

Pentecostalism, Pilgrimage to Prayer Mountains and Pilgrims' Adherence to Holiness Ethics in Ghanaian Christianity

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ABSTRACT

The influence of Pentecostalism as a global religious culture is obvious in almost every sphere of human endeavour. As a Christian religious category, Pentecostalism permeates virtually all dimensions of Christian faith and practice. In spite of the visibility and vociferous presence of Pentecostalism as a worldwide Christian religious culture, its influence on Christians' visitation to Prayer Mountains (PMs) and the pilgrims' devotion to holiness ethics appear not to have been traversed in scholarship. This paper attempts to fill this gap by employing a multidisciplinary approach to gather the relevant field data. The discussion is theoretically anchored on Miroslav Volf's 'The Christian Faith as a Prophetic Religion.' Using this theory as a hermeneutical framework of the influence of pilgrimage to PMs on society, the paper discloses, among others, that Ghanaian Christians' pilgrimage to PMs and the pilgrims' adherence to holiness ethics are replications of Pentecostal practices.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the influence of Pentecostalism on Ghanaian Christian pilgrims' appropriation of Prayer Mountains (PMs) and the pilgrims' adherence to holiness ethics. The validity and relevance of the study may be located in the context of the presumed indispensability and overarching significance of Pentecostalism in contemporary global Christianity. For instance, Afe Adogame maintains that:

The debut, visibility and mobility of the Pentecostal movement and the charismatization of mainline Christianity have combined to reshape the African [or Ghanaian] religious landscape so profoundly that its footprints [and influence] can hardly be sidestepped. Its stark emphasis on personal pneumatic experience, expression and committed evangelical re-engagement of depth spirituality has implications that transcend the religious sphere to how humans deploy religious power for economic, social and political gymnastics vis-à-vis the sacraments of life.¹

¹ Afe Adogame, 'Foreword' in J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2015), xvii.

Abamfo Ofori Atiemo also indicates that one of the changes in Ghana since 1995 is the obvious Pentecostalization of the Ghanaian traditional churches. He writes as follows: ‘Most of the Ghanaian ‘mainline churches’, which I now prefer to call ‘traditional churches’ have become almost completely Pentecostal; and there are hardly any distinctions between them and the newer churches in terms of grassroots theology, worship patterns and other practices. Pentecostalism has become more ‘mainline’ than the churches which previously carried that designation.’²

One of the implications of the above quotations is that Pentecostalism has become so dominant and appealing in Ghana that it influences almost every aspect of the lives of Ghanaian Christians. Atiemo has classified the reasons for which people are attracted to the New Movements (including the Pentecostal / the Charismatic churches) as psychological, social, intellectual and spiritual.³ The spiritual reasons, according to Atiemo, are:

- a. The need for a sense of mystery – the desire to be united with God; the search for a spiritual experience that transforms and restores.
- b. The desire for supernatural power to overcome destructive habits, weaknesses, and difficulties in one’s life e.g., help to overcome smoking, drunkenness, etc.
- c. The need for spiritual guidance and direction e.g., people want leaders they can rely on and look up to for guidance through life.
- d. The desire to overcome the felt or the perceived effects of the activities of malevolent spiritual forces such as witches and demons.⁴

Thus Pentecostalism is attractive to many Christians because it appears to have answers to almost all their existential concerns. Despite the obvious and vocal presence of Pentecostalism as a global religious culture, its influence on Ghanaian Christians’ pilgrimage to PMs and the pilgrims’ adherence to holiness ethics appear to have escaped scholarly attention. This paper, therefore, attempts to fill this gap in scholarship by employing a multidisciplinary approach to gather the relevant field data. The discussion is theoretically couched on Miroslav Volf’s ‘The Christian Faith as a Prophetic Religion.’ This theory is employed as a hermeneutical framework for the influence of pilgrimage to PMs on society. The discussion of Volf’s theory is preceded by a working definition of Pentecostalism. The justification is that the working definition of Pentecostalism also has implications for some practical actions which appear to promote or strengthen contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostal Christianity in one way or the other. While the author’s emphasis in this paper is largely theological, it is imperative to underscore that the theological model is not exceptionally unique. It is sometimes borne out of, or at least shaped by, a certain mutual cognition in which phenomenological, social-anthropological and historical standpoints are complementary methodologies.⁵

METHODOLOGY

A multidisciplinary approach, including theological, phenomenological, social-anthropological and historical models, was employed to guide the collection of the relevant field data. Being qualitative research, the methods of data collection included participant observation and interviews. Published and unpublished materials were also used. Thus both primary and secondary data sources were employed to elicit the relevant pieces of information.

A Brief Description of Pilgrimage to the Abasua Prayer Mountain

From the year 2016 to 2019, the author made several trips to Abasua Prayer Mountain (APM), first, as a pilgrim and, second, as a researcher and participant observer. APM is one of the sacred

² Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections* (Accra: Heken Ltd., 2016), iv.

³ Atiemo, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections*, 29-30.

⁴ Atiemo, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections*, 30.

⁵ Afe Adogame, ‘Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements in a Global Perspective’ in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion* (West Sussex, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010), 498-518.

mountains located at the Nsuta Municipality in the Ashanti region of Ghana. As a result of the Pentecostal identity of the Rev. Abraham Osei Asibey, the Methodist Minister who discovered the site in 1965, the author considers APM to be a Pentecostal sacred space in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity.⁶ Churches such as The Methodist Church Ghana (MCG) and Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) have institutionalised pilgrimage to the site. Each of these churches has a bi-annual pilgrimage to APM, usually, in February and August. Each pilgrimage lasts about a week.

To avoid overcrowding on the mountain, the churches do not embark on the pilgrimage concurrently, even though each church has its Prayer Camp on the mountain. Pilgrimage to the PM is usually under the auspices of a Directorate of the church. For instance, the Directorate of Evangelism, Mission and Renewal organises that of the MCG while the Evangelism and Missions Directorate organises that of the PCG. The activities carried out by the Christians during their pilgrimage include prayer and fasting, healing and deliverance sessions, corporate or joint worship, group Bible studies, individual prayer, Bible studies, quiet time or personal reflections and communal labour including clean-up exercises.

Pilgrimage seasons are also moments of brisk and lucrative small-scale business activities for the citizens of Abasua and those from adjoining communities, owing largely to the relatively large number of pilgrims who move to the site. The economic benefits of pilgrimage to APM extend to drivers who ply the Abasua community and those who transport the pilgrims to the Abasua community and back to their destinations. A toll booth has been set up at the foot of the mountain for the collection of tolls from the pilgrims who ascend the mountain. The revenue from the tolls goes to the Nsuta Municipal Assembly, Nsuta Traditional Council and Abasua community for developmental purposes. In that regard, APM may be described as a phenomenon in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity that promotes the pursuit of spirituality and socio-economic advancement in Ghana. This creative synthesis between spirituality and materiality is one of the main emphases of a working definition of Pentecostalism in this paper.

A Working Definition of Pentecostalism

This article employs J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's personal definition of Pentecostalism. He writes:

Pentecostalism refers to Christian groups which emphasise salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic phenomena including 'speaking in tongues', prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general, are perceived as standing in historic continuity with the experiences of the early church as found especially in the Acts of the Apostles, are sought, accepted, valued, and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experiences of his Spirit.⁷

The justification for the above working definition lies in its emphasis on the Holy Spirit's transformative influence on Christians. It provides the conceptual basis for the examination of the influence of Pentecostalism on pilgrims' appropriation of PMs and their adherence to holiness ethics in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. Thus in this context, it is imperative to indicate that Christian pilgrims who have a transformative or experiential encounter with the Holy Spirit and are endowed with diverse spiritual gifts attempt to respond to their perceived divine directives or personal convictions in practical actions. These practical actions include the institutionalisation of pilgrimage

⁶ For details, see Philip Okyere, 'Pentecostals and Prayer Mountains in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity', *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology* 9.2 (2019), 77-94.

⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 12.

and devotion to holiness ethics. These are done with the intention of contributing to the transformation of society.⁸

Pentecostalism, as viewed in the above working definition, is unarguably a theological construct that underscores the primacy of Christians' encounter with the Holy Spirit and the objectification of such (subjective) supernatural encounters in relevant practical works including the institutionalisation of pilgrimage to PMs and adherence to holiness ethics. Before examining each of these sub-themes in relative detail, the Christian faith as a prophetic religion is explored as a hermeneutical framework of the influence of pilgrimage to PMs on society.

The Christian Faith as a Prophetic Religion: A Hermeneutical Framework of the Influence of Pilgrimage to PMs on Society

Volf brilliantly asserts that the Christian faith is a prophetic religion because it is 'an instrument of God for the sake of human flourishing in this life and the next.'⁹ In that sense, the Christian faith as a prophetic religion 'advocates the active transformation of the world', unlike mystical types of religion which encourages flights of the soul from the world into God's arms.¹⁰

Generally, Christians agree that 'an authentic religious experience should be a world-shaping force'.¹¹ In the context of this study, this implies that Christian pilgrims' ascents to PMs to encounter the transcendental realms must be ideally followed by their return to renew or revitalise their communities or churches through various prayer rituals and other transformative activities. Thus Volf rightly underscores that 'ascents' ... must be followed by 'returns.'¹²

The Bible clearly reinforces pilgrims' ascents to mountains and their subsequent returns. Moses ascended Mount Sinai and returned with the tablets of the law (Exodus 24:12-13; 32:15-16).¹³ A similar pattern applies to Jesus Christ and the Jerusalem pilgrims who experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus Christ ascended the Mount of Transfiguration and returned to mend a world plagued by evil (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-37).¹⁴ More fundamentally, Jesus came 'from above' to bring healing and redemption (John 8:23), and having ascended into heaven at the end of his earthly sojourn, will return once more to judge and transform the world (Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Rev. 21:1-8).¹⁵ After ascending the mountainous city of Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of Pentecost which providentially coincided with God's outpouring of the Holy Spirit, John Schwarz reveals that some of the visitors or pilgrims from Rome returned and founded the Church in Rome.¹⁶ These biblical examples, to some extent, underscore the fact that for prophetic religions such as Christianity, pilgrimage to mountains as a religious experience (that is, ascent) is not complete until it is followed by the pilgrims' return. In that sense, both 'ascent' and 'return' are very crucial.

⁸ Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, 'Christianity in Ghana: An Introduction' in J. Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu (ed.), *Christianity in Ghana: Volume 1 A PostColonial History* (Accra, Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2018), ix-xiii.

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How the Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2011), 5.

¹⁰ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 6.

¹¹ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 7; Jesse Johnson, 'Thinking About Social Justice in Light of the Great Commission' in Nathan Busenitz (ed.), *Right Thinking in a Church Gone Astray: Finding Your Way Back to Biblical Truth* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2017), 155-164.; David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Good Faith: Being a Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant and Extreme* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2016); Emmanuel Asante, *Theology and Society in Context: A Theological Reflections on Selected Topics* (Accra, Ghana: SonLife Press, 2014); Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson and Heidi Rolland Unrue, *Churches That Make A Difference: Reaching Your Community With Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2002).

¹² Volf, *A Public Faith*, 7.

¹³ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 7.

¹⁴ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 7.

¹⁵ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 7.

¹⁶ John Schwarz, *The Compact Guide to the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 109.

Volf provides a critical distinction between ‘ascent’ and ‘return’ which constitute a relevant theological fulcrum for the examination of the influence of Pentecostalism on the appropriation of PMs in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity. He writes:

‘Ascent’ is the point at which, in the encounter with the divine, [PM pilgrims] receive the message and their core identity is forged – whether through mystical union with God, through prophetic inspiration, or through a deepened understanding of sacred texts. The ascent is the *receptive* moment. ‘Return’ is the point at which, in interchange with the world, the message is spoken, enacted, built into liturgies or institutions, or embodied in laws. The return is the *creative* moment.¹⁷

Volf’s description of ascent as receptive and return as creative is very appropriate because it zeros in on the main thrust of what happens in ascent and return. And yet, he further indicates that ‘ascent’ is not *merely* receptive. In receiving, the [pilgrims] themselves are transformed – they acquire new insight; their character is changed. So ascent is very much creative – a case of creative receptivity. Similarly, the ‘return’ need not be merely creative – the [pilgrims] unilaterally shaping social realities. They themselves may be shaped in the process, return then being a case of receptive creativity.’¹⁸

Keeping in mind this relatively more complex understanding of prophetic receptivity and creativity, Volf forcefully contends that:

without the ‘receptive ascent,’ there is no transforming message from God; without the ‘creative return,’ there is no engagement in the transformation of the world. Leave out either one, and you no longer have prophetic religion. Together, ‘ascent’ and ‘return’ form the pulsating heart of prophetic religion – showing that though ‘prophetic’ and ‘mystical’ are contrasting types of religion, religious experiences and engagement with the world are both essential components of [Christianity as a] prophetic type of religion.¹⁹

Therefore, it is appropriate and logical to argue that the Christian faith partly malfunctions when Christians’ pilgrimage to PMs (that is, receptive ascent) is not followed by a creative return. In that sense, Christians’ pilgrimage to PMs becomes like that of mystical religions in which ascent is followed by unproductive rather than creative return – in Volf’s words – ‘a return that has no positive purpose for the world but is merely an inevitable result of the inability of a flesh-and-blood human being to sustain unitive experience over time.’²⁰

As has already been indicated, Volf’s ‘The Christian faith as a prophetic religion’ is employed as a hermeneutical underpinning of the influence of pilgrimage to PMs on society. It is linked to the impact of pilgrims on their societies when they descend from the mountains.

The Institutionalisation of Pilgrimage to Prayer Mountains

The influence of Pentecostalism on pilgrims’ patronage of sacred sites is further observed from the institutionalisation of pilgrimage to PMs by some churches in Ghana. This is because the place and relevance of prayer camps or prayer centres and their institutionalisation in Ghanaian Pentecostalism have attracted scholarly discussions among some Pentecostal theologians. Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, for instance, posits that:

Prayer Camps or Prayer Centres are Pentecostalist prayer and healing centres where people with various needs go for supernatural succor. The activities of these centres almost exclusively gravitate around one key person: a prophet, a prophetess, or an evangelist. ... These healing centres though are predominantly found within the Church of Pentecost, they

¹⁷ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 8 (Emphasis original).

¹⁸ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 8 (Emphasis original).

¹⁹ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 8-9.

²⁰ Volf, *A Public Faith*, 7.

have now become a growing phenomenon in Ghanaian Christianity, stretching beyond the boundaries of mainline Pentecostalism to the precincts of the historic churches, knocking at the iron door of historic orthodoxy demanding attention. Though all these healing activities start in the context of an established denomination, in the process of time the leaders, more often than not, break away to form their own independent ministries.²¹

Some of the popular healing or prayer centres in the Church of Pentecost (CoP), according to Larbi, are the Okanta Camp and Maame Dede's Camp, both located in the Eastern Region of Ghana.²² Asamoah-Gyadu corroborates Larbi's opinion on the prevalence of prayer or healing camps in the CoP, and further discloses the efforts of the church to institutionalise the activities connected with healing and prayer camps.²³ He notes:

The CoP gained an urge on the Sunsum Sorè (Spiritual Churches), as the older independent churches are referred to in Ghana, and thus supplanted the activities of many prophets through the ministry of healing and deliverance. In order to avoid some of the excesses, suspicion and abuses surrounding the healing practices of 'prophetism in Ghana', the CoP has *institutionalised*, integrated and therefore brought under the church's administrative control the activities of those of their number manifesting the gifts of healing and deliverance.²⁴

It can be deduced from Larbi and Asamoah-Gyadu's observations that the prevalence of healing or prayer camps as some of the spiritual resources in the CoP to mitigate the crises of those who patronize or appropriate the facilities also has implications for pilgrimage to those places, especially by suffering Pentecostals. The relevance of these healing centres and the quest to guard against possible abuses, especially by those in charge, has resulted in the CoP's institutionalisation of the prayer or healing centre concept. The implication of this institutionalisation, in the researcher's opinion, is that the CoP does not only bring under the church's administrative control the activities of those of their number manifesting the gifts of healing and deliverance, but also it recognises and approves of members' appropriation of those healing centres through religious pilgrimage. On the basis of this implication, it can be argued that the institutionalisation of healing or prayer centres – and by extension, pilgrimage to those centres – is one of the features of contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostalism. This sounds plausible because healing centres are not prevalent only in the CoP. Larbi reveals the novelty of the phenomenon within neo-Pentecostalism and indicates that 'the first of its kind is the Solution Centre within the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), under the leadership of Pastor Annor.'²⁵

PMs in Ghanaian Christianity, especially those under consideration in this study, may also be regarded as prayer or healing centres that pilgrims patronize for various reasons, including relief from existential crises. Moreover, it has already been pointed out that pilgrimage to PMs has become one of the means by which some pilgrims, upon their return, start their ministries. It is instructive to note that these church founders do not only have classical Pentecostal churches as their religious background²⁶ but have also institutionalised pilgrimage to PMs. They lead their church members to the PMs at least once every quarter to pray and fast for not less than a week. They embark on periodic pilgrimages to the PMs mainly to be spiritually empowered for spiritual revitalization activities in their churches upon their return. These spiritual revitalization activities, in the words of Apostle James Kofi Marfo, include 'tongues' speaking, prophecy, healing, deliverance, visions and

²¹ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra, Ghana: Blessed Publications, 2001), 367.

²² Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 367-368.

²³ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 133-135.

²⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 134 (Emphasis mine).

²⁵ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 369.

²⁶ The religious backgrounds of Apostles James Kofi Marfo, Prince Emmanuel Godsson, Richard Kwame Owusu and Evangelist Kwadwo Gyasi are Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), CoP, CoP and CAC respectively.

revelations.²⁷ The PMs are perceived by Christian pilgrims as the ‘power-house of spiritual endowments and solution centres’.²⁸ The institutionalisation of pilgrimage to such sacred sites is therefore seen as one of the means by which the churches which patronize those sites try to ensure regular spiritual vibrancy and revitalization.

In addition to the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches which have institutionalised pilgrimage to PMs are, as already indicated in this paper, historic mission denominations such as the MCG and the PCG. Camps Three (3) and Eight (8) of APM are owned by the MCG and the PCG respectively. The camps are the venues for the churches’ annual Connexional / National Prayer Retreat held twice a year. The MCG controls the Connexional Prayer Retreat through the church’s Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Directorate (EMRD).²⁹ Aspects of the EMRD’s report on the MCG’s pilgrimage to APM or Abasua Retreat Centre (ARC) to the Representative Session of the 9th Biennial / 47th Conference are revealing and informative in this context: ‘The Connexional Prayer Retreat [CPR] at the Abasua Prayer Centre [APC] for zones one and two took place from Tuesday, 23rd February to Saturday 27th February 2016 and April 19th to 23rd, 2016 respectively, under the theme “Witnessing to Christ: The Methodist Identity and Spiritual Renewal” – About five hundred and twenty (520) people attended the zone one retreat while about eight hundred and seventy (870) people attended the zone two retreat.’³⁰ A similar and relatively detailed report had been submitted by the EMRD at the 8th Biennial / 46th Conference:

By the grace of God, patronage of the ARC keeps increasing year after year and we are trying very hard to improve upon the facilities. For example, an auditorium to seat about two thousand people is under construction while some Dioceses and Circuits are also helping to put up room to accommodate people. Apart from the Connexional Prayer Retreat (CPR) which is held twice in a year for zones I and II, other Dioceses and Circuits also visit the place for spiritual renewal.... Over the years, Dioceses have been encouraged to identify and establish retreat centres in their Dioceses so that people can visit those places for spiritual exercises in addition to the Abasua Centre. The following Dioceses report of having established retreat centres which are being patronized by both Methodists and non-Methodists.

Tarkwa Diocese:	Wassa Akropong and Bremang in Asankragwa Circuit
Sefwi Bekwai:	Ankramoano in Bibiani Circuit and Akontombra Nkawanta
Obuasi:	Kusa
Cape Coast:	Ntaferewaso
Sekondi:	William De-graft Retreat Centre, Azani
Akyem Oda:	Gethsemane
Northern Ghana:	Damango Hills

The Lord is blessing the people who visit these places. Some of the testimonies shared include: healing, deliverance from spiritual forces, spiritual renewal, childbirth...³¹

The MCG reinforces its position on the institutionalisation of pilgrimage to sacred sites by ensuring that prayer centres established by Dioceses, Circuits and Societies are managed by mature,

²⁷ Apostle Marfo, Interview, 7 December 2017, Abuakwa, Kumasi. See also Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 2.

²⁸ Evangelist Richard Afriyie (General Overseer of Camp Three, Abasua Prayer Mountain), Interview, March 12, 2016, Abasua Prayer Mountain.

²⁹ The Representative Session Agenda of the 9th Biennial / 47th Conference of the Methodist Church Ghana held at Tarkwa in 2016, 136-137; The Representative Session Agenda of the 8th Biennial / 46th Conference of the Methodist Church Ghana held in Kumasi, 112-113.; Philip Kwadwo Okyere, ‘Reconstructing Sacred Space: The Place and Relevance of Abasua Prayer Mountain in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity’. Mphil Thesis (University of Ghana, Legon 2012), 72-74.

³⁰ The Representative Session Agenda of the 9th Biennial / 47th Conference of the Methodist Church Ghana, 136-137.

³¹ The Representative Session Agenda of the 8th Biennial / 46th Conference of the Methodist Church Ghana, 112-113.

spirit-filled and trusted leaders. In order to avoid excesses, these centres and their various leaders are under the supervision of the clergy and the Leaders' Meeting.³²

The PCG also has oversight responsibility of the church's many prayer centres including Abasua Mountain Prayer Ministry (AMPM), through its Evangelism and Missions Division (EMD).³³ The AMPM of the PCG is reported to be one of the church's vital spiritual revitalization programmes. The PCG's appropriation of media technologies at the AMPM has made available many audio-visual DVDs mostly containing sermons preached or testimonies shared. Captivating sermon topics over the years include 'Divine Selection' (Acts 1:24), 'Crossing Over to the Other Side' (Mark 4:1), 'Crossing the Jordan' (Joshua 3:5) and 'Breaking the Protocol of Satan'. Several testimonies, including those on the reality of heaven and the power in the blood of Christ, have been shared over the years.³⁴

The institutionalisation of pilgrimage to APM in the MCG and PCG is partly seen from the allocation of space for this religious activity on the churches' annual Almanacs. It must be emphasised that the historic mission denominations that have institutionalised pilgrimage to PMs appear to be replicating one of the characteristics of classical Ghanaian Pentecostalism which is a visitation to prayer centres including PMs. It is believed that Christians' pilgrimage to prayer sites sharpens their devotion or results in their acquisition of spiritual gifts such as 'tongues' speaking, healing, deliverance, etc. Institutionalising pilgrimage to PMs or prayer centres is therefore understood as the churches' efforts at ensuring or safeguarding the continuity of the beneficial outcomes of pilgrimage as a religious ritual.

The efforts of Pentecostal / Charismatic churches and the historic mission denominations to institutionalise pilgrimage to PMs appear to corroborate Park's opinion on the notion of sacred space and its attendant pilgrimage attraction as some of the more prominent dimensions of religious expression in the world.³⁵ Webb also reveals that humans' innate predilection for pilgrimage in utilitarian terms dates back to antiquity. She writes: 'The apparently deep-seated human tendency to locate the holy at a distance from one's everyday surroundings and to seek solutions to personal problems and the alleviation of suffering (or boredom) in a journey to such a place was clearly manifested in pre-Christian cultures.'³⁶ In the religions which preceded Christianity in the Near Eastern and Mediterranean region, it is possible for one to locate features that still persist throughout the Christian epoch. The idea that particular beneficial outcomes accrued to those who had made the pilgrimage to Osiris at Abydos became familiar to Egyptians of the New Kingdom, and Abydos remained an important shrine in the Hellenistic and Roman epochs. Healing shrines which were sacred to Asklepios abounded in ancient Greece. Greeks were said to practise 'incubation' (that is, sleeping at a shrine in order to obtain a cure), and Medieval Christians developed their own version of the practice.³⁷

Moreover, Asamoah-Gyadu affirms the importance of pilgrimage as a religious activity for many religious traditions including certain streams of Christianity such as Roman Catholicism. He maintains that pilgrimages are embarked upon to various Catholic grottos such as Lourdes in France.³⁸ He further underscores the prevalence of sacred spaces in the history of African Christianity and the power of those sites to attract pilgrims. He writes:

³² The Representative Session Agenda of the 8th Biennial / 46th Conference of the Methodist Church Ghana, 113.

³³ Rev. Felix Akresu (the Evangelism and Missions Director of the PCG), Interview, 16 March, 2016, PCG Headquarters, Accra.

³⁴ The researcher has in his possession copies of the DVDs referred to in this study.

³⁵ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 1; Chris Park, 'Religion and Geography' in Hinnells, J. (ed.) *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 19.

³⁶ Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, (c. 700 – c.1500)* (New York: Palgrave, 2002). viii.

³⁷ Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, viii.

³⁸ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Do not "Meccanize" Christianity: Worship in Spirit and in Truth', *The Christian Sentinel* 22 (2013), 12.

In the history of Christianity in Africa, members of the African independent churches in particular, created all sorts of healing centres in forests and on mountains which people repaired in search of supernatural interventions for their problems. The Garden of the Church of Twelve Apostles and the Mercy Ground of the Celestial Church of Christ are cases in point. In other words, pilgrimage in Christianity may take people to a multiplicity of centres depending on what such people think about pilgrimage sites and the personal benefits expected to be gained from their visit.³⁹

Thus there appears to be an upsurge of institutionalised religious pilgrimage to prayer sites or PMs in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, as the foregone narratives indicate. One of the possible explanations for this is what the researcher considers to be one of the prevailing influences of Pentecostalism as far as institutionalised religious pilgrimage to prayer sites or PMs is concerned.

Adherence to Holiness Ethics

Pilgrims' adherence to holiness ethics at the PMs is another way by which Pentecostalism influences pilgrimage to PMs. The due acknowledgment must be to the existence of scholarly and insightful works on holiness ethics as integral aspects of the spirituality of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.⁴⁰ Focusing exclusively on Ghana's CoP's holiness ethic, for instance, Asamoah-Gyadu categorically asserts that:

The CoP is noted for its uncompromising holiness ethic and high moral standard. There is a definite relationship between personal experiences of the Spirit and commitment to the cause of Christ and his mission through the church. Such commitment arises out of a sense of belonging that develops within the individual as a result of that intense encounter with the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

In other words, the authenticity of a Pentecostal's experiential encounter with the Holy Spirit finds expression in his or her ultimate testimony 'of personal transformation from life in the world to a new life in Christ, involving a renewal of the whole person for a life of holiness.'⁴² One of the key factors of CoP's uncompromising stance on holiness ethic appears to be its constitution which, among other things, spells out moral failures or deviations on the part of church members and their associated stringent sanctions.

Omenyo also locates his discussion of holiness ethics in the context of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana. He maintains that 'In their spirituality, Charismatics stress holiness ethic – personal "holiness" or "righteousness", which for them is a fruit of "new birth". They regard a life of holiness as the real proof of life in Christ. This life starts with the experience of "new birth". Then everything becomes new.'⁴³ Omenyo and Asamoah-Gyadu underscore the pivotal role of constitutions and by-laws as key factors undergirding the Pentecostals' and the Charismatics' uncompromising stance on holiness ethics. The constitutions and by-laws spell out moral failures or deviations and their corresponding sanctions to be meted out to miscreant church members.⁴⁴ Thus Pentecostals, in the opinion of Petersen, are overtly distinguished by their moralism because their view of reality, invested as it is with a pervasive sense of the sacred, imposes moral sanctions on

³⁹ Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Do not "Meccanize" Christianity', 12.

⁴⁰ For details, see Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 138-141; Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2006), 216-218; Douglas Petersen, *Pentecostals: Who Are They?* in Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (eds.) *Mission as Transformation: A Theology of the Whole Gospel* (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 1999), 94-96.

⁴¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 138.

⁴² Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 138.

⁴³ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 216.

⁴⁴ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 217; Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of the Spirit*, 139-140.

their adherents.⁴⁵ Petersen cites Bryan Roberts to buttress his argument about Pentecostals' uncompromising attitude towards holy living: 'as they [Pentecostals] see it, a person's Christian quality ... is certified by changes which occur in his moral life, rather than by his doctrinal loyalties.'⁴⁶ Petersen, like Asamoah-Gyadu and Omenyo, clearly articulates the outcomes of Pentecostals' hard stance on holiness:

Rather rigid rules of conduct tend to separate adherents from the easy going, permissive attitude toward marital infidelity, gambling, excessive drinking and misrepresentation found often in popular culture. Practical norms and rules provide assurance to one's behaviour, and illuminate a 'signpost' to the authenticity of the dramatic and radical nature of conversion. Such demands, beyond a demonstration of moral life, have a pedagogic importance, particularly when they guide people clearly out of harmful patterns of behaviour.⁴⁷

In light of these outcomes, participation in Pentecostal services is intentionally meant to influence members' conduct, specifically a concrete realization of the group's values which include adherence to holiness. The emotional orientation of Pentecostal services increases members' motivations to live a holy life beyond simply a sense of obligation to comply with a sense of spiritual dimensions. Pentecostals appear to draw from their beliefs and experiences in their spiritual sensitivity to invoke an aspiration and commitment to produce high levels of selfless, enthusiastic practice of moral living.⁴⁸

The crux of the reviewed works on holiness ethics among Pentecostals is that Pentecostals endeavour to authenticate their subjective, experiential, and transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit through practical holy living. These works are important because they provide some empirical evidence of holiness as one of the cardinal emphases of Pentecostal spirituality. They are also important because they provide a relevant and compelling academic basis to explore the influence of Pentecostalism on pilgrims' adherence to holiness ethics on PMs. The underlying presupposition is that Pentecostalism as a modern religious phenomenon has had a significant impact on Christianity worldwide.⁴⁹ Therefore, the spirituality of PMs as sacred spaces in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity is primarily characterised by the belief in the active presence of the Holy Spirit who is perceived to be the source of pneumatic phenomena (such as 'tongues' speaking, prophecy, healing and deliverance, etc.) and the one who engenders Christian pilgrims' conversion and transformation evidenced in practical holy living. As a result, conscious emphasis on holiness or moral uprightness as evidence of pilgrims' authentic conversion and transformation is one of the key aspects of the spirituality of PMs in Ghana. For instance, in one of the researcher's field trips to APM, he found these sacred writings pasted on some of the buildings at 'Camp Three' very intriguing:

The Bible mentions many specific actions and attitudes that are either right or wrong. The wrong ones or vices include sexual immorality, impurity (Gal. 5:19), lust (Col.3:5), hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, dissension (Gal. 5: 20), arrogance (2 Cor. 12:20), envy (Gal. 5: 21), murder (Rev. 22:12-16), idolatry (Gal. 5: 20; Eph. 5:5), sorcery (Gal. 5: 20), drunkenness (Gal. 5: 21), wild parties (Luke 15:13; Gal. 5:21), cheating, adultery, homosexuality, stealing (1 Cor. 6:9-10), greed (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5), lying (Rev. 22:12-16). The virtues, understood as the by-products of living for God, include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (Gal. 5:22), gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:23).

⁴⁵ Petersen, *Pentecostals: Who are They?*, 94-95.

⁴⁶ Petersen, *Pentecostals: Who are They?*, 95.

⁴⁷ Petersen, *Pentecostals: Who are They?*, 95.

⁴⁸ Petersen, *Pentecostals: Who are They?*, 95.

⁴⁹ Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Mass (eds.), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), xv.

These vices and virtues had their respective additional pieces of information which appeared to be their commentaries. The commentary on the vices was anchored on Galatians 5:19-21:

We all have evil desires, and we can't ignore them. In order for us to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance, we must deal with them decisively (crucify them – Gal. 5:24). These desires include obvious sins such as sexual immorality and demonic activities. They also include less obvious sins such as hostility, jealousy, and selfish ambition. Those who ignore such sins or refuse to deal with them reveal that they have not received the gift of the Holy Spirit that leads to a transformed life.

The commentary on the virtues was couched on Galatians 5:22-23:

The fruit of the Spirit is the spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Spirit produces these character traits that are found in the nature of Christ. They are the by-products of Christ's control. We can't obtain them by trying to get them without his help. If we want the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us, we must join our life to his (see John 15:4-5). We must know him, love him, remember him and imitate him. As a result, we will fulfill the intended purpose of the law – to love God and our neighbours.

These sacred writings fascinated the researcher because they appeared to be a catalogue of vices and virtues together with their brief interpretations ostensibly intended to educate pilgrims about the perils of a godless life and the fruitfulness of a Christ-centered life. The writings were also considered to be part of the efforts of the site's management to use the Bible to reinforce the sacred identity of the site and the need for pilgrims to abide by the rules and regulations governing the site's sacred orientation. This position is succinctly articulated by Douglas Davies who defines sacred writings in Christianity as the Bible and its centrality in Christian thought and practice.⁵⁰ He further expounds on the supreme significance of the Bible in Christian worship:

Christian worship is so closely linked with sacred scriptures that it is almost impossible to think of any formal Christian service taking place without some use of the Bible. This centrality of the Bible is due to the fact that Christianity stresses its past through the belief that God's self-revelation has occurred within history at particular times and places, through religious leaders such as prophets, but most especially, through Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible is the central deposit of witness to this divine revelation.⁵¹

The relevance of Davies' point is that a discourse on holiness in Christianity would scarcely be complete without resorting to the Bible.⁵² The prevailing holiness ethics of the PMs could also be seen from the strictly religious and moral rules that pilgrims are obliged to observe or adhere to. On all the PMs under study, attendance to religious programmes is compulsory for all pilgrims. These programmes include morning devotions, Bible studies, all-night prayer sessions and divine services. Besides, strict moral rules feature prominently. On all the PMs, it is not allowed for males and females who are not married to sleep in the same room. Owusu-Ansah, citing Evangelist Asiamah,⁵³ maintains that opposite sexes [who are not married] are forbidden to sleep in one room because there has been some incidence of sexual affairs at Camp Three of APM.⁵⁴ Moreover, wearing indecent clothes or sexually provocative dressing anywhere on the PMs is seriously frowned upon. The wearing of such indecent clothes is believed to have the propensity of sexually luring or enticing

⁵⁰ Douglas Davies, 'Christianity' in Jean Holm with John Bowker (eds.), *Sacred Writings* (London, United Kingdom: Pinter Publishers Ltd., 1994), 44; Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 90.

⁵¹ Davies, 'Christianity', 45.

⁵² Jude Hama, *Practical Holy Living* (Accra, Ghana: Step Publishers, 2017), 19-238; Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, United States of America: Navpress, 2006), 1-127.

⁵³ Evangelist Asiamah was the Caretaker of Camp Three from the year 2004 to date (the time of this work).

⁵⁴ Isaac Owusu-Ansah, 'Abasua Prayer Mountain in Ghanaian Christianity', Long Essay (Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon 2005), 23.

people into some misconduct, thereby truncating and defeating the very essence of the pilgrimage at the site.⁵⁵

This brief survey of holiness ethics on the PMs forms part of the rituals that 'are needed to cleanse, purify and prepare those coming from the realm of the secular before they enter the realm of the sacred.'⁵⁶ The survey of holiness ethics on the PMs would be incomplete without a discussion of its influence on pilgrims' conversion and, by implication, their quest to lead morally upright lifestyles. The conversion testimony of Apostle Richard Kwame Owusu is contextually instructive.

On the 15th of August, 2011, Apostle Owusu informed the researcher about the sanctity and spiritual potency of APM and its influence on his conversion to Christianity and, subsequently, into the pastoral ministry, during an interview he granted him at APM. Apostle Owusu reports being a professional carpenter and testifies of having been a massive beneficiary of the toils and sacrifices of his relatives, but did not initially live up to their pleasure and expectation until he met Jesus Christ at APM, through the influence of Apostle Godsson. As one of the eleven children of his economically powerless parents – Mr. Kwaku Nsiah and Madam Agnes Agyapong – Owusu had his formal basic education through the efforts of his maternal aunt, Madam Ama Tiwaa and her husband, Mr. S.K. Fokuo. He completed Roman Catholic Middle School in 1985 at Donyina in the Asante region. After moving to Kumasi to briefly struggle as a cobbler and a sole proprietor, he was assisted by his sister and his brother-in-law to learn carpentry. Owing to his determination and tenacity of purpose, he completed within two years instead of the normal three years of apprenticeship. He was further assisted by his sister and brother-in-law to move to Accra to practice his trade as a professional carpenter.

He revealed that it was in Accra that he bitterly and unfortunately plunged his life into a quagmire of all sorts of vices including drunkenness, fornication and recklessness. He lost focus as a professional carpenter and was eventually rejected by his parents and relatives. It was in the midst of this disillusionment that he claims to have been providentially led by a friend to APM in August 1999. He describes his going to APM as providential because according to him, God strangely arranged for him to meet Apostle Prince Emmanuel Godsson, the founder and general overseer of Full Gospel Church of God International, who was then praying on the mountain. Apostle Godsson is said to have prophetically disclosed to Owusu (as he was then called) that God was going to use him mightily to win many souls to His Kingdom. Apostle Owusu indicates that he spent three months on the mountain without any of his relatives knowing his whereabouts. He reports being significantly influenced by the serenity and holiness of the site. As a result, he claims that he went through stringent spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting for seven days, for fourteen days, for twenty-one days and for forty days, under the spiritual guidance of Apostle Godsson. He discloses that after going through the twenty-one days of prayer and dry fasting (that is, praying and fasting without food), he experienced an unprecedented abdominal disorder, followed by forty-five bouts of diarrhea. According to Apostle Owusu, God told him that the forty-five bouts of diarrhea he experienced was nothing but His (God's) own way of purging him of all the filthy deposits of drunkenness, fornication, recklessness, etc., which had been accumulated in him for a long time. He testifies of a dramatic conversion experience characterized by transformation and what Jude Hama refers to as 'practical holy living'.⁵⁷ He further testifies that as a result of his conversion and transformation, Jesus Christ has been gracious enough by calling him into the pastoral ministry as the founder and general overseer of Jesus the Light Evangelistic Ministry, a Pentecostal church. He was

⁵⁵ In Islam, for example, Muslims who embarked on pilgrimage to Mecca were required to abstain from sexual intercourse, obscene language and acrimonious disputes. For details, James Fieser and John Powers (eds.), *Scriptures of the World's Religions* (New York, United States of America: McGraw-Hill, 1998). 401.

⁵⁶ Robert A. Scott, *The Gothic Enterprise: A Guide to understanding the Medieval Cathedral* (California: University of California Press, 2003), 152.

⁵⁷ Hama, *Practical Holy Living*.

ordained as ‘Apostle’ by Rev. Dr. Robert Ampia-Kwofie (founder and leader of Global Revival Ministries)⁵⁸ and Apostle Godsson – the people he describes as his spiritual fathers.

If Apostle Owusu attributes his transformation of character and subsequent ordination into the pastoral ministry to his pilgrimage to APM and providential encounter with Apostle Godsson (a Pentecostal Christian), then it is plausible to argue that the Pentecostal orientation of PMs attracts (Pentecostal) Christian pilgrims (usually as pastors, prophets, evangelists, etc.) who also assist other pilgrims to be spiritually gifted, transformed and imbued with the quest for holiness which, as has already been stated, are aspects of Pentecostal Christianity. In that sense, the positive influence of Pentecostalism on Christians’ pilgrimage to sacred sites and their quest for holiness ethics are underscored.

Pilgrims’ Adherence to Holiness Ethics and the Prevalence of Imprecatory Prayers on the Prayer Mountains

There are however certain observations which seem to negate the positive influence of Pentecostalism on pilgrims’ appropriation of PMs, as far as their quests for holiness and transformation of character are concerned. Thus inasmuch as Pentecostalism seems to positively influence pilgrims’ patronage of PMs and stimulate their transformation of character and quest for holiness, the same religious phenomenon sometimes appears to obliterate pilgrims’ quest for authentic Christianity characterized by love for a neighbour or love for one’s enemies.

During the field trips to the PMs under study, the researcher observed many things including some symbols which were very captivating. At APM, specifically, in the forests where some pilgrims pray during the day, he saw, among others, pieces of wood tied with red materials or other ropes against trees. These symbolic prayer rituals were believed to be such pilgrims’ own way of binding and cursing the enemies perceived to be responsible for their predicaments.⁵⁹ These observations are generally understood as the prevalence of what Osei Sarf-Kantanka refers to as ‘dangerous or imprecatory prayers’⁶⁰ by people perceived to be Pentecostal Christian pilgrims.



Figure 1: Symbols of imprecatory prayers found in the forests of Abasua Prayer Mountain. Pieces of wood tied with ropes to trees. It is believed to be some pilgrims’ own way of binding and cursing their enemies perceived to be responsible for their predicaments.

Theological contestations about the appropriateness or otherwise of imprecatory Psalms or ‘dangerous prayers’ in Christianity warrant a brief survey in this section of the study in order to

⁵⁸ Larbi, *Pentecostalism*, 504.

⁵⁹ Mr. Joseph Boateng Fordjour (the secretary of Camp Three, Abasua Prayer Mountain), Interview, March 14, 2016, Abasua Prayer Mountain.

⁶⁰ Osei Sarfo-Kantanka, ‘Responses to Contemporary Issues in the Church in Ghana: “Dangerous Prayers” in *Asempa Dawuro*, Vol. 2, N006 (April – June, 2011), 4-7.

ascertain whether or not such prayers really desecralise pilgrims who utter or resort to them on PMs. In his commentary or notes on Psalm 35:1-28, Donald C. Stamps refers to the Psalm as ‘an imprecatory Psalm, meaning that the Psalmist *prays that God will bring judgment on the enemies of his people and overthrow the wicked* (Ps 35, 69, 109,137; Ne 6:14; 13:29; Jer 15:15; 17:18; Gal 5:12; 2Tim 4:14; Rev 6:10).⁶¹ Although Stamps appreciates Christ’s instruction to believers to forgive their enemies (Luke 23:34) and to pray for their salvation (Matthew 5:39, 44), he is still of the opinion that ‘a time comes when we must pray for evil to cease and for justice to be done for the innocent. We should be vitally concerned for the victims of cruelty, oppression and evil.’⁶² He expounds on his perspective of the theological appropriateness of imprecatory prayers in the church as follows:

They are prayers for deliverance from injustice, crime and oppression. Believers have a right to pray for God’s protection from evil people. They are appeals to God to administer justice and to send penalties on the wicked that are commensurate with their crime.... If just retribution is not undertaken by God or by human government, violence and chaos will reign in society (see Dt. 25:1-3; Ro 13:3-4; 1Pe 2:13-14). As you read these prayers, know that the Psalmist does not take vengeance into his own hands but commits it to God (cf. Dt 32:35; Pr 20:22; Ro 12:19). The imprecatory Psalms point to the truth that when the sin of the wicked reaches its full measure, the Lord in his righteousness does judge and destroy (see Ge 15:16; Lev 18:24; Rev 6:10, 17). Remember that these prayers are inspired words of the Holy Spirit (cf.2Ti 3:16-17; 2Pe 1:19-21), and not just an expression of the Psalmist’s human desire. The ultimate goal of an imprecatory prayer is to see injustice and cruelty come to an end, evil destroyed, Satan defeated, godliness exalted, righteousness established and God’s kingdom realized. This goal is a dominant concern in the NT. Christ himself states that true believers may pray for the vindication of the righteous. He widow’s prayer to “grant me justice against my adversary” (Lk 18:3) is answered by Jesus’ assurance that God will “bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night” (Lk 18:7; cf. Rev 6:9-10). Believers must keep two Biblical principles in balance: (a) the desire see all people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (cf. 2Pe 3:19), and (b) the desire to see evil destroyed and God’s kingdom victorious. We must earnestly pray for the salvation of the lost and weep for those who reject the gospel; yet we must also know that righteousness, goodness and love will never be established according to God’s purpose until evil is conquered and Satan and his followers are forever put down (see Rev 6:10, 17;19-21). The faithful must pray, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20) as God’s ultimate and final solution for evil in the world.⁶³

Thus for Stamps, Christians are theologically justified when they employ imprecatory prayers as part of their expression of Christian spirituality. In the introduction to his book *Prayer of Jehu*, Daniel Olukoya appears to corroborate Stamps’ defense of the theological validity of imprecatory prayers among Christians:

There are prayers that the enemy cannot toy with. There are prayer points that will be too hot for the enemy to confront. When the mystery of Jehu prayers is at work, arrows that are sent by the enemy will go back to the sender and so much violence will be discharged that the enemy will regret ever trying to go into conflict with a member of the Jehu army. In these last days, God has established an elite force called the Jehu army, made up of aggressive warriors who are not ready to take nonsense from the enemy. This divine force has constituted serious headache to the enemy. Its symbol is holy fury. Its trademark is fire. Its mission is to totally disgrace and bury [the] enemy’s army. ⁶⁴

⁶¹ Donald C. Stamps, ‘Psalm 35:1-38 (sic) Fight against those who fight against me’ in *The Full Life Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Zondervan Corporation, 1992), 794-795 (Emphasis mine).

⁶² Stamps, ‘Psalm 35:1-38 (sic)’, 794.

⁶³ Stamps, ‘Psalm 35:1-38 (sic)’, 794-795.

⁶⁴ Daniel Olukoya, *The Prayer of Jehu* (Lagos: Battle Cry Christian Ministries, 2012), i.

It can be discerned from the perspective of Stamps and Olukoya that Christian pilgrims do not become unholy for employing imprecatory Psalms or prayers. Imprecatory prayers rather appear to be some of the catalysts for enhancing pilgrims' quest for virtuous lives since these prayers are perceived by pilgrims as powerful and efficacious enough in dealing with the contending forces believed to be responsible for all vices or immoral behaviours.

Sarfo-Kantanka, however, strongly argues against these prayers in the church. In his opinion, the language of libation in Traditional African Religion is the religio-cultural context or source of the prevalence of imprecatory prayers in the church. In libation, the linguist usually articulates the antagonism between the adherents of Traditional African Religion and the enemy through a forceful invocation of curses onto the enemy. In a typical traditional Akan religious context, the linguist usually ends libation in these words: '*Obi nkɔ ahyira nkɔhyira ne busuyefɔ*', meaning; 'No one goes to pray for blessings on his or her enemies'. The linguist would usually add these words: '*Onipa bɔnefɔ a ɔmpɛ yɛn yie deɛ, ne kɔnkɔ mmɔ ne so*', meaning; 'May those who wish evil for us fall and die.'⁶⁵ Thus, in the view of Sarfo-Kantanka, paying the enemies back in their own coin is the Africans' understanding of how one deals with their enemies.⁶⁶

Despite the Old Testament's references to some imprecatory prayers (Ex 21:24) as seen in the worldview of traditional African religious practitioners, Sarfo-Kantanka vehemently contends the prevalence of these prayers in the church [and PMs] by appealing to the New Dispensation in Christ, Pauline teachings and the views of other theologians to buttress his stance. He anchors his explanation of the New Dispensation in Christ on Matthew 5:17 where Christ is reported to have said: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them' (NIV). The fulfillment, according to Sarfo-Kantanka, may be understood in two senses. First, the fulfillment of the promises of God as given in the Law and Prophets is to be found in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). Second, Jesus Christ is the embodiment of humankind's complete understanding of the Law and the Prophets.⁶⁷

In light of this, Christ announced the style of the New Dispensation as follows: '**You have heard that it was said to the people long ago... But I tell you...**'⁶⁸ The implication of this announcement is that there was no other acceptable teaching beyond what Christ said and practised. If this is logical, then the New Dispensation in Christ is the yardstick for determining what is supposed to be the Christian norm in Christians' relationship with their enemies or those who persecute them. In Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus taught: 'You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (NIV). Thus 'the New Dispensation initiated by Jesus', according to Sarfo-Kantanka, 'is therefore higher and is to be our example rather than some Old Testament practices.'⁶⁹

Moreover, the Pauline corpus appears to be replete with references to the need for Christians to love their enemies, thereby shunning imprecatory prayers and other revengeful actions. The words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:14-21, according to Sarfo-Kantanka, are apt:

'Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse ... Do not repay anyone evil for evil ... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath....Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good' (NIV). Paul in this text appears to be telling his Christian listeners to follow Jesus Christ who, in the course of his crucifixion, was reported to have prayed 'Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing (Lk 23:34 – NIV), or the martyr Stephen who allegedly followed Jesus Christ and prayed during his persecution 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (Acts 7:60 – NIV).

⁶⁵ Sarfo-Kantanka, 'Responses to Contemporary Issues in the Church in Ghana', 4.

⁶⁶ Sarfo-Kantanka, 'Responses to Contemporary Issues in the Church in Ghana', 4.

⁶⁷ Sarfo-Kantanka, 'Responses to Contemporary Issues in the Church in Ghana', 4.

⁶⁸ Sarfo-Kantanka, 'Responses to Contemporary Issues in the Church in Ghana', 5 (Emphasis original).

⁶⁹ Sarfo-Kantanka, 'Responses to Contemporary Issues in the Church in Ghana', 5.

A rather uncompromising position against imprecatory Psalms or prayers is maintained by John W. Baigent and Leslie C. Allen whose work is quoted by Sarfo-Kantanka:

A more serious problem confronts the Christian in the so called imprecatory Psalms (e.g., 35:1-8; 58:6-9; 59; 69:22-28; 137:8f) [or prayers] in which the Psalmists curses his enemies, call down vengeance on them, often vindictively and gloats over the prospect of their downfall. The Christian is not able to adopt this kind of language in relation to his own enemies and persecutors. He has learned a better way from his Lord's teaching and example (Mt. 5:44ff; Lk 23:34) and from the NT generally (cf. Acts 7:60, Ro 12:14, 19ff, 1Ti 2:1-4).⁷⁰

The theological arguments against imprecatory prayers imply that Christians are forbidden from employing them to deal with their enemies. Therefore Christian pilgrims who use them may be regarded as unholy and disobedient since the appropriation of such prayers by Christians is considered to be tantamount to their repudiation of the instructions of Jesus Christ.

The seemingly endless debate about the theological justification or otherwise of imprecatory prayers is, in the researcher's opinion, a reflection of the centrality and sensitive nature of the concept in Christian theology. Sarfo-Kantanka's association of libation in Traditional African Religion with imprecatory prayers indicates his attempt to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion on the African religions as the substructure of African Christianity. Andrew F. Walls clearly articulates this as follows: 'African Christianity is a new development of African religion, shaped by the parameters of pre-Christian African religion as was the Christianity of the Jerusalem church of the Acts of the Apostles rooted in the religion of old Israel.'⁷¹ Also, Stamps' insistence on the theological validity of imprecatory prayers appears to find space and relevance in African Christianity and Traditional Akan Religion characterised, among other things, by what Omenyo refers to as [mystical] causality.⁷² Omenyo writes: 'The [Akan's] idea of causality leans heavily on the spiritual. Besides purely organic causation of sickness, for instance, no interpretation of causality that does not include elements like preordained destiny, punishment by angered ancestors and witchcraft can be fully acceptable.'⁷³ The presence of destructive forces in the worldview of the African Christian seems to justify Stamps' perspective of imprecatory prayers in Christianity, since those prayers, in Stamps' thinking, are efficacious in dealing with those malicious forces. Thus the position of each exponent, in my view, is theologically valid as long as each one eschews relying on the proof-text approach to biblical hermeneutics. This is where, in the opinion of Asamoah-Gyadu, context is ignored in the interpretation of scripture so that passages are made to serve the purposes of the interpreter rather than the purposes of the Spirit of God.⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

It has been noted that Pentecostalism as a modern religious phenomenon has had a great impact on almost all the nooks and crannies of Christianity. The influence of Pentecostal Christianity includes the institutionalisation of pilgrimage to PMs and pilgrims' adherence to holiness ethics. It is scarcely doubted that Ghanaian Christians' pilgrimage to PMs and the pilgrims' adherence to holiness ethics are imitations of Pentecostal practices.

The prevalence of imprecatory prayer rituals as part of the spirituality of PMs in Ghanaian Christianity, however, seems to contradict the assertion of Pentecostalism's positive influence on

⁷⁰ Sarfo-Kantanka, 'Responses to Contemporary Issues in the Church in Ghana', 4.

⁷¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 116.

⁷² Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 30.

⁷³ Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism*, 30. Omenyo adds that this is not to say that the Akan is blindly fatalistic. In spite of supernatural interpretation of mishaps, the role of conscience, common sense and for that matter human responsibility is considered. Joshua N. Kudajie, "Does Religion Determine Morality in African Societies? A Viewpoint" in John S. Pobee (ed) *Religion in a Pluralistic Society* (Leiden:E.J Brill, 1976), 62ff.

⁷⁴ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Sighs and Signs of Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2015), 40.

pilgrims with respect to their (that is, the pilgrims') quest for holiness and transformation of life. This is because Christian pilgrims who employ them may be regarded as unholy and disobedient since the use of such prayers by Christians is considered to be synonymous with their repudiation of the instructions of Jesus Christ.

This assertion is, however, contentious especially, when examined from the perspective of African Traditional Religion which is not only considered to be a precursor of African Christianity but also embraces imprecatory prayers as a normal religious practice. The apparent endless contestation about the theological justification or otherwise of imprecatory prayers may be an attestation of the complex and sensitive nature of the concept in African Christianity.

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