



A Thematic Engagement of Literature on Prayer Mountains as Sacred Spaces in Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity

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ABSTRACT

Sacred spaces and their attendant pilgrimage attractions seem to be some of the universal and more obvious features of world religions. One of the emerging phenomena within contemporary Ghanaian Christianity is Christians' pilgrimage to some sacred mountains. Even though scholarship on this phenomenon is gradually bourgeoning within the Ghanaian epistemic context, a thematic engagement of literature on Prayer Mountains (PMs) as sacred spaces in the Ghanaian Christian setting seems to have fallen out of scholars' grasp. This paper, therefore, employs discourse analysis as a method to elucidate some selected themes. In light of discourse analysis, the paper concludes, among others, that the evolution of the PMs phenomenon in Ghanaian Christianity is likely to cause a rethinking of the conventional notion of PMs as spaces for transcendental encounters. Such a revision may result in the emergence of other themes or concepts of future academic relevance.

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INTRODUCTION

Generally, scholarly works on sacred mountains and their attendant pilgrimage attractions abound in world religions.¹ Mountains, regarded as sacred manifestations of some intrinsic quality, have been linked with the cherished standards and desires of people from diverse cultural/traditional backgrounds.² The justification for this religio-social and cultural phenomenon in the world has been ably articulated by scholars. Norbert C. Brockman, for example, notes that 'the perception that the sacred is associated with high places, that mountains point to a heaven above and beyond the earth, is deeply ingrained in human consciousness.'³ In that sense, almost all pilgrims in the world who utilize sacred mountains as pilgrimage sites do so because of their belief in those mountains as dwelling places of the gods, as places to find spiritual understanding, as tutelary spirits themselves and as places of

¹ Edwin Bernbaum, 'Sacred Mountains: Themes and Teachings' *Mountain Research and Development* 26 (2006), 304. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4540647> [Accessed 2 May 2013].

² Bernbaum, 'Sacred Mountains', 304.

³ Norbert C. Brockman, *Encyclopaedia of Sacred Places (second edition)* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), 347.

supernatural intervention.⁴ Thus as pilgrimage sites, sacred mountains promote pilgrims' engagement with the supernatural realm and its diverse ramifications of power, complication and, sometimes, fatality.⁵

In the history of African Christianity, discourse on PMs as sacred spaces have not escaped the attention of scholars. Mount Kenya, the second-highest mountain in Africa after Kilimanjaro, for instance, is believed to be sacred to some Kenyan Christians.⁶ Mount Kenya is important as a sacred space to Kenyans because, in many ways, it embodies or represents their religious, historical, cultural, social and political experiences.

Olatunji F. Aina also indicates the reality of the PM phenomenon in African Christianity. He maintains that trips to PMs for spiritual adventures are as old as the *Aladura* Churches or Independent African Churches in Nigeria. Such mountains, it is believed, provide pilgrims with a serene and spiritual atmosphere to commune with God in fasting, prayer and worship. Aina asserts that difficult life cases including illnesses are often 'referred' to such mountains by clergymen for spiritual intervention to pacify or destroy evil forces behind such life crises.⁷

Mountains in Ghana, like elsewhere in Africa and other parts of the world, are not only part of the earth's formations, but some of them are also relevant symbols in the construction of traditional or indigenous religio-social and cultural identities.⁸ A cursory overview of contemporary Ghanaian Christianity is likely to identify pilgrimage to sacred mountains (such as Abasua Prayer Mountain and Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp) as one of the burgeoning religious activities.⁹

Even though academic interest in this phenomenon is gradually growing within the Ghanaian epistemic context, a thematic engagement of literature on PMs as sacred spaces in the Ghanaian Christian context seems to have fallen out of scholars' grasp. This paper is therefore theoretically grounded on discourse analysis as a method to explain these themes: sacred, sacred space, prayer rituals, distinctions between sacred and profane, a survey of sacred mountains in the Bible and Prayer Mountains as sacred spaces in Ghana.¹⁰ It concludes that in the light of discourse analysis, the evolution of the Prayer Mountain phenomenon in Ghanaian Christianity is not only likely to vary the meaning of these themes in the course of time, but also give birth to other themes or concepts which may engage the attention of future researchers.

Discourse Analysis as a Theoretical Method

Discourse analysis focuses on 'the study of how to do things with words.'¹¹ It 'examines how actions are given meaning and how identities are produced in language use. Theoretically speaking, discourse analysts investigate processes of **social construction**.'¹² The import of discourse analysis is fundamentally rooted in the understanding of discourse in a social scientific context. In that setting,

⁴ Brockman, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Places*, 347; Robert H. Dalton, *Sacred Places of the World: A Religious Journey Across the Globe* (Chandigarh, India: Abhishek Publications, 2010), 19.

⁵ Veikko Anttonen, 'Sacred', in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutheon (eds) *Guide to the Study of Religion* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 272.

⁶ Brockman, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Places*, 357.

⁷ Olatunji F. Aina, 'Psychotherapy by Environmental Manipulation' and the Observed Symbolic Rites on Prayer Mountains in Nigeria', *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 9, (1), (2006), 1-13. (Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674670512331322612>. [Accessed 14 October 2017].

⁸ 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), 13&14, 38-41.

⁹ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 106; Evangelist Frank K. Gyasi (the founder of the Camp), Interview, Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp, 27 July, 2016.

¹⁰ Anthony Thorley and Celia M. Gunn, *Sacred Sites: An Overview. A Report for the GAIA Foundation 2007*, 22. Available at <http://www.sacredland.org/media/Sacred-Sites-an-Overview.pdf> [Accessed 21 June 2016].

¹¹ Titus Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis' in Michael Stausberg and Stephen Engler (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research in the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2014), 134; John L. Austin, *How to do things with words* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹² Hjelm, 'Discourse Analysis', 134 (Emphasis original).

‘discourse is a way of speaking that does not simply reflect ‘things out there’, but ‘constructs’ or ‘constitutes’ them. It operates on the basic assumption that ‘all descriptions of the world are by definition partial, and the variability of discourse itself is an indicator of the constructed nature of social life.’ In that sense, ‘discourse is *constitutive* – that is, it constructs social reality and relationships.’¹³ It also has a *function* because it ‘is seen as a form of social *practice*, contributing both to the reproduction of society and to social change.’¹⁴

In light of the above basic assumption of discourse, the paper does not claim to engage in an exhaustive review of literature on the identified themes. Rather, what is done in this work is considered to be *constitutive* – that is, the themes represent some of the essential concepts to be engaged and unravelled in a study on PMs as sacred spaces in Ghanaian Christianity. Furthermore, the paper tries to explore the identified themes in functional terms with respect to their facilitation of social interactions.

The Meaning of Sacred, Sacred Space and Prayer Rituals

Etymologically, Anthony Thorley and Celia M. Gunn indicate that the word sacred evolved from the classical Latin word *sacer*, meaning ‘set apart to or for some religious purpose.’¹⁵ This implies that sacred connotes some inherent special quality that differentiates it from the ordinary or normal. In addition to the primary meaning of *sacer* as ‘dedicated or consecrated to a divinity,’- is its related meaning as ‘accursed, execrable, horrible, infamous’ or ‘devoted to a divinity for destruction, forfeited.’¹⁶ The implication is that *sacer* is associated with divinity both as a powerful force for injury and destruction, as well as the idea of simply being exceptionally regarded or revered.¹⁷

Thorley and Gunn further observe that the root *sac* is related to the Hittite *saklais*, meaning ‘rite, custom, law.’ The root *sac* also relates to the derived Latin word *sanus*, meaning ‘safe, whole or healthy.’ This is the same root that gives the Latin word *sanctus*, a ‘saint or holy person’, and *sanctum*, a ‘holy place or sanctuary’.¹⁸ Thus although sacred may seem a relatively simple word in terms of its contemporary usage, it is actually a complex word carrying a fascinating blend of meanings which make up its derivation: rite, custom, safe, whole, accursed, horrible, divine destruction, divine presence.

The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of the word sacred includes such terms as ‘made in awe,’ ‘revered,’ ‘considered deserving of veneration,’ and ‘consecrated.’ Terms such as ‘holy’ and ‘hallowed’ are employed in elaboration to designate the sacred.¹⁹ Most students of religion agree that societies everywhere have a conception of a force that evokes emotions and feelings of sacredness, although the specific content of ideas about the sacred varies across different peoples and historical eras.²⁰

The notion of sacred space as one of the more obvious characteristics of religious expression in the world also seems to be universally acknowledged.²¹ Virtually all religions designate certain places as sacred or holy, and this designation often encourages adherents to visit those places on

¹³ Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 135.

¹⁴ Hjelm, ‘Discourse Analysis’, 135.

¹⁵ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, 22.

¹⁶ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, 22.

¹⁷ Robert A. Scott, *The Gothic Enterprise: A Guide to understanding the Medieval Cathedral* (California: University of California Press, 2003), 148.

¹⁸ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, 22. Italics original.

¹⁹ Scott, *The Gothic Enterprise*, 148.

²⁰ Scott, *The Gothic Enterprise*, 148.

²¹ Chris Park, ‘Religion and Geography’ in Hinnells, J. (ed.) *Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 19.

pilgrimage.²² World Religions²³ and their various sacred sites which attract believers in pilgrimage have been identified and scholarly articulated.²⁴ Generally, a sacred space is a place not only for worship and divine revelations but also a place which provides pilgrims with peace and solace from the pestering burden of daily life.²⁵ Against this backdrop, sacredness understood as a religious and theological category has not escaped the intellectual gaze.²⁶

Veikko Anttonen, in his assertion that seems to corroborate Park's observation about the ubiquitous nature of sacred spaces in all religious traditions, writes as follows:

Setting specific times and places apart as sacred is a fundamental structure in human cultures, without which no religion, nation-state or political ideology can ensure the continuity of its power, hierarchy and authority. Such universal forms of religious behavior as fasting, pilgrimage, asceticism, celibacy, religiously motivated forms of seclusion and reclusion and various forms of meditation can also be comprehended in terms of the category of the sacred. These forms of religious behavior are culturally constituted on the idea of marking one's physical and mental self as separate from the routines of everyday social life.²⁷

Central in Anttonen's observation is the notion of sacredness, believed to be an integral component of all religious traditions. Historians and phenomenologists of religion such as Nathan Soderblom, Rudolf Otto, Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade, according to Anttonen, hold sacrality to be not only a hallmark of religion but its very essence.²⁸ These theorists assert that cultural systems of belief and practice cannot be given the title 'religion' if there is nothing which is deemed sacred by their adherents. In the methodological approach of these scholars, the sacred is treated as an ontological category, culturally schematised in human experience in the form of subjective feelings of the presence of what scholars refer to as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,²⁹ that is, a mysterious something that both frightens and fascinates.³⁰ This position reinforces Geertz's notion of sacred symbols as some of the major characteristics of religious traditions.³¹

A sacred space, therefore, is a place where people encounter the sacred, understood as something truly extraordinary and overwhelming. It is a place where people feel gripped by a reality that is 'wholly other' than themselves – something mysterious, awesome, powerful and beautiful.³² The conception of a sacred space also implies the reality of a profane or secular space. In the scheme of Eliade, the profane space is 'the realm of the everyday business – of things ordinary, random and largely unimportant.'³³ In short, profane space is 'the worldly Universe or historical situation of people.'³⁴ The role of religion, according to Daniel L. Pal, is to promote encounters with the sacred, to bring a person "out of his worldly Universe or historical situation, and project him into a Universe different in quality, an entirely different world, transcendent and holy."³⁵

²² Park, 'Religion and Geography', 19.

²³For details on these World Religions, see Dean C. Halverson, (Gen. ed.) *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (Minnesota, USA: Bethany House Publishers, 1996), 13-234; Michael Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions: Tradition, Challenge and Change* (second edition) (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2002), 59-525.

²⁴ Dalton (ed.), *Sacred Places of the World*, preface.

²⁵ Dalton (ed.), *Sacred Places of the World*, preface.

²⁶ Anttonen, 'Sacred', 271-282; Scott, *The Gothic Enterprise*, 147-170; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 126.

²⁷ Anttonen, 'Sacred', 272. Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 52-53.

²⁸ Anttonen, 'Sacred', 272.

²⁹ Anttonen, 'Sacred', 272.

³⁰ Daniel L. Pal, *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 164.

³¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 129.

³² Pal, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 164.

³³ Pal, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 163-164.

³⁴ Pal, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 165.

³⁵ Pal, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 165.

In Scott's view, [prayer] rituals are required to effect the transition from the worldly Universe to the realms of transcendence, also referred to in this work as sacred space.³⁶ The author's operational definition of prayer rituals is humans' activities or actions (visible or invisible) perceived to symbolize their belief in and communication with God or a deity. They are thus some of the main activities or actions that inform and define the sacredness of almost all spaces.³⁷ In his definition of 'ritual', Ronald L. Grimes points out that ritual refers to 'traditional, prescribed communication with the sacred.'³⁸ By this definition, ritual is identified 'with actions predicated on a theistic, mysterious or animistic premise, or performances by religious functionaries in sacred places.'³⁹ In that sense, prayer rituals are believed to be the nexus of the two divergent worlds (that is, sacred space and profane space). In other words, prayer rituals can be conceptualised as humans' activities or actions by which the gulf between sacred space and profane space can be bridged.

If the sacredness of a place is determined by the belief in the presence of a supernatural force or a deity in that space and the possibility of human interaction with that deity through rituals,⁴⁰ then discourse on the sacredness of a space, in the author's opinion, would not be complete without reference to prayer rituals. Thus sacredness of a place and prayer rituals, in this context, are not mutually exclusive.

Edward Mckendree Bounds, a doyen on prayer, categorizes prayer into seven aspects: 'purpose in prayer'⁴¹, 'the necessity of prayer',⁴² 'the possibilities of prayer'⁴³, 'essentials of prayer'⁴⁴, 'obtaining answers to prayer'⁴⁵, 'power through prayer'⁴⁶, and 'the weapon of prayer.'⁴⁷ This taxonomy of prayer implies that, for Bounds, prayer is Christians' indispensable resource. It is the Christian's lifeline to God, and with it lives are changed for eternity.⁴⁸

Prior to Bounds' comprehensive work on prayer, Dick Eastman had underscored prayer as the 'Slender nerve of power' and 'that marvelous mystery hidden behind the cloud of God's omnipotence.'⁴⁹ To him (Eastman), 'Nothing is beyond the reach of prayer because God Himself is the focus of prayer.'⁵⁰ Defining prayer as 'divine communion with our heavenly Father,'⁵¹ Eastman adds that 'Prayer does not require advanced education' and that 'knowledge is not a prerequisite to engage in it. Only an act of the will is required to pray.'⁵² The implication of this is that prayer is not the preserve of a few selected individuals. It cannot be monopolized by anybody. Whoever has 'an act of the will' could pray. David Cook corroborates Eastman's view by underscoring prayer to be 'an interactive communication with God.'⁵³ Thus in prayer, Cook maintains, 'The believer assumes God's

³⁶ Scott, *The Gothic Enterprise*, 150.

³⁷ Dalton, *Sacred Places of the World*, 7-11, 13 and 112.

³⁸ Ronald L. Grimes, 'Ritual' in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.) *Guide to the Study of Religion* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 261.

³⁹ Grimes, 'Ritual', 261.

⁴⁰ Randall Studstill, 'Eliade, Phenomenology, and the Sacred' *Religious Studies*, 36 (2000), 177-194. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20008280>. [Accessed 17 March 2012].

⁴¹ Edward Mckendree Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997), 11-106.

⁴² Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 107-190.

⁴³ Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 191-286.

⁴⁴ Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 287-376.

⁴⁵ Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 377-466.

⁴⁶ Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 467-524.

⁴⁷ Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, 525-613.

⁴⁸ Bounds, *E. M. Bounds on Prayer*, Blurb.

⁴⁹ Dick Eastman, *The Hour That Changes The World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 11.

⁵⁰ Eastman, *The Hour That Changes The World*, 11.

⁵¹ Eastman, *The Hour That Changes The World*, 11.

⁵² Eastman, *The Hour That Changes The World*, 11.

⁵³ David Cook, *Thinking About Faith* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 95.

existence and prayer is the expression of a relationship with that God, not a means of establishing his existence.⁵⁴

Eastman conceptualizes a theology based on a twelve-step model to 'be applied with spiritual liberty rather than regimented legality.'⁵⁵ He enumerates and briefly defines the items or 'steps' in the model as follows:

Praise: The act of divine adoration; *Waiting*: The act of soul surrender; *Confession*: The act of declared admission; *Scripture Praying*: The act of faith appropriation; *Watching*: The act of mental awareness; *Intercession*: The act of earnest appeal; *Petition*: The act of personal supplication; *Thanksgiving*: The act of expressed appreciation; *Singing*: The act of melodic worship; *Meditation*: The act of spiritual evaluation; *Listening*: The act of mental absorption; *Praise*: The act of divine magnification.⁵⁶

The implication here is that prayer rituals in Christianity are so broad that they seem to defy systematic categorization. They encapsulate several actions or practices that symbolize or facilitate a Christian's interaction with God.

Cook further confirms Eastman's formulaic and theological perspective of prayer but he categorizes prayer into four distinct components expressed by the initials ACTS. He maintains that 'Prayer is *adoration, confession, thanksgiving* and *supplication* (also called petition). When people are involved in prayer, they may be engaged in any or all of these activities.'⁵⁷ The views of Eastman, Cook and Bounds as briefly surveyed, in the author's opinion, underscore the overarching importance of prayer in a Christian believer's life.

The significance of prayer in a person's religious life is articulated in the introduction to *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, edited by Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba.

How could there be a vibrant religious life without the practice of prayer? In both theistic and non theistic traditions, religious followers are generally counseled to steadfast prayer—to pray "without ceasing." Without prayer, religious sensibility would likely atrophy and perhaps die. Yet what makes prayer so essential to a life of faith? Perhaps the most important answer is that prayer connects us to the divine, to something beyond ourselves and beyond immediate reality.⁵⁸

On the basis of the perception that human life comprises both the material /secular and spiritual /sacred dimensions, prayer, according to Benson and Wirzba, may be understood as 'the moral and spiritual discipline that introduces and directs us to the sacred dimension that infuses and undergirds all that is.'⁵⁹ This gives credence to the perception that there are some things in prayer that give it such a formative role in religious life, a role that informs and transforms believers. One of such things, according to the editors, is the understanding that prayer is an "experience at the limit."⁶⁰ What this means, according to Benson and Wirzba, is that:

Prayer effectively strips the soul of its pretense and makes it available before an inscrutable God. At its extreme, prayer leads to a breakdown of language as the believer enters a "dark night" or "blinding light" like those described by the great mystics. Prayer is reduced to mute, amorous praise, for the believer is now bathed in a transcendence that both exceeds and also sustains one's being.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Cook, *Thinking About Faith*, 94 -95.

⁵⁵ Eastman, *The Hour That Changes The World*, 10.

⁵⁶ Eastman, *The Hour That Changes The World*, 11-137.

⁵⁷ Cook, *Thinking About Faith*, 95. (Emphasis original).

⁵⁸ Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba (eds.), *The Phenomenology of Prayer* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 1.

⁵⁹ Benson and Wirzba, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, 1.

⁶⁰ Benson and Wirzba, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, 1.

⁶¹ Benson and Wirzba, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, 2.

The other striking motivation and essence of prayer is its perception as the “intensification of experience.”⁶² This means that in prayer, ‘we have revealed to us the depth and breadth of what we otherwise overlook or take for granted—life’s gratuity, fragility, terror, blessing, and interdependence. Such a revelation calls us to a more honest and authentic accounting of our lives.’⁶³ The view of prayer as an ‘intensification of experience’ is expressed somewhat clearly in Cook’s five-fold functional description of prayer: ‘Prayer as dependence’, ‘Prayer as performance’, ‘Prayer as living’, ‘Prayer as contemplation’ and ‘Prayer as relationship.’⁶⁴ These prayer rituals exist in sacred spaces to promote or facilitate interaction between a religious person and the transcendent realm.

Distinctions between Sacred and Profane

Distinctions between sacred and profane or secular appear to have originated in European culture following the Enlightenment and the rise of nineteenth-century secularism. One of the pioneering philosophers and social scientists who sought to provide a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane was Emil Durkheim (1858-1917).⁶⁵ He wrote: ‘A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church and all those who adhere to them.’⁶⁶ On the basis of this definition, Durkheim saw the sacred as essentially a social construction and mutually exclusive from the profane,⁶⁷ so that ‘the two classes cannot even approach each other and keep their own nature at the same time.’⁶⁸

Sometime later, the philosopher and scholar of the history of religions, Mircea Eliade, expressed an important view of sacred space almost diametrically opposed to Durkheim’s position. While acknowledging spatial non-homogeneity, Eliade is pessimistic about the possibility of an absolutely profane existence. He writes: ‘It must be added at once that such a profane existence is never found in the pure state. ... It will appear that even the most desacralized existence still preserves traces of a religious valorization of the world.’⁶⁹ Eliade asserts that in some profound way all sacred landscape, however, desacralized or secularized by mundane activities or by social construction, remains at some level essentially sacred.

Additionally, Eliade explores how secular or profane space is converted into a sacred space, and suggests that this symbolic process reflects the spiritual characteristics associated with both the physical features and the deeper, abstract implications of delimiting a particular site as sacred. Designation of a site as sacred is generally a response to two types of events. Some events (which Eliade calls *hierophanic*) involve a direct manifestation on earth of a deity or a spontaneous expression of the divine on earth whereas in other (*theophanic*) events somebody receives a message from the deity and interprets it for others.⁷⁰ By this interpretation, a natural landscape becomes consecrated and amplified by human recognition, participation and ritual.

From the above divergent or extreme positions of Durkheim and Eliade, it is obvious that a discourse on a sacred space is, among other things, characterized by a tension between those who advocate that a sacred site is essentially a social construct that can be located anywhere on earth and those who see sacred space as a transcendental construct, more autochthonous or more naturally born

⁶² Benson and Wirzba, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, 2.

⁶³ Benson and Wirzba, *The Phenomenology of Prayer*, 2.

⁶⁴ Cook, *Thinking About Faith*, 100 – 101.

⁶⁵ Ivan Strenski, *Thinking About Religion: An Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 283-307.

⁶⁶ Emile Durkheim, trans. Karen E. Fields, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]), 35. Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, 31; Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 126.

⁶⁷ Strenski, *Thinking About Religion*, 283.

⁶⁸ Thorley and Gunn, *Sacred Sites*, 31.

⁶⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1959), 23.

⁷⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20 – 27.

from a specific point on the earth itself, only awaiting social recognition and enhancement through rituals.

Almost directly related to the above tension in recent years is the emergence of new postmodern and traditional conceptions of pilgrimage to sacred places. In the traditional view, which is somehow couched on Eliade's transcendental perspective of sacred space, 'the power of a miraculous shrine is seen to derive solely from its inherent capacity to exert a devotional magnetism over pilgrims from far and wide, and to exude of itself potent meanings and significances for its worshippers ... its power is internally generated and its meanings are largely predetermined.'⁷¹ The traditional view, therefore, is that some places are inherently sacred, and the act of pilgrimage to those places bestows inherent benefits.

The postmodern view, which thrives on Durkheim's perspective of sacred space as a social construct, is very different. This is because it argues that meanings are not inherent but are attributed to those who believe in the notion of sacred space. In the postmodern perspective, 'pilgrimages are journeys to the sacred, but the sacred is not something which stands beyond the domain of the cultural; it is imagined, defined, and articulated within a cultural practice.'⁷² In this perspective, therefore, different people bring their own perceptions and meanings to the sacred place. As a result, sacred spaces have projected onto them a range of different meanings and interpretations, even among believers.⁷³

Notwithstanding the above tension, sacred sites and their attendant pilgrimage attractions in contemporary global religious topography⁷⁴ seem to reflect a creative fusion of Eliade's transcendental orientation/traditional perspective of sacred space and Durkheim's social construct/postmodern view of sacred sites. What this means is that a sacred site in contemporary religions may attract pilgrims who recognize the inherent miraculous or divine potency of that site and pilgrims who imagine, define, and articulate the sacredness of the site within a cultural practice.

The notion of sacred space is not novel in African religion. John S. Mbiti, a renowned African scholar, has embarked on a taxonomy of sacred places in African religion. Referring to sacred sites as 'religious places', Mbiti classifies them into 'man-made places' and 'natural places' and asserts that 'in both cases, the places are used for religious activities like praying, making offerings and sacrifices, and major ceremonies and rituals.'⁷⁵ Thus Mbiti attempts to establish a close nexus between sacred sites and pilgrimage movements in the African traditional religious context.

Mary W. Helms appears to corroborate Mbiti's classification of sacred sites and their attendant pilgrimage attractions. She also underscores a close link between sacred sites and pilgrimage by identifying the following as some of the sacred landscapes that could be found in most regions of the world: the networks of earthen mounds characteristic of pre-Columbian eastern North America, the numerous temple complexes of the lowland Maya, the interrelated oracle sanctuaries of the Ibo of Nigeria, the sacred places where the mythic ancestors of Australian Aboriginal tribes first emerged from the earth during the Dreaming, and the distributions of Neolithic chambered monuments in southern Wales.⁷⁶

It could be deduced from Helm's brief survey that a discourse on sacred space is not only limited to mountains. In addition to great mountains like Kilimanjaro in Africa, Michael Molloy explains that sacred space may also encompass a volcano, a valley, a lake, a forest, a single large tree,

⁷¹ John Eade and Michael Sallnow (eds), *Contesting the Sacred* (London: Routledge: 1991), 9.

⁷² Park, 'Religion and Geography', 23.

⁷³ Park, 'Religion and Geography', 23.

⁷⁴ Dalton (ed.), *Sacred Places of the World*, 1-208., Park, 'Religion and Geography', 19.

⁷⁵ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (2nd Revised Edition) (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1991), 147.

⁷⁶ Mary W. Helms, *Sacred Landscape and the Early Medieval European Cloister: Unity, Paradise, and the Cosmic Mountain* (Anthropos Bd.: Anthropos Institute Stable, 2002), 435. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40466044>, [Accessed: 10 October 2011].

or some other striking natural site.⁷⁷ Molloy further asserts that sacred space could also be constructed in a symbolic shape such as a circle or square, and defined by a special building or by a boundary made of rope or of rocks, such as Stonehenge in England. It could even be an open area among trees or buildings, such as the great open space between the temples of Teotihuacan, near Mexico City.⁷⁸

A Survey of Some Sacred Mountains in the Bible

The Bible is replete with several references to sacred mountains.⁷⁹ The biblical imagery of mountains locates them in a quagmire of complexity and a captivating mixture of meanings. Lyland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III disclose the paradoxical and even contradictory orientation of the biblical meanings of the mountain:

Mountains are sometimes a symbol of refuge and security and sometimes a threatening place of military slaughter. At times inaccessible, barren and uninhabited, mountains are nonetheless places where God's people will dwell in abundance. As sites of religious experience, mountaintops are places of pagan worship that God denounces and of true worship that he commands. The mountains of the bible are both physical phenomena and spiritual symbols.⁸⁰

In light of the above fascinating blend of meanings of mountains, Ryken et al categorize the biblical imagery of mountains under four main headings. These are mountains as physical places, the mountains of the poets, mountains as sacred sites and apocalyptic mountains.⁸¹ The implication of this categorization is that the view of sacred mountains as avenues for prayer and divine revelations is amplified in Christianity.⁸² Mountains in the Old Testament which were often chosen as the place for worship or divine revelation include Moriah (Gen. 22:2), Sinai (Ex. 19: 18 – 20; 24:9 – 18), Zion (Ps. 2:6; 48:1 – 2) and Carmel (1Kgs. 18: 19 – 39).⁸³

Mount Moriah is believed to be the place where God tested the faith of Abraham by commanding him to offer his only son, Isaac, as a burnt offering.⁸⁴ It was, thus a sacred place where Abraham worshipped and offered sacrifice to God.⁸⁵

Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai is perceived to be another biblical basis for the appropriation of PMs as sacred spaces in Christianity. In his commentary on 'God's call to Moses' in Exodus 3:1-10, Abel Ndjerareou rightly points out that:

The place where God chose to reveal himself [to Moses] was Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai (3:1). Here God attracts Moses' attention by using a strange sight – a bush that burns without burning up (3: 2-3)... Because God is present, the ground where Moses is standing is declared to be *holy*. He is told not to come any closer and to take off his sandals as a sign of humility and worship.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions*, 36.

⁷⁸ Molloy, *Experiencing the World's Religions*, 36.

⁷⁹ Gen. 22:2, Ex. 19: 18 – 20; 24:9 – 18, Ps. 2:6; 48:1 – 2, 1 Kgs. 18: 19 – 39, Matt. 5:1-7:29; 17: 1-21., Mk. 9:2-13.; Lk. 9:28-36., II Pet. 1: 16-18.

⁸⁰ Lyland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, (eds.), 'Mountain' in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 572-574.

⁸¹ Ryken et al, 'Mountain', 572-574.

⁸² Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 5-11; Gen. 22:2, Ex. 19: 18 – 20; 24:9 – 18, Ps. 2:6; 48:1 – 2, 1 Kgs. 18: 19 – 39, Matt. 5:1-7:29; 17: 1-21., Mk. 9:2-13.; Lk. 9:28-36., II Pet. 1: 16-18.

⁸³ Finely E. Harvey, 'Mountain' in Charles F. Pfeiffer, et al (eds) *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Massachusetts, USA: Hinderickson Publishers, Inc. 2003), 1157.

⁸⁴ Barnabe Asshoto and Samuel Engewa, 'Genesis' in Tokumboh Adeyemo (Gen. ed), *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 43.

⁸⁵ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 5&6.

⁸⁶ Abel Ndjerareou, 'Exodus' in Tokumboh Adeyemo (Gen. ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 90.

It can be observed that in the context of Mount Moriah and Mount Horeb and, of course, other PMs to be considered later, the sacredness of a place may be defined and informed by the belief in the presence of the supernatural in that space. This supernatural, in the case of Mount Moriah and Mount Horeb, was perceived to be God. Various signs or manifestations could represent God's presence at a place. In the case of Mount Moriah, the miraculous provision of a ram instead of Isaac as the object for the burnt offering was seen to be a dramatic manifestation of God's presence there. This perception of the reality of miraculous intervention may however be contested by cynics or skeptics who seem to banish the miraculous to the prescientific world of medieval superstition.⁸⁷

In the case of Mount Sinai, one of the manifestations believed to depict God's presence there was a bush in flames without burning up. Ndjerareou is of the opinion that 'The fire is said to represent *the angel of the Lord*, that is, the angelic form in which God at times reveals himself to humans (3:4; see also Gen. 16: 19). In [Exodus] 19:18, fire will again symbolize the presence of God.'⁸⁸

In addition to the above sacred mountains is Zion. Keith N. Schoville thinks that in contemporary times, Zion is used as a synonym for all Jerusalem.⁸⁹ As a synonym for Zion, Jerusalem is now believed to be the city or dwelling place of God. Perhaps it is against the backdrop of this perception that John Rea and George Turner describe Jerusalem as the "spiritual capital of the world."⁹⁰ Their description corroborates the United Nations' resolution of 1947 which designated Jerusalem an international holy city.⁹¹

It can be observed that the connection of Zion or Jerusalem with the sacred mountain of God is implicit in many of the references to mountains in the Old Testament. Schoville traces the historical basis of this connection as follows:

The concept of a sacred mountain as the abode of deities was common in the ancient Near East. At Ugarit on the North Syrian coast, Mount Zaphon to the north was the sacred mountain. The most active of the gods of Ugarit was called Baal – Zaphon. Psalm 48: 3..., refers to Jerusalem as "the utmost height of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King." The poet has drawn on Canaanite imagery to enhance praise of the Lord.⁹²

The perception of Mount Zion or Jerusalem as a holy site indicates the possibility of reconstructing a secular space into a sacred space.⁹³ David's military prowess, among others, may have enabled him to convert what was formerly called 'the city of David' or 'Zion' to 'the dwelling place of God.'⁹⁴

The survey of Old Testament sacred mountains or spaces would be incomplete without Mount Carmel. It is believed to be the site where Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal in a contest (1 Kgs. 18). Davison G. Vernon underscores that ancient sanctuaries to the weather deities were built on the heights of Mount Carmel; thus it was a fitting site for the contest between Elijah and the prophets of the Canaanite storm-god Baal. The Egyptians called Carmel a sacred cape.⁹⁵ Vernon thus corroborates Schoville's description of sacred mountains as the abode of deities. The colonization of mountains by

⁸⁷ Ronald J. Sider, 'Miracles, Methodology and Modern Western Christology' in Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (eds.) *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World* (Michigan, USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 238., Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 6&7.

⁸⁸ Ndjerareou, 'Exodus', 90. (Emphasis original).

⁸⁹ Keith N. Schoville, 'Jerusalem. The Name.' in Walter A. Elwell (ed.) *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996). 393.

⁹⁰ John Rea and George Turner 'Jerusalem' in Charles F. Pfeiffer, et al (eds) *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Massachusetts, USA: Hinderickson Publishers, Inc. 2003), 905.

⁹¹ Rea and Turner 'Jerusalem', 905.

⁹² Schoville, 'Jerusalem. The Name.' 393.

⁹³ For details on 'Creating sacred spaces', see. Scott, *The Gothic Enterprise*, 153 – 164.

⁹⁴ Schoville, 'Jerusalem. The Name.' 393.

⁹⁵ Davison G. Vernon, 'Carmel' in Charles F. Pfeiffer, et al (eds.) *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Massachusetts, USA: Hinderickson Publishers, Inc. 2003), 315.

deities and the re-appropriation of those mountains as sacred spaces in different religio-cultural contexts appear to be a research area worth exploring.

The New Testament (especially the Synoptic Gospels, that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke), is also replete with references to Jesus' mountaintop experiences. Popular among these experiences include the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29), and the Transfiguration (Matt. 17: 1-21.; Mk. 9:2ff.; Lk. 9:28-36.; II Pet. 1: 16-18).

The mountain plateau where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, according to Donald R. Sime, has often been referred to as the Mount of Beatitudes.⁹⁶ Many scholars have compared the Mount of Beatitudes to Mount Sinai, where God, through Moses, first taught his moral codes by the law (Ex. 19 – 20).⁹⁷ For instance, Delitzsch is cited by Sime as having called the Mount of Beatitudes the "Sinai of the New Testament."⁹⁸ Delitzsch thus corroborates the view of Thomas Watson that the law was first given on Mount Sinai and on the Mount of Beatitudes Christ expounded it.⁹⁹ The evidence of this, in the author's opinion, is underscored in Grant R. Osborne's view about the inseparability between the Old and New Testaments, as far as biblical hermeneutics is concerned. Osborne points out that:

It is impossible to separate the two testaments, and any truly biblical theology must begin with the recognition of unity and demonstrate such. The simple fact that there are at least 257 quotes and over 1,100 allusions ... of the Old Testament in the New shows the extent to which the latter built upon the former. In terms of vocabulary, themes, religious emphases and worship, the two depend upon one another. In terms of redemptive history, a clear typological relationship of promise-fulfillment exists between the testaments, and any concept of the progress of revelation in history (the backbone of biblical theology) must build upon this deeper interdependence.¹⁰⁰

Apart from the perception of the Mount of Beatitudes as the location for the Sermon on the Mount, Watson agrees with Jerome¹⁰¹ and other scholars that the specific site was Mount Tabor.¹⁰²

In his commentary on the experience of Jesus' transfiguration, Cole Victor Babajide's view deserves attention. He maintains that 'The transfiguration must have taken place somewhere in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, probably on Mount Hermon.'¹⁰³ This position is, however, contested by Allan R. Killen. Killen suggests four possible locations for the transfiguration. In addition to Mount Hermon, he suggests the Mount of Olives, Mount Tabor and Jebel Jermaq.¹⁰⁴ Killen's argument is that Mount Hermon seems to some to be the most likely because of its great height (9,232 feet) and its proximity to Caesarea Philippi. Besides, this place was mentioned immediately before Matt. 16:13 and Mk. 8:27.¹⁰⁵ He further maintains that the Mount of Olives and Mount Tabor appeared to have been too inhabited for an event that called for such privacy and quiet as the transfiguration.

Jebel Jermaq (3,962 feet), believed to be the highest mountain in Upper Galilee, is also suggested by W. Ewing as the location for the transfiguration. Ewing's contention is that Hermon lay outside Palestine and therefore was unlikely. Further, since Christ went up the mountain to pray (Lk.

⁹⁶ Donald R. Sime, 'Mount of Beatitudes' in Charles F. Pfeiffer, et al (eds.) *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Massachusetts, USA: Hinderickson Publishers, Inc. 2003), 1155.

⁹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 56.

⁹⁸ Sime, 'Mount of Beatitudes', 1155.

⁹⁹ Thomas Watson, *The Beatitudes* (Pennsylvania, USA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 277.

¹⁰¹ One of the greatest scholars of the early Christian Church (c. AD 420).

¹⁰² Watson, *The Beatitudes*, 16.

¹⁰³ Cole Victor Babajide, 'Mark' in Tokumboh Adeyemo (Gen. ed), *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), 1185.

¹⁰⁴ Allan R. Killen, 'Transfiguration of Christ' in Charles F. Pfeiffer, et al (eds) *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary* (Massachusetts, USA: Hinderickson Publishers, Inc. 2003), 1731.

¹⁰⁵ Killen, 'Transfiguration of Christ', 1731.

9:28) and came down the next day to meet a multitude (Lk. 9:37), Hermon appeared to be too inaccessible.¹⁰⁶

One thing is however clear about the apparent controversy surrounding the location of the transfiguration. All four suggested locations are mountains. In other words, the transfiguration of Jesus was believed to have occurred on a mountain. According to Robert H. Stein, the fact that all the Synoptic Gospel writers did not unanimously agree on one site for the transfiguration implies that they were not interested in locating exactly *where* this event took place; they were more concerned with *what* took place.¹⁰⁷

It has been said that Jesus Christ took His three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, with Him on this occasion. The transfiguration occurred as He was praying (Lk. 9:29). The disciples, who were asleep (Lk. 9:32), awakened to see Christ transformed or metamorphosed. His outward appearance, it has been said, was completely transformed, allowing the trio to catch a glimpse of his inner glory. Even his clothes reflected unsurpassed glory, for they appeared to be of a whiteness or purity unequalled on earth (Mk. 9:3).¹⁰⁸ It is believed that his face shone with brightness like the sun, an event perceived to confirm Jesus' divine personality and status.

All of this is to say that in the Bible, mountains as sacred spaces occupied a considerable place and relevance. Some of them were places for worship and others, for divine revelations. Such divine encounters were probably part of the reasons those mountains became sacred to the believing community. Thus the Bible as one of the ideal historical points of reference in a discourse on PMs underscores the fact that the current academic interest or emphasis¹⁰⁹ on mountains as sacred spaces in contemporary Christianity dates back to times immemorial.¹¹⁰ The implication is that PMs as sacred spaces in Christianity is not a recent phenomenon.¹¹¹

Historically, they have been part of the sites or communities for several Christian religious practices including monasticism.¹¹² During the Byzantine Empire in AD 476, one of the obvious features of Christianity was the development of monastic communities. Roy T. Matthews and F. DeWitt Pratt note that 'The monastic communities were basically places where people retreated from the world to lead strictly disciplined lives.'¹¹³ 'The most important monastic complex in Byzantium', according to Matthews and DeWitt 'was at Mount Athos, founded in 963. This mountain retreat in northern Greece ... housed about eight thousand monks in the thirteenth century.'¹¹⁴

Prayer Mountains as Sacred Spaces in Ghana

Mbiti and Helm's classification of sacred sites reinforces the observation that the phenomenon of sacred space is prevalent and integral in almost all religious and socio-cultural contexts.¹¹⁵ In light of this apparent universality, the variations in the symbolic representation of these sacred spaces have not escaped scholarly attention. Henryk Zimon, for instance, found out about 'The sacredness of the Earth

¹⁰⁶ Killen, 'Transfiguration of Christ', 1731.

¹⁰⁷ Robert H. Stein, 'Transfiguration' in Walter A. Elwell (ed.) *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 782. (Emphases original).

¹⁰⁸ Babajide, 'Mark', 1185.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Jan Margry (ed.) *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World: New Itineraries into the Sacred* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008); Gideon Bar, 'Reconstructing the past: The Creation of Jewish Sacred Space in the State of Israel, 1948–1967' *Israel Studies*, 13(2008), 1-21. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30245829>, [Accessed 10 October 2011].

¹¹⁰ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20-27.

¹¹¹ Harvey, 'Mountain', 1157; Assohoto and Engewa, 'Genesis', 42 - 43; Schoville, 'Jerusalem. The Name.' 394; Ndjerareou, 'Exodus', 90; Vernon, 'Carmel' 315.

¹¹² Roy T. Matthews and F. DeWitt Pratt, *The Western Humanities* (Fourth Edition) (California, USA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2001), 193.

¹¹³ Matthews and Pratt, *The Western Humanities*, 193.

¹¹⁴ Matthews and Pratt, *The Western Humanities*, 193.

¹¹⁵ Park, 'Religion and Geography', 19.

among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana' and other parts of West Africa.¹¹⁶ Researchers such as Clement Dorm–Adzobu, Okyeame Ampadu–Agyei and Peter G.Veit have also discussed 'Religious Beliefs and Environmental Protection in the context of 'The Malshegu Sacred Grove in Northern Ghana.'¹¹⁷ In these instances, the 'Earth' and the 'Grove' are the respective symbolic representations of the sacred spaces among the Konkomba and the Malshegu people. The implication of this is that the notion of sacred space is not in any way alien to Ghana's religious cosmology. In Traditional African Religion, for instance, John D.K. Ekem discusses priesthood in Akan Traditional Religions and makes mention of the following as some of the popular shrines in Ghana: Akonnedi at Larteh – Akuapem in the Eastern Region and Kwaku Fri at Nwoase – Wenchi in the Brong-Ahafo Region.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the author is personally aware of other shrines in the Asante Region. These include Antoa Nyamaa at Antoa and Gadawu at Agona-Asamang.

Scholarly works on PMs in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, to the best of the author's knowledge, includes those done by Doris Ekua Yalley,¹¹⁹ Philip Kwadwo Okyere¹²⁰ and Isaac Owusu-Ansah.¹²¹ In her scholarly study, Yalley examines the perceptions of the Methodist Church Ghana's authorities (both clergy and laity) about the church's involvement in the practice of institutionalised mass pilgrimages to sacred sites both at the Connexional and Diocesan levels.¹²² She does not only confine her study to the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG) but also focuses on three pilgrimage sites operated by the church. These sites are the William de Graft Centre (WdG) at Azani in the Sekondi Diocese in the Western Region, Thomas Birch Freeman (TBF) Centre at Kusa in the Obuasi Diocese in the Asante Region and Abasua Prayer Centre (APC) in the Effiduasi Diocese, also in the Asante Region. She looks at the contribution pilgrimage to these sites makes to the renewal programme of the MCG.

Okyere's study essentially dwells on some aspects of APM. The work generally underscores the reality of sacred spaces and their attendant pilgrimage attractions in almost all religious traditions in the world. In his view, 'people's belief in the presence of the luminous or transcendent reality at places and the possibility of their interaction with the luminous through prayer rituals, do not only define those places as sacred but are also some of the major reasons for pilgrimage to such places.'¹²³ He indicates that 'the traditional notion of sacred places as spaces for prayer, worship and divine revelation is virtually ubiquitous in all discourses on sacred spaces.'¹²⁴ The specific themes he discusses in the work include the history of the Abasua community¹²⁵ and APM,¹²⁶ the religion of the Abasua community¹²⁷ and the role of the PM in the development of Abasua citizens and the pilgrims.¹²⁸

Isaac Owusu-Ansah also outlines and discusses some Christian sacred spaces in the context of Prayer Camps in Ghana: Grace Deliverance Centre for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), Kusa

¹¹⁶ Henryk Zimoń, *The Sacredness of the Earth among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, (Anthropos: Anthropos Institute Stable, 2003), 421-443. Available at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40467332>, [accessed: 10/10/2011].

¹¹⁷ Clement Dorm – Adzobu, et al, *Religious Beliefs and Environmental Protection: The Malshegu Sacred Grove in Northern Ghana* (Nairobi, Kenya: World Resources Institute: 1991), 421 – 443.

¹¹⁸ John D. K.. Ekem, *Priesthood in Context: A Study of Priesthood in some Christian and Primal Communities of Ghana and its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation* (Accra, Ghana: SonLife Press, 2009), 43-57.

¹¹⁹ Doris Ekua Yalley, 'Sacred Site Visitation and the Renewal Program of the Methodist Church Ghana', PhD Thesis (University of Ghana, Legon, 2015).

¹²⁰ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space.'

¹²¹ Isaac Owusu-Ansah, 'Abasua Prayer Mountain in Ghanaian Christianity', Long Essay (Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon 2005).

¹²² Yalley, 'Sacred Site Visitation', 4.

¹²³ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', iii.

¹²⁴ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', iii.

¹²⁵ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 27-41.

¹²⁶ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 58-95.

¹²⁷ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 41-50.

¹²⁸ Okyere, 'Reconstructing Sacred Space', 96-129.

Camp for the MCG, Edumfa Prayer Centre for the Church of Pentecost and Abasua Prayer Mountain (APM).¹²⁹ His research seeks to evaluate the use of APM in Ghanaian Christianity in terms of the site's role in advancing pilgrims' spirituality.¹³⁰ The traditional notion of APM as a place for worship, prayer and divine revelation is, thus the crux of Owusu-Ansah's study.

SUMMARY

It is plausible to observe that for a very long time sacred sites have been understood mainly as places where religious pilgrims employ prayer rituals to advance their quest for spiritual uplift. These sites and their attendant pilgrimage attractions in contemporary global religious space appear to reflect a merging of Eliade's traditional perspective of sacred space and Durkheim's social construct / postmodern view of sacred sites. The implication is that a sacred site may attract pilgrims who recognize the inherent miraculous power of that site and pilgrims who appropriate the sacredness of the site as part of their normal religio-cultural practice. It is obvious from the foregone discussions that PMs essentially form part of the scholarly discussion of sacred sites. They have a fascinating blend of meanings and relevance. Again, PMs as sacred spaces in Christianity are not a recent phenomenon. There are several antecedents from the Bible and Church history. From the works of Yalley, Okyere and Owusu-Ansah, for instance, it could be inferred that in Ghana, academic discussion of PMs as sacred sites seems to have mainly centered on the conventional thinking of those mountains as sites for pilgrimage, worship, prayer and divine revelation.

CONCLUSION

In light of discourse analysis, this paper contends that the evolution of the PM phenomenon in Ghanaian Christianity is likely to cause a rethinking or revision of the conventional notion of those sites as spaces for transcendental encounters. Such a revision may also give rise to other themes or concepts which may engage the attention of future researchers.

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¹²⁹ Owusu-Ansah, 'Abasua Prayer Mountain in Ghanaian Christianity', 5-48.

¹³⁰ Owusu-Ansah, 'Abasua Prayer Mountain, 49.

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