my heart, the wonderful work of God was done. I was not called upon to answer questions as I was expecting. As if by miracle, I was declared discharged by the learned Judge to the amazement of myself and the packed court room. Three days afterwards a messenger was sent to me by my Department requesting me to report for duty immediately.

Thus I am free, free in truth in the Name of Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters should therefore assist me to render sincere thanks to the Lord. Praise God".

(Male, Accra)

If Thou Canst Believe, All Things Are
Possible To Him That Believeth

"You will remember that sometime during last year I came and reported to you that my car had been stolen and you prayed for me and said that the car had been found.

I came back some few days and reported to you that the car had been found and that those responsible had been arrested. The Police were then keeping the car and you prayed and said that the car would be released to me.

ARTICLES

24.

I am very glad to inform you that the car has been found and that the culprits have been imprisoned for 8 years.

I enclose, though belated, this little amount as an offering to the Almighty. May God give you wisdom and more power to do His work. Praise God".

(Male, Accra)

15.

Passed Degree Examination

"I thank God Almighty and all of you, His servants, for the wonderful work He has done for me. With the help of Jesus Christ, I have passed my degree examinations and have secured the top position in His name.

Please, praise the Lord with me by reading for me Psalm 98 and Psalm 40 v 5.

I will send my thanksgiving donation at the end of this month.

I send you my sincerest greetings".

(Male, Accra)

16.

Sickness Healed, Wife Conceived And
Business Progressing Amazingly

"Hoping you are still breathing the air of normal health. I am physically fit in health too.

Thank you very much for your prayers. They have done wonderfully good for me. Through that I have been able to make a second store, which shows a great improvement in my business. And the gift which was given to my wife through your prayers is improving gradually. Please, I want you to keep on praying for us".

(Male, Accra)

17.

Court Case Cancelled

"I am pleased to advise that the case in the court against me has been cancelled as was predicted by you. This was possible because of the prayers offered for me from your Temple. Praise God for what He has done for me.

Please give me more prayers that God may open my ways and give me the means to live as a modern man together with my family".

(Male, Accra)

18.

Miraculously Reinstated In My Work

"I was terminated from business for two years since August, 1962. I had tried every place just seeking for employment but all my efforts were in vain. As I was not working I made use of a little money that I possessed and as time went on with no sign of success, I automatically ran into financial embarrassment. In fact, it is impossible for a man with wife and children, bearing so many responsibilities in this modern world, with no income at all to make two ends meet.

As I had not been working, I could not pay my rent for two years. The landlord, fed up with me, gave me notice on 1st July, to quit his room. I was entirely discouraged when I received the notice and throughout the whole night I felt as though the end of the world had come with that fearful destruction.

I decided therefore, to move far away to a village where I thought of hiding myself to avoid these unfavourable conditions. But before doing that I consulted you personally and disclosed to you all my plans and also requested you to pray for me so that Father God might have mercy upon me to release me from my difficulties. You told me through prayers at that very moment that I should not go anywhere but rather "wait" and that the Spirit of the Lord would direct me what to do. I agreed to your advice and started waiting.

On the following morning as I woke up, some biblical expressions came into my memory which say "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows". "Can a woman forget her suckling child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee", Praise God. I was very much encouraged as these words came into me and I immediately went to one of the Brothers in Christ and communicated the whole thing to him sorrowfully. After hearing my trouble, he rose up and gave me a key to a certain room which he said I should stay in free of charge with all my wife and children till I got some job. He also gave me some money to hire a lorry to convey my belongings into the said room. At that moment, I thought I was dreaming, for I was without any expectation; I stood still to see whether my eyes were deceiving me, but in some few minutes I perceived the whole thing to be a reality.

In the first week at my new house, I woke up to go to church where I met a man who told me to submit an application to my former office where I was terminated. I hurriedly sent my application to the office on the following morning and as soon as the Manager saw me he did not even read my application but told me to start immediately, Praise God. With God, all things are possible. I thank God for his unspeakable gifts.

I should very much be grateful if the whole members would help to sing this song for me: 'Jesus, Jesus, Jesus yebeda wo ase'.

(Male, Labadi, Accra)

19.

I Am Delivered — Thank You Father

"With these few words I inform you that, in the Holy Name of Jesus, I am out of the case which I was facing at the court. Oh! I am free, Jesus has set me free, I am free indeed, I am not imprisoned, I have been discharged. I thank the Almighty Father.

This I say refers to the complaint I brought to you about three weeks ago, in which I told you that, I was involved in a

court case, and through the prayers and quotations you gave me, I am now out of the case. Oh! Glory be to God.

Oh! Father Almighty Lord is great; and anybody who follows Him will never be cast down. Hallelujah. Amen.

Brother kindly pray for me, so that, I may be able to stay in the Lord's Temple and to do all His wishes. I therefore enclose herewith an amount of one guinea as thanks offering".

(Male, Accra)

Blessed With A Really Beautiful Baby
Girl To The Glory Of God

"Now, before we proceed with this letter of praise, we ask our brethren to join us thank God in Jesus' Name thus:

What shall I render to my God,
For all His mercy's store?
I'll take the gifts He hath bestowed,
And humbly ask for more.

We are really happy to sing this hymn of thanks for the precious and wonderful gift He has given us. As I said, He promised us a girl named Gloria, and really, Gloria arrived on the 17th of March at 12.45 a.m. and what a smashing girl she is.

Her brother, Lawson Ansah, goes about in school describing her beauty to his friends and we are very proud about that.

Thanks to the Almighty. Hallelujah!

The enclosed are the photographs of the baby and sister Ansah which I took when she was six weeks old. I think they will interest you for the praise of God in Jesus' Name".

(Couple, London)

21.

Praise God My Wife Delivered Without
Any Trouble

"My wife has given birth to a baby boy. She delivered safely without any trouble and the boy is as handsome as anything. Thank you for your daily prayers. They have travelled to our home to take rest. And I want you to shield them with your prayers at where they are.

This amount of ten pounds (£10) is my love offering to the Lord; and I want more prayers to guide my steps.

Hoping you are physically fit".

(Male, Tema)

22.

I Am Delivered By His Word
Oh! Praise The Lord

"Here is 10/6d. offering to the Almighty for He has delivered me from all my troubles. Truly those who are washed in the Innocent Blood of the Lamb of God are always innocent.

About 4 months ago, I was involved in a case with three people which was put before the Law Court. I was perplexed and never knew what to do. Fortunately I met one sister by the name Elizabeth Smith who is a member of this church, and told her about my worries.

She immediately asked me not to mourn but rather follow her, and I did.

Where did we enter but this very Temple. That was on the 28th of April this year. I heard her ask of Brother Lawson but was told that brother was at home. We therefore continued the journey to Brother's house and luckily for me we met him. Sister Smith told Brother about the case of mine and so did I. Instantly one sister by the name Victoria, prayed for me and so did Brother himself. Not that only but also Brother gave me some prayerful

quotations to say each and every blessed day to my own hearing.

We departed and since then the case, was adjourned to fortnightly hearings. On the 7th of this month, we went to the court again on the very case.

What happened? It is just like a miracle. The case was called to be judged. The Magistrate flashed his eyes upon the accused numbered one to three. I was among, and of course, the third accused. He didn't talk for a moment, gazed through the statements we have made and then what proceeded from his mouth was "Go! third accused, you are discharged". Then the other two accused were granted bail for hearing again within a fortnight.

Here I lifted up my head, thanked the Lord and remembered (Psalm 50 v 15).

Dear brother, will you please pray for me, never to come across such dangers in my way again and to be prosperous in Christ throughout my life. Praise God".

(Male, Accra)

23.

Blessed With A Baby Boy

"I have seen that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself; the Lord hears him when he calls unto Him. It is two years now when I approached you to help me in prayers when I was in trouble. You offered some prayers for me and in your prayers you said so many things including these words, "God has put you in a place that you have never thought of. He has given you a child and all your enemies too love you in Jesus' Name". Praise God! He can do it and He has done it, thanks be to God, I did not come to you purposely for a child because the case I brought was too great to ask for a child. God who knows everything let you pray for that too and now I have been blessed with a baby boy.

Brother I don't know what to do or to say than to say 'THANKS BE TO GOD'. I was playing with the baby when something came to my mind to write this letter. Thank God.

Kindly ask the church members to help me in praising God with this song "Otumi ye biribiara", meaning "He can do everything". May God bless everyone of you.

Ending with greetings to you all".

(Female, London)

24.

I Was Dead But God Brought Me Back To Life

"I would humbly admit that no one, or perhaps very few people indeed, can sufficiently thank Jehovah for what He is doing for mankind.

In my case, all that I know is that, exactly a year ago, on the 16th July I died but Jehovah by His love through Christ Jesus brought me back to life.

Oh! Jehovah. Thou Author of Life, I thank Thee with my whole being, Amen.

It was after this miraculous experience that I came to you some three months ago. It was the Spirit of Jehovah who directed me to you, so that I might learn more about Him from you. At that time, I was totally sleepless and I had been in that state for nearly one week.

You prayed for me, and suddenly sweet and comfortable sleep followed. Now, I am, as ordained by the Omnipotent, a keen member of "The Lord Is There" Temple, Korle Gonno Assembly, always enjoying and growing in the Word of God.

Enclosed, please find, my first tithe of N28.00 (Eight New Cedis) for the glorious work of Jehovah".

(Male, Accra)

19 of the letters were written by males, 3 by females and two by couples. In terms of origin, 14 came from Accra, 3 from Tema, 2 from London, and one each from Zaria (Nigeria), Kumasi, Ho, Suhum, and Labadi. The preponderance of males over females may be due to the fact that women often make most of the testimonies during occasions of public worship in Spiritual Churches, and what has been declared in public need not be put on paper afterwards. It may also reflect the greater educational opportunities which have for a long time been available to the men, and such men who may not feel easy testifying in public could have recourse to writing to the leader.

Of the 24 letters reproduced above, 50 (12 letters) deal with healing, thus accentuating the preponderant role which divine healing plays in Spiritual Churches. The breakdown of the letters is as follows:

Healing 12 (Letter Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
11, 16, 24);

Childbirth 4 (Letter Nos. 10, 20, 21, 23);

Court Cases 4 (Letter Nos. 13, 17, 19, 22);

Success in examinations 2 (Letter Nos. 12, 15);

Lost property 1 (Letter No. 14);

Reinstatement in work 1 (Letter No. 18).

Just as in traditional Ghanaian (African) society religion was one with life, so also in the Spiritual Churches, no aspect of life is beyond religious considerations. Bishop Peter Sarpong wrote: "The African's religion concerns the whole person, not just his soul. It helps him to have children, to get rich, to avoid sickness, to get back his health, to grow old and to prosper".¹ This attitude to religion is pervasive among members of Spiritual Churches. Every problem is brought up for prayer, with the firm conviction that, "God, through Jesus Christ, will undertake the need for which you ask".

1: Catholic Voice, Vol. 46 No.2, February 1971, p.23.

What is new in this situation is that people (mostly Christians) with various afflictions turn to the spiritual leader instead of to the priest at a shrine, as a divine medium. This point receives further emphasis from Baeta who writes: "The 'Spiritual Churches' represent a turning away from these traditional resources of supernatural succour in order that help may be sought, for the same purposes, from the God proclaimed in the Christian evangel".¹ Moreover, these testimonies are regarded in the Divine Healer's Church as coming from "people whom the Lord God had delivered from the power of darkness."

This deliverance from darkness into light, to which the above letters testify, constitutes one of the strongest sources of appeal of Spiritual Churches in Ghana today, for their adherents are out to test the veracity of Mark 9:23 "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that belleyeth".

1. Prophetism in Ghana, SCM 1962, p.135.