

KINGDOM: A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

by Kofi Asare Opoku*

In July 1967, a religious community was established in a thick forest about twenty-six miles north west of Kumawu, in the Asante Region. The members of this community (church), which was called Kingdom, after Luke 22:9 (As my father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you), were dedicated to the pursuit of a pure Christian life in eager anticipation of the Second Coming of Christ. Life at Kingdom was communistic, along the lines of Primitive Christianity, for members shared everything in common,¹ after they had made what amounted to a complete break with the modern way of life.²

Kingdom, or "Kyindom" (the Asante version of the name), started in Kumawu as a break-away group from the Apostolic Church at Kumawu, and the "rebel" group was led by Pastor Peter Amoah. The cause of the rift which ultimately led to secession is not yet known, but from preliminary investigations (interviews with two respondents who were prominent members of the community), we gather that a marked characteristic of the members of Kingdom was their deep sense of Christian fellowship and brotherliness, and in this they differed considerably from the other members of the Apostolic Church. So great was their love for each other that it was decided that

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1. The inspiration for the establishment of Kingdom came from Acts 4:32-37, where the earliest christian community is described. The emphasis is on the unanimity, the unselfishness and the brotherly love of its members. Members of the Kingdom community set out to realize this ideal.
2. This is reminiscent of the Yota Mission founded by Philip Chei, in the 1920's, at Nkwakubio, near the Anum Peki junction in the Volta Region. For further information on the Yota Mission see Debrunner, H. A History of Christianity in Ghana, Waterville, Accra, 1967, p.333.

they should move away and settle at a place far away from human habitation and safely insulated against the contaminations of modern life, where they could live a pure and unadulterated christian life, in fervent preparation for the imminent return of their Lord.

When the idea of moving out of Kumawu occurred to them, some suggested that they should settle on the outskirts of Kumawu, but others felt that the site was too close to town. They therefore approached the chief of Kumawu who gave them an area, near the Onwam River, where a virgin forest predominates. And on this "holy spot" the members all agreed to found their community.

When the decision was reached to move out, members began to prepare themselves through prayer and fasting for divine guidance. And on July 11, 1967, a pioneer group, consisting of eleven able-bodied men, under the leadership of Isaiah Berko, left Kumawu to found the colony before the other members joined them. They sold their possessions and took with them a few essentials. The eleven men assembled in their usual meeting place for worship and prayer before they took off on their mission.

On the 12th of July they arrived at the chosen spot and that very day they cleared a site, put up a construction with a roof over it and spent the first night there, with great jubilation and singing of praises to God for giving them the opportunity of settling on this "holy spot".

Then for the next two and half months these eleven men cleared an area for a township, felled huge trees and constructed an entire township of 36 houses, including a chapel. They built the houses in rows with streets between them and they constructed one main street with trees lining its sides in the centre of the town.

After the completion of the town the Minister and the rest of his followers left Kumawu for Kingdom. All told, the population of the community was 130

strong, including men, women and children. Those who followed the leader to Kingdom included not only his own followers, and other members of the Apostolic Church at Kumawu, but a good many others including hunters, artisans, farmers, traders, businessmen, pupil teachers etc. also joined them. They all went with one avowed aim: "to prepare themselves so that they may have a place to stand when Christ returns".*

Some followers sold their belongings and put the money into the central coffer at Kingdom. One respondent, collected the proceeds (N~~o~~300) from his farm in the Brong Ahafo Region and added it to the central fund. Such gestures and the total life at Kingdom recalls the life of the early church recorded in Acts 4:32, where the "company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common".

Thus at Kingdom, everything was possessed in common. They farmed on common land and owned all things together, with the founder of the church playing the role of leader and shepherd of the flock. At the initial stages of life at Kingdom when the community had to purchase food from farms in the area, buying was done from the central fund. Every morning, members would queue up to receive their day's ration from the central storehouse. Hunters would bring their kill to be shared among all and so did trap setters, and fishermen.

Life at Kingdom centred around worship and work. The day began at 5 a.m. with morning worship, and after that there would be breakfast and preparation for the day's work. Assignments were daily given - farmers to the farm, hunters and trap setters to their respective tasks and so did artisans. At the end of the day there was evening service which usually lasted till 8 p.m.

* Exact words of a respondent, Isaiah Berko, a pioneer member of Kingdom community, during interview.

On Sundays there was no work, but members attended services thrice. On other occasions members could be summoned from work to come to the chapel to pray.

To cater for the needs of the children a school was established at Kingdom. There were two teachers and several children of both primary and middle school age and they were taught the Bible as well as reading, writing and arithmetic.

Housing was adequately provided; each couple had a living room and a bed room, and there were separate quarters for unmarried men and women. Some of the buildings had corrugated iron sheets for roofing while others had thatch roofs, and according to my informants there were plans to roof all houses ultimately with corrugated iron sheets.

But by December 11, 1968, after a period of seventeen months, the Kingdom community had come to an end and the whole township with its surrounding farms was standing idle. Some of its members had returned to Kumawu in disillusionment, but others, the faithful ones, had followed the leader, Pastor Peter Amoa, to Nkwanta, near Nkoranza in the Brong Ahafo Region, to found a second Kingdom.

The above information was collected during preliminary interviews in November 1969, with two respondents both of whom were members of the Kingdom community but are now resident in Kumawu.

I intend to follow this up with visits to Kumawu to gather more information from former Kingdom members and also to visit the new site of Kingdom for the purpose of interviewing the leader and the present members of the community and to make observations of the organization and the day to day running of the community.

This study will throw some interesting light on a pattern of religious separation which varies greatly from that of other Spiritual Churches in Ghana and shows interesting potentialities inherent in Christianity.



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