

PENTECOSTALS AND PRAYER MOUNTAINS IN CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAN CHRISTIANITY

Philip Okyere

***Abstract:** One of the key developments among African church historians is the unfolding of scholarly debates about African initiatives in Christianity in Africa. The notion of the black roots of contemporary Pentecostalism as the most influential Christian religious culture attests to African initiatives in Christianity in Africa. Despite these appreciable endeavours, there seems to be a scholarly lacuna with respect to the role of Pentecostals in promoting pilgrimage to Prayer Mountains in Ghanaian Christianity. This paper employs historical and phenomenological approaches to explore the initiatives of some Pentecostals in the development of Abasua Prayer Mountain and Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp as sacred sites for prayer rituals in Ghanaian Christianity. The sacredness of these sites is a response to Eliade's theophanic and hierophanic events.*

Key Words: African, Church History, Pentecostals, Prayer Mountains, Prayer Rituals.

Introduction

Mountains are seen as the highest and most impressive features of the landscape with an unusual power to awaken a sense of the sacred.¹ This is because their remarkable soaring summits, the clouds and thunder that swirl about their peaks, the life-giving waters that flow from their heights and other features imbue them with an aura of mystery and sanctity.² In that aura, people of diverse backgrounds, both traditional and modern, through pilgrimage, experience a deeper reality that gives meaning and vitality to their lives.³ Thus as pilgrimage or awe-inspiring sites, mountains facilitate pilgrims' encounter with a transcendent realm. This encounter is almost always tantamount to pilgrims' experience of power and complexity with perhaps a real touch of unpredictability.⁴

¹ Edwin Bernbaum, "Sacred Mountains: Themes and Teachings," *Mountain Research and Development* 26 (2006), 304.

² Bernbaum, "Sacred Mountains," 304.

³ Bernbaum, "Sacred Mountains," 304.

⁴ Veikko Anttonen, "Sacred," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 272.

Mountains, understood as sacred expressions of some deeper reality, have become associated with the deepest and highest values and aspirations of cultures and traditions throughout the world.⁵ The rationale behind this religio-cultural and social phenomenon has been amply expressed. Brockman, for instance, observes 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.”⁶ Virtually all pilgrims around the world who appropriate mountains as sacred spaces do so as a result of their perception of those mountains as homes of the gods, as places of revelation, as places to discover spiritual insight and as deities themselves.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. Prior to the re-discovery of mountains as sacred sites for Christian religiosity in Ghana, some of them were the abodes of deities and embodiment of the indigenous peoples’ traditional religious expression.⁸ The re-discovery and subsequent re-appropriation of such sites for Christian rituals have, among other things, resulted in a paradigmatic shift of some of the indigenous peoples’ religious focus from traditional religious inclination to Christianity.⁹ A panoramic view of contemporary Ghanaian Christian topography is likely to locate pilgrimage to mountains as one of the burgeoning and highly patronised religious activities.¹⁰

Even though pilgrimage to Prayer Mountains (PMs) is generally perceived to be a phenomenon in the Pentecostal communities around the world,¹¹ the role of Pentecostals in promoting pilgrimage to Prayer

⁵ Bernbaum, “Sacred Mountains,” 304.

⁶ Norbert C. Brockman, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Places*, 2nd Edition (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 347.

⁷ Brockman, *Encyclopedia*, 347; Robert H. Dalton, *Sacred Places of the World: A Religious Journey Across the Globe* (Chandigarh, India: Abhishek Publications, 2010), 19.

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,” 13-14.

¹⁰ Okyere, “Reconstructing Sacred Space,” 106.

¹¹ Yeol Soo Eim, “South Korea,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Mass (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 239-246. See also Yong Kwon Jung, “Korean Prayers: Evaluating the Prayer Phenomena at the Prayer Mountain Centres in Korea” (PhD Dissertation; Asbury Theological

Mountains in Ghanaian Christianity appears to have evaded scholarly attention. This paper employs historical and phenomenological methods to explore the initiatives of some Pentecostals in the development of Abasua Prayer Mountain (APM) and Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp (NMOPC) as sacred sites for prayer rituals in Ghanaian Christianity. The paper argues that Pentecostals' influence in stimulating pilgrimage to Prayer Mountains in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity is an emerging aspect of the discourse on Africans' initiatives in Christianity.

Historical and Phenomenological Study

History, understood as historians' intentional efforts to recast the past realities in contemporary works, immediately presupposes prevalence of some historical events or phenomena that warrant the attention or engagement of the historian. The historical model in this context is thus couched on the notion that contemporary religious phenomena such as PMs have their pasts which are inextricably linked to their modern identities. The modern identities of those phenomena are therefore the result of several processes or stages of evolution /development which started long ago. Contemporary religious phenomena are therefore products of their past. The implication is that Christians' appropriation of religious phenomena, for instance, PMs, is partly the result of the Christians' awareness of how other Christian pilgrims have, over the years, patronized those sites as religious resources or as panacea to some of their existential challenges.¹²

The historical approach is employed in the study to examine the development of the Prayer Mountains in Ghana. Rev. Abraham Osei Asibey and Evangelist Kwadwo Gyasi are, in fact, the Ghanaian Pentecostal Christians believed to have developed the two Prayer Mountains object of this study.

The phenomenological approach, on the other hand, is an impartial description of PMs as sites characterized by trepidation and religious pilgrims' persistence to variously experience the transcendent realm

Seminary, 2002); Yohan Lee, 'The Analysis of the Prayer Mountain Phenomenon in Korea', (Dissertation; School of World Missions, Fuller, 1985).

¹² For an example of the use of the historical model, see 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), 9.

over there. The centrality of ‘experience’ in the phenomenological approach to the study of religion has been underscored. Spickard, for instance, notes that “In the study of religion, the term ‘phenomenology’ draws us toward the experiences that are supposed to underlie religious life.”¹³ The overarching point in Spickard’s assertion is that the phenomenological model to the study of religion seeks to impartially describe religious experience as it presents itself to subjective consciousness.¹⁴

It is basically an approach to the study of religion which requires the scholars of religion to suspend judgments about the phenomenon being studied, by bracketing out potentially distorting presuppositions stemming from both confessional Christian theology and from positivistic science in order that, by using empathetic methods, they could enter into the experiences of the believers or adherents to achieve understanding-in-depth.¹⁵

The implication is that by this model, my personal biases arising from my Christian inclinations are not only considerably minimized, but some of the prayer rituals undertaken on the Prayer Mountains by the pilgrims who appropriate the sites are also impartially examined.

The Discovery Narrative of Abasua Prayer Mountain

Abasua Prayer Mountain is located at Abasua under the jurisdiction of Nsuta Traditional Council. Oral tradition¹⁶ and participant observation indicate that Abasua community is surrounded by four mountains. These are *Krɔbo boɔ*, *Atwea boɔ*, *Yaase boɔ* and *Kompi boɔ*. *Atwea boɔ* was a very powerful mountain deity whose overarching influence and potency was believed to be the source of attraction to many traditional religious devotees and clients from diverse

¹³ James V. Spickard, “Phenomenology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religions*, eds. Michael Stausberg and Stephen Engler (New York: Routledge, 2014), 334.

¹⁴ Spickard, “Phenomenology,” 333.

¹⁵ Cox, *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 209.

¹⁶ The following were some of the people interviewed about the history of Abasua Prayer Mountain: The Very Rev. Isaac Yao Boamah, Superintendent Minister of Atonsu Circuit, Effiduasi Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana, 19 October 2010; Mr. Daniel Appiah-Aboraa, a retired educationist and a royal native of Abasua community, 13 August 2011; Mr. Kofi Boakye, a carpenter and a royal native of Abasua community, 13 August 2011; and Madam Adwoa Ape-masu, a native of Abasua community, 13 August 2011.

backgrounds to Abasua community. In that sense, *Atwea boɔ* was the pivot of the community's indigenous spirituality.¹⁷

Krɔbo boɔ, also referred to as *Krɔbo Kwasi Bediatuo*, was a powerful mountain deity on which warriors, political leaders and many other people tramped to for ritual bathing and mystical insulation against potential attacks especially, from malevolent forces and gun shots.¹⁸ As a mountain deity, it had a traditional priest by name Kwabena Adu.¹⁹ He did not only function as the mouth piece of the mountain deity, but also the medium through whom clients could reach the deity with their concerns.

A Christian Minister's discovery²⁰ of *Krɔbo boɔ* as a sacred mountain where God's presence dwells²¹ or sacred space for Christian prayer rituals, is believed to have resulted in the current paradigmatic shift of the people's²² religious focus from *Atwea boɔ* to *Krɔbo boɔ*. The people's belief in the potency of *Atwea boɔ* has drastically waned in favour of *Krɔbo boɔ*. The words of one of the citizens of Abasua community, Madam Adwoa Apemasu, confirmed this: Akan traditional religion, which used to dominate and overtly describe the religious life of Abasua community is now a minority phenomenon respect to Christianity.²³ This shift of the people's religious focus, to a large extent, is due to the discovery of *Krɔbo boɔ* as an ideal place for prayer, worship and miracles.²⁴ The discovery of *Krɔbo boɔ* and the subsequent re-appropriation of the site by Christian pilgrims are the basis for the 'redefinition of the site's identity from *Krɔbo boɔ* to Abasua Prayer Mountain.²⁵

The late Rev. Abraham Osei Asibey discovered *Krɔbo boɔ* as a sacred space in 1965,²⁶ when the traditional priest of the mountain deity had

¹⁷ Okyere, "Reconstructing Sacred Space," 47-50.

¹⁸ Nana Kwaku Kwarteng, interview granted the author, 29 March 2017, Abasua Community.

¹⁹ Nana Kwaku Kwarteng, interview granted the author, 29 March 2017, Abasua Community.

²⁰ Rev. Abraham Osei-Asibey, a Methodist Minister, is believed to have discovered *Krɔbo boɔ* in February 1965.

²¹ See Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea* (cover page).

²² These people include the clients who used to consult *Atwea boɔ* for assistance.

²³ For a good discussion on Primal Religions as preparatory grounds for the spread of Christianity in Africa, see Bediako, *Jesus in Africa*, pp. 20-33.

²⁴ Adwoa Apemasu, interview granted the author, 14 August 2011, Abasua community.

²⁵ Okyere, "Reconstructing Sacred Space," 13

²⁶ Very Rev. Isaac Yaw Boamah, interview granted the author, 19 October 2010, Effiduasi. C.f. Owusu-Ansah, *Abasua Prayer Mountain*, 11; Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea*, 4.

died.²⁷ The demise of the priest, in the opinion of Nana Kwaku Kwarteng, had a lot of ramifications on the Abasua community's Akan traditional religiosity. First, it implied the absence of the deity's spokesperson and the difficulty, if not impossibility, of clients having their concerns directly addressed by the deity. Second, it indicated an abrupt curtailment of sacrifices or religious rituals offered by the devotees to periodically activate and reinforce the deity's potency. This is because the physical presence of the traditional priest (being the medium between the devotees and the deity) was considered imperative for the validity and recognition of sacrifices offered to the deity.²⁸

It is said that prior to the discovery, the late Osei Asibey had been transferred from the Sunyani Circuit to the Asante Effiduasi Circuit of the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG) as the Superintendent Minister in 1963.²⁹ The then Effiduasi Circuit was a vast area since it extended to the Northern Region of Ghana.³⁰ The Circuit included Konongo, Achinakrom (around the Lake Bosomtwe), Asante Mampong, Atebubu, Wioso, Yeji, Ejura-Sekyeredumase, Asokore and Dwaben.³¹

The narrative of the 'discovery' of the site as a sacred space is captured within the context of a summarized version of an eye-witness account by the Very Rev. Isaac Yao Boamah. He maintains that in 1965, the Asante Effiduasi District Education Office was located at Asante Mampong. The late Rev. Osei Asibbey was travelling to Mampong to attend an official assignment in his capacity as the Local Manager of Methodist Schools. Mr. Yao Boamah was the driver of the Effiduasi Circuit car with which the late Rev. Osei Asibbey was travelling.³² Upon reaching Banko, one of the towns in the Effiduasi Circuit, the late Rev. Osei Asibbey allegedly saw the *Krɔbo boɔ* from afar and asked whether it was possible for people to go there. When they reached the Atwea community which was on their way to Mampong, the late clergyman was said to have been moved by an unusual urge to tell the driver to stop. Boamah maintains that the late clergyman felt insistently drawn to the top of the mountain: "Later in a chat

²⁷ Nana Kwaku Kwarteng, interview granted the author, 29 March 2017, Abasua Community.

²⁸ Nana Kwaku Kwarteng, interview granted the author, 29 March 2017, Abasua Community.

²⁹ Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea*, 4.

³⁰ Owusu-Ansah, *Abasua Prayer Mountain*, 11.

³¹ Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea*, 4.

³² Isaac Yao Boamah, interview granted the researcher, 19 October 2010.

with him, he (The Rev. Osei Asibbey), confessed, ‘My heart was strangely warmed when I encountered the mountain.’³³

Based on this ‘strange warmth’ and the inner urge of Rev. Osei Asibbey, they decided to go to Abasua community to inquire from the traditional leaders about the possibility of going to the top of the mountain. They decided to do this before continuing their journey to Mampong. When they reached Abasua community, they contacted the then chief, Nana Kwasi Marfo, about the possibility of visiting the top of the mountain. The chief’s response was that it was possible since some European tourists had been using the site for relaxation and merry making during summer holidays. However, because Rev. Osei Asibbey was on official assignment, they continued their journey to Mampong, and rescheduled to come back to Abasua after two weeks.³⁴ One of the people interviewed confirmed that Rev. Osei Asibbey and his driver reached Mampong at about 3.00 pm, but the meeting which he was attending had not yet started.³⁵

An insightful aspect of the above narrative is the presence of what Benjamin W. Warfield refers to as “the supernatural act.”³⁶ The supernatural act in the above narrative includes the irresistible sensation and heightened inner urge of the late clergyman to go to the mountain when they got to Atwea community. The researcher is however, not unaware of the potential difficulty this supernatural reality may pose to skeptics of the supernatural phenomena or those whose judgments of experiences are almost always scientifically motivated. The supernatural reality, in the opinion of such skeptics, may easily be relegated to the backdrop of natural occurrences or experiences without any link at all to the metaphysics. The claim that the late clergyman was driven to the mountain through an irresistible inner urge may be regarded as a manifestation of the psychological definition of religion as “a universal obsessive neurosis” or “some kind of profound inner

³³ Very Rev. Isaac Yaw Boamah, interview granted the author, 19 October 2010, Effiduasi. C.f. Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea*, p. 5.

³⁴ Very Rev. Isaac Yaw Boamah, interview granted the author, 19 October 2010, Effiduasi.

³⁵ Taller, a native of Abasua community disclosed this during an interview he granted the researcher at Abasua on 14 August 2011.

³⁶ The supernatural in this context refers to matters and experiences connected with forces that could not be explained by science. For discussion on “Christian Supernaturalism,” see Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 25-46 (Emphasis original).

experience.”³⁷ Thus the allusion to the supernatural reality as a major source of the *Krɔbo boɔ*’s discovery and sacredness may be rationally contested.

Despite this potential contention, I maintain that the supernatural occurrence that characterized the discovery of the *Krɔbo boɔ* cannot be completely relegated to the background. The supernatural occurrence is plausible because it has biblical antecedents. One of the biblical antecedents of a supernatural attraction to a sacred space was Moses’ encounter with the burning bush (Exod. 3:1-10). In Exod. 3:2-3, it is said: “And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, ‘I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.’”

From the above biblical antecedent, I can contend that both Moses and Rev. Abraham Osei Asibbey *felt* drawn to their respective sacred sites because of what they *saw*. Moses *saw* a burning bush that was not consumed, and the late clergyman allegedly *saw* *Krɔbo boɔ*, believed to be a mountain of God’s presence.³⁸

***Obɔɔ anim* as a Sacred Space**

The narrative of the ‘discovery’ of ‘*Obɔɔ anim*’ explores the customary ownership of the site and its tripartite orientation as a cocoa farm, a village site and a non-denominational prayer ground prior to its current status as a Christian pilgrimage site. It also focuses on some *theophanic* events which were perceived to confirm or attest to the site’s sacredness. The discussion further explores the development of the space for pilgrimage and prayer rituals by Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi.

Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp is traditionally referred to as *Obɔɔ anim*, meaning ‘in front of a rock or mountain’.³⁹ It is a mountainous sacred space supernaturally constructed and located in front of a mountain. From a Christian theological point of view, the supernatural aesthetic orientation of the site simply depicts God’s

³⁷ James L. Cox, *Expressing the Sacred: An Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion* (Zimbabwe: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1996), 4.

³⁸ Emphases is mine.

³⁹ Nana Ofori Agyapong, interview granted the author, 10 September 2016, Nkawkaw.

impressive creativity, stupendous design, unparalleled ability and unimaginable dexterity.⁴⁰

There seems to be a universal consensus among Christians with respect to God's unquestionable ownership of the earth and all its contents, including mountainous sites: "the earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."⁴¹ In Ghana, the traditional Akan Religious perspective of the Supreme God's identity as the greatest deity [and owner of the earth] also seems to be corroborated by this biblical position.⁴² It is, however, insightful to point out that the site is customarily owned by the late Nana Jacob Yaw Asiedu, the grandfather of Nana Ofori Agyapong, Nsuta Dikro, who is also one of the informants.⁴³

It formed part of Nana Asiedu's cocoa farm and the exact location where harvested cocoa pods were gathered, and the beans dried up. To minimize the difficult task of frequently climbing the mountain to carry down cocoa beans, especially during bumper harvest, Nana Asiedu thought it expedient and prudent to dry his cocoa beans at the village, before conveying them down for sale.

Owing largely to the plenteous quantity of cocoa the farmer harvested, his farm or village attracted people usually workers he recruited for several aspects of his project. Unfortunately, the demise of the farmer dealt a heavy blow to the lucrative cocoa business which had been a source of livelihood to many people at Nkawkaw and its environs. Surprisingly, the cocoa farm and the village were abandoned after the death of the man.

Scarcely did Nana Asiedu know that the activities related to his cocoa farm also underscore the site's assumption of a sacred status with the potency to attract many religious pilgrims from diverse backgrounds. Since the location of the cocoa farm and the village was mountainous, and therefore very serene and ideal for reflections and meditations, people from diverse religious persuasions — Christians, Muslims and practitioners of African Traditional Religion — use the site for prayer.

⁴⁰ William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 17.

⁴¹ Psalm 24:1 - English Standard Version Study Bible

⁴² Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 116-117.

⁴³ Nana Ofori Agyapong, interview granted the author, 10 September 2016, Nkawkaw. See also Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 116-117 for a discussion of ownership and use of stool lands.

Some of them were workers but others came from different areas of Ghana and other African countries such as Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger.

The foreigners who patronized the site claimed that they had dreams about the sacredness of the site. and to receive divine directions to the place.⁴⁴ It is thus in his context that the site's multipurpose orientation is constructed/defined – a cocoa farm, a village site and a non-denominational prayer ground. This tripartite identity of the site, with its inherent element of sacredness, in my opinion, suggests that the sacredness of the site was underscored long ago before the onslaught of *theophanic* events which allegedly confirmed its current spiritual potency as a Christian pilgrimage site.

In Eliade's theoretical scheme, designation of a site as sacred is generally a response to two types of events: *hierohanic* and *theophanic* events. The one that is of immediate relevance to this aspect of the work is *theophanic* event. In this event, Eliade posits that somebody receives a message from the deity and interprets it for others, to probably recognize and appreciate the site's sacredness or spatial non homogeneity.⁴⁵ Two of such *theophanic* events are the hanging of a cross in front of the mountain by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in Koforidua in 1958, and a prophetic declaration about God's gracious presence at the site. These events about the sacredness of the site were all perceived to have been orchestrated by God.⁴⁶

The utilization of the site for non-denominational prayer rituals by people of different religious traditions was reinforced in 1958 by the RCC in Koforidua. In that year, it is said that the RCC, under the inspiration of God, went to hang an aluminum cross on the mountain. The church, under the pastoral leadership of Bishop Joseph Oliver Bowers, further highlighted the sacredness of the place with this inscription on the face of the mountain: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Host ... Behold the Cross of the Lord."

⁴⁴ Nana Ofori Agyapong, interview granted the author, 10 September 2016, Nkawkaw.

⁴⁵ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20 – 27. See also page 19 of Chapter one of this work

⁴⁶ Nana Ofori Agyapong, interview granted the author, 10 September 2016, Nkawkaw; Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, interview granted the author, 27 July 2017, Mount Olive Prayer Camp, Nkawkaw

These religious symbols did not only accentuate the RCC's notion of the site's apartness and spiritual relevance, but also indicated the church's perception of Christ's ownership and territorial dominance of the entire earth, including Nkawkaw community and its environs.⁴⁷ These religious symbols are reminiscent of 20th January 1482, the date traditionally regarded as the introduction of Christianity in West Africa. J. Kofi Agbeti, a renowned Ghanaian Church Historian, observes that "On that day, a Portuguese expedition of 600 men, under the command of Don Diogo d'Azambuja who had landed at Elmina, near Cape Coast, in Ghana, a day before (symbolically announced their presence)."⁴⁸ Agbeti, citing C.P. Grooves, discloses that they:

*suspended the banner of Portugal from the bough of lofty tree, at the foot of which they erected an altar, and the whole company assisted at the first mass that was celebrated in Guinea, and prayed for the conversion of the natives from idolatry, (sic) and the perpetual prosperity of the church which they intended to erect upon the spot.*⁴⁹

It seems to me that the suspension of religious items such as a cross on the face of a mountain or a banner from the bough of a tree, and their respective religious inscriptions and prayer rituals, were part of the missionary or evangelistic strategies employed by Western Christian Missionaries who sought to announce their presence and missionary intentions in Africa. Thus such religious items, in my opinion, formed part of the means by which the Portuguese in the fifteenth-century and the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century negotiated for space to encounter Ghana's, then Gold Coast's, existing religious traditions (which they erroneously stigmatized, stereotyped and marginalized) and possibly spearhead a change in her indigenous religious culture through conversion.⁵⁰

The second *theophanic* event that allegedly attested to the spiritual potency of the site was a prophecy. Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, the founder of Nkawkaw Prayer Mountain, narrated the circumstances surrounding the prophetic utterance to the researcher. He said that in

⁴⁷ Nana Ofori Agyapong, interview granted the author, 10 September 2016, Nkawkaw.

⁴⁸ Agbeti, *West African Church History*, 3.

⁴⁹ Agbeti, *West African Church History*, 3. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁰ Jacob K. Olupona, "African Humanity Matters: Religious Creativity and Africa's World Encounters," in *New Perspectives on African Humanity: Beliefs, Values and Artistic Expression* eds. Gordon S.K. Adika, George Ossom-Batsa and Helen Yitah (Ghana: Adwinsa Publications, 2014), 1-37.

the year 1991, Rev. Kwame Nti, a pastor of the Resurrection Power Ministry, a Christian denomination at Nkawkaw, had organized a group of people into a Christian fellowship to pray on Wednesdays. Evangelist Gyasi indicates that it was in one of these prayer meetings that a certain sister prophesied about the prevalence of spiritual power at *ƆboƆ anim*. The prophecy literally meant that the Almighty God was present and active at the site. It was, therefore, imperative for Christians to go there ‘to wait on the Lord’ in prayer. Rev. Kwame Nti, upon hearing the prophetic utterance, began to lead his team to *ƆboƆ anim* to pray.⁵¹ The implication is that the prophetic utterance officially gave birth to pilgrimage movements to Nkawkaw Prayer Mountain.

The Transformation of *ƆboƆ anim* into Nkawkaw Mountain Olive Prayer Camp

The transformation of *ƆboƆ anim* into Nkawkaw Mount Olive Prayer Camp is attributed to Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi. He is credited to have founded and facilitated the development of *ƆboƆ anim* into a Prayer Camp of international repute.⁵² He reveals how *ƆboƆ anim* emerged to become a Christian sacred space of international standing, after the prophetic declaration which attested to God’s abiding presence at the site.

He confirms the dominance of mysterious powers and wild animals at *ƆboƆ anim*, prior to the prophetic utterance of the site’s sacredness and appropriateness for Christian pilgrimage rituals. In his opinion, it was a site densely populated by mysterious and weird creatures such as dwarfs and malevolent forces. He discloses that despite all these scarring forces at the site, he, together with Rev. Kwame Nti and the rest of the fellowship members (as they were then called) was never scarred to utilize the site for prayer.⁵³ They were actually determined to tarry there in prayer.

⁵¹ Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, interview granted the author, 27 July 2017, Mount Olive Prayer Camp, Nkawkaw.

⁵² Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, interview granted the author, 27 July 2017, Mount Olive Prayer Camp, Nkawkaw.

⁵³ Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, interview granted the author, 27 July 2017, Mount Olive Prayer Camp, Nkawkaw.

When Rev. Kwame Nti was transferred by his church, the Resurrection Power Ministry (1991), the zeal with which the fellowship members appropriated the site declined. The group's pilgrimage to the site, according to Evangelist Gyasi, eventually halted and the site was entirely abandoned. The members of the Christian fellowship who were patronizing the site with Rev. Kwame Nti retreated to their various denominations.

Between the years 1993 and 1994, Evangelist Gyasi discloses that he volunteered to resume pilgrimage to the site through prayer and fasting, in order to reactivate the spiritual fervor of the place. In his view, the prophetic utterance about the site's spiritual potency was authentic, inerrant and absolutely reliable. It was, therefore, thought to be inconsistent with Christian religious practice for such a prophecy to be repudiated by his refusal to patronize the site through pilgrimage.

He reveals that the resumption of pilgrimage movement to the mountain apparently coincided with what he considered to be a heightened activation of demonic operations over there. The site was overtly characterized, among other things, by sudden and surreptitious disappearance of his food items like banana and kenkey; loud laughter, conversation and touching of people by some invisible beings believed to be dwarfs. The dominance of spiritual forces on the mountain at that time was so heavy that the road from Nkawkaw to Atobie, at the vicinity of the PM, was almost always characterized by fatal motor accidents believed to be orchestrated by the malevolent forces that were thought to reside on the mountain.

The prevalence of these mysterious phenomena on the mountain, in Gyasi's opinion, infused in him an insatiable thirst and hunger for prayer anytime he embarked on pilgrimage to the site. He claims that he and other pilgrims who occasionally patronized the site were determined to prayerfully halt those fatal accidents.

In the course of time, he decided to move and stay on the mountain. He asserts that though he was young (less than thirty years at that time), he scarcely entertained fears. He further claims that for fourteen years (from 1994 – 2008), he was on the mountain praying and fasting, especially in the night, when evil spiritual forces were believed to heighten their diabolical and mischievous nocturnal expeditions.

Evangelist Gyasi attributes the coming into limelight of the prayer camp to God who, through dumbfounding miraculous deeds, continually proves himself faithful and powerful in the lives of pilgrims who come to wait on him in prayer. In his opinion, the dumbfounding miracles at the camp attest to the faithfulness of God as the real source of the prophetic utterance that attested to the site's spiritual potency. One of such astonishing miracles which popularized the prayer camp, according to Evangelist Gyasi, was God's revival of a dead woman through him in the year 1997 at Nkawkaw. The details of the flabbergasting miracle as narrated by the Evangelist are as follows:

In the year 1997, I was praying on the mountain with three of my Christian friends. I heard God instructing me to descend. I asked him why he wanted me to descend. He responded that he would show me the rationale behind the instruction. I obeyed and descended. Owing to excessive prayer and fasting, I had grown very lean; almost emaciated. I was divinely instructed by God to go to the Roman Hospital at Nkawkaw. Upon reaching the hospital, I saw three vehicles with their horns being incessantly tooted by their drivers; a scene that depicted a crisis situation. The passengers in the vehicles were also very intoxicated amidst singing of songs and noise making. When they reached the hospital where we were standing, they stopped. Suddenly I heard God speaking to me: "There is a dead body in one of the vehicles. The relatives were going to deposit her in the morgue. Go and pray for her to arise." I became startled and confused. In my confusion, I disclosed the instruction to one of my prayer partners. I tried to find out from one of the passengers in the vehicles the reason for their noise making and intoxication. The response was that their sister had suddenly died in the morning and they had come to preserve her in the morgue. I asked the person whether the relatives of the deceased would permit me to pray for her. Immediately they heard my request to pray for the deceased, the relatives, under the influence of liquor, began to hurl insults on me. They insulted me partly because I physically looked very emaciated due to excessive prayer and fasting. They could scarcely associate anything good such as spiritual vitality with me. But for the timely intervention of an elderly woman, the intoxicated mob would have pounced on me to beat me up for daring to request to pray for the revival of their deceased relative. The woman persuaded them to permit me to pray for her since, according to the woman, a favourable outcome of the prayer would be stupendous and exhilarating. The opposite, on the other hand, would not essentially matter much. The relatives consented for me to pray. I then instructed the relatives

to bring the dead body out of the vehicle. God ordered me to give the dead person water to drink. I asked God how a dead person could drink water, but I was still directed to obey by giving her water to drink. When I began, the water could not go down through her throat. God ordered me to hit her chest. When I did that the water entered her body and immediately, she was revived. The people who were holding her and those around the scene suddenly took to flight because of what had happened. I asked of her name, and she responded ‘Ama’, then she began to fall down. I gave her water and hit her chest the second time. Immediately, she opened her eyes and asked for food to eat, precisely, *banku*. The relatives who had run away in bewilderment returned when they realized that she had come back to life and even asked for food to eat. I asked what was wrong with her and she said that she had a problem with her heart. She was a Presbyterian. I told her relatives to go and give thanks to God in her church. The relatives asked of my identity and where I was staying. I told them that I was an Evangelist, staying on the Prayer Mountain at Nkawkaw.⁵⁴

The narrative of the revival of the dead person by Evangelist Kwadwo Gyasi points, among other things, to prayer and miracles as some of the major themes in Christian theology. Thus in this work, it suffices to assert that the revival of the dead person seems to establish a Christian theological paradigm of inextricable nexus between prayer and miracles. If this thesis is theologically valid, then anyone who conjectures the inevitability of miracles in any ‘prayer-infested’ Christian context is not far from right.

Given the astonishment of the people who witnessed the revival of the dead person — the several questions the relatives asked about the location or residence and identity of the Evangelist, the dominant notion of mystical causality in African religiosity⁵⁵ and the huge number of people attracted by religious functionaries perceived to be powerful or agents of uncommon miracles — Evangelist Gyasi drew many curious observers to the PM where he engaged in serious prayer rituals. In fact, he attests to the fact that God’s revival of the lady through him was a major contributor to his popularity and attracted a huge number

⁵⁴ Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, interview granted the author, 27 July 2017, Mount Olive Prayer Camp, Nkawkaw.

⁵⁵ Mystical causality in this context refers to the belief that the spiritual world of the African includes malevolent forces responsible for evil occurrences in life. See Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 76-84.

of pilgrims. Ever since the miracle occurred in 1997, he claims that the influx of pilgrims to the PM and the corresponding upsurge of supernatural manifestations of God have been massive and humanly unimaginable.⁵⁶ The continuous outpouring and experience of God's supernatural manifestations such as healing and deliverance at the PM culminated in the change of its name from *Oboɔ anim* to NMOPC in the year 2002.⁵⁷

The discovery narratives of the Prayer Mountains underscore several areas of scholarly relevance including the Pentecostal identities of Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi and the late Rev. Abraham Osei Asibey. David Barrett and Todd Johnson write that Pentecostals are:

Christians who are members of the major, explicitly Pentecostal denominations in Pentecostalism or the Pentecostal Movement or the Pentecostal Renewal, whose major characteristic is a rediscovery and new experience of the supernatural, with a powerful and energizing ministry of the Holy Spirit in the realm of the miraculous that most other Christians have considered to be highly unusual. This is interpreted as a rediscovery of the spiritual gifts of [New Testament] times and their restoration to ordinary Christian life and ministry.⁵⁸

Pentecostals hold the distinctive teaching that all Christians should aspire a post-conversion religious experience called baptism in the Holy Spirit, and that a Spirit-baptized believer may receive one or more of the supernatural gifts that were known in the early church. These supernatural gifts may include instantaneous sanctification, the ability to prophesy, to practise divine healing through prayer, to speak in different tongues or to interpret tongues, singing in tongues, singing in the Spirit, dancing in the Spirit, dreams, visions, discernment of spirits, word of wisdom, words of knowledge, miracles. Power encounters, exorcisms (casting out demons), resuscitations (reviving the dead or the unconscious), deliverances, signs and wonders.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, interview granted the author, 27 July 2017, Mount Olive Prayer Camp, Nkawkaw.

⁵⁷ Evangelist Frank Kwadwo Gyasi, interview granted the author, 27 July 2017, Mount Olive Prayer Camp, Nkawkaw.

⁵⁸ David Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, 'Global Statistics,' *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, in eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Mass (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 290.

⁵⁹ Barrett and Johnson, "Global Statistics," 291.

A cursory look at the roles of these Prayer Mountain founders; Evangelist Kwadwo Gyasi and the late Rev. Abraham Osei Asibey, to a large extent, seems to typify Barrett's and Johnson's description of Pentecostals.

The Implications of the Study for African Initiatives in African Christianity

The examination of the emergence of the Prayer Mountains by the two Ghanaian Pentecostal Christians and the discussion of some of the prayer rituals undertaken on the sacred sites appear to have implications for the unfolding scholarly debates about African initiatives in Christianity in Africa. In his 'African Church Historiography Reconsidered,' Omenyo cites Kalu's words: "Early African Christian Historiography has consistently been too Eurocentric or has overemphasized the role of Western missionary agents, who are often presented as having preached the gospel to 'passive' receptors."⁶⁰

Walls frowns on the Eurocentric approach to African church historiography and seeks to highlight the contributions of Africans in African Christianity. His observation is apt: "Modern African Christianity is not only the result of movements among Africans, but it has been principally sustained by Africans and is to a surprising extent the result of African initiatives."⁶¹ Walls further underscores that:

The crucial events of Christian history have often taken place through obscure people. The missionary movement itself, in both its Catholic and Protestant phases, has usually been a peripheral activity of the church. It would be hard to guess from the average volume on this history of the church in the nineteenth century that events that were to transform the church altogether were going on in Africa and Asia, for these events are likely to occupy a few pages in the volume at most.⁶²

⁶⁰ Cephas N. Omenyo, "African Church Historiography Reconsidered: Some Manifestations of African Initiatives in the Planting, Nursing and Growth of the Methodist Church Ghana," in Abamfo O. Atiemo, Ben-Willie K. Golo and Lawrence K. Boakye (eds.), *Unpacking the Sense of the Sacred: A Reader in the Study of Religions* (Oxford: Ayebia Clark Publishing Limited, 2014), 147. See also Ogbu U. Kalu, "Church Presence in Africa: A Historical Analysis of the Evangelisation Process," *ATER* (1979), 14.

⁶¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 86.

⁶² Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 53.

Therefore, an academic discourse that attempts to unravel the efforts, creativity, ambition and self-motivation of Ghanaian Pentecostals in the development of Prayer Mountains and their attendant pilgrimage attractions in Ghana is an attempt to position Ghanaian Christians at the centre of religious attraction, attention and relevance, as far as the development of Prayer Mountains as sacred sites in Ghana is concerned.

The upsurge of scholarly debates and interests in Ghanaians' initiatives in the development of Prayer Mountains as sacred sites in Ghana underscores further calls for a paradigmatic shift in the Eurocentric perspective of African church historiography. The paradigmatic shift calls, among other things, for Ghanaian interpretation of the emergence of Prayer Mountains in contemporary Christianity that does not gloss over the role of Ghanaian agency. Kalu notes that "The history of Christianity in Africa is not only what missionaries did or did not do, but also what Africans thought about what was going on, and how they responded."⁶³

Conclusion

Ghanaian Pentecostal Christians such as Evangelist Kwadwo Gyasi and the late Rev. Abraham Osei Asibey have contributed immensely to the establishment of Prayer Mountains as sacred sites which provide Christian pilgrims peace and relief from the burden of daily life. Therefore, contemporary scholarly writings and interests in Africans' initiatives in the development of African Christianity, in my opinion, would woefully be inadequate without adequate space for the role of Ghanaian Pentecostal Prayer Mountain founders.

The prevalence of Prayer Mountains as sacred sites established by Ghanaian Pentecostals underscores further calls for a paradigmatic shift in the Eurocentric perspective of African church historiography. The paradigmatic shift calls, among other things, for an interpretation of the emergence of Prayer Mountains in contemporary Christianity that intentionally showcases the indispensable role of Ghanaian Christians.

⁶³ Kalu, "Church Presence in Africa," 14; Omenyo, "African Church Historiography Reconsidered," 148.

Undoubtedly, the above narrative indicates that the sacredness of APM and NMOPC is a response to Eliade's *theophanic* and *hierophanic* events. The Prayer Mountains are now ecumenical sacred sites in contemporary Ghanaian Christianity, despite the Pentecostal identities of the founders. It would therefore be insightful for future researchers to demonstrate the areas of convergence and divergence among the denominationally different Christian pilgrims who usually patronize those Pentecostal Prayer Mountains.

Philip Okyere

philipkokyere@yahoo.com
Mfantsipim School
Cape Coast