



AFRICAN CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF DR. MENSAH OTABIL'S DESCRIPTION OF "AGGRESSIVE PRAYER" AS A "SYMPHONIC ORCHESTRA" IN THE CONTEXT OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF EFFECTIVE PRAYER

EXPERIENCIA CRISTIANA AFRICANA: ANÁLISIS CRÍTICO DE LA DESCRIPCIÓN DEL DR. MENSAH OTABIL DE LA «ORACIÓN AGRESIVA» COMO UNA «ORQUESTA SINFÓNICA» EN EL CONTEXTO DE LA HERMENEUTICA BÍBLICA DE LA ORACIÓN EFICAZ

Emmanuel Twumasi-Ankrah¹

Christian Service University, Kumasi, Ghana.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6305-2954>

Daniel Kyereahene-Mensah²

Christian Service University, Kumasi, Ghana.
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5610-277X>

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Resumen:

El floreciente desarrollo y la aceptación de lo que se denomina "oración agresiva" como un catalizador para la oración efectiva en el cristianismo africano ha sido recibido con cierta cautela por una parte de los fieles. Se utilizó un enfoque fenomenológico para examinar a los seguidores de la "oración agresiva" en la Montaña de Oración Abasua (Atwea) en Ghana. El área de "Campamento Tres" de esa montaña de oración, particularmente conocida por sus formas agresivas de oración, fue el foco de la investigación sobre los practicantes de la "oración agresiva" en Ghana. Este estudio ha identificado que las cosmovisiones africanas, junto con la apropiación generalizada de textos bíblicos y la influencia de las ideas pentecostales/carismáticas, han influido considerablemente en este fenómeno denominado "oración agresiva". Sin embargo, el estudio señala que la llamada "oración agresiva" se practica con una ideación errónea sobre su idoneidad, impacto y lo que realmente constituye una oración efectiva, que debería guiar la práctica de la oración en el cristianismo africano contemporáneo. Este artículo aborda un tema muy interesante sobre la oración desde una perspectiva crítica y moderna, lo cual constituye una aportación a los estudios bíblicos hermenéuticos. Presenta una tesis clara que desarrolla dos argumentos. Por un lado, describe la situación religiosa de la "oración agresiva" en Ghana y, por otro lado, cuestiona la hermenéutica bíblica empleada por los líderes del movimiento. Se afirma que la oración puede ser efectiva si se ofrece dentro de la voluntad de Dios, con el motivo adecuado, un corazón puro y en fe.

Palabra clave: Oración eficaz, oración agresiva, monopolio de la oración, Cristianos africanos, Montañas Atwea.

¹ Emmanuel Twumasi-Ankrah holds a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Theology at the Christian Service University in Ghana. Email: etankrah@csuc.edu.gh

² Daniel Kyereahene-Mensah holds a Master of Arts in Christian Ministry with Management from the Department of Theology, Christian Service University, Kumasi-Ghana. He is also a Physician Assistant and Pharmacy Technologist at the Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, Kumasi-Ghana. Email: danmekay@gmail.com

Abstract

The flourishing development and the accommodation of the so-called “aggressive prayer” as a catalyst for effective prayer in African Christianity has been taken with a pinch of salt by a section of the Christian faithful in Ghana. Phenomenological approach was used to examine the patrons of “aggressive prayer” on Abasua (Atwea) Prayer Mountain in Ghana. The “Camp Three” area of that prayer mountain, particularly known for “aggressive” strains of prayer was the focus for the examination of patrons of “aggressive prayer” in Ghana. The African worldviews, together with the overarching appropriation of proof-texts and the influence of Pentecostal/Charismatic ideas have been identified by this study to have informed greatly this so-called “aggressive prayer” phenomenon. However, the study notes that the so-called “aggressive prayer” is practised with false ideation about its appropriateness, impact and what actually constitutes effective prayer that should inform the practice of prayer in the contemporary African Christianity. This paper has addressed a very interesting subject of prayer from a critical and modern perspective, which would be a contribution to biblical hermeneutical studies. It presents a clear thesis which develops two arguments. On one hand, it depicts the religious situation of “aggressive prayer” in Ghana and on another hand, questions the biblical hermeneutics employed by the leaders of the movement. It is asserted that prayer may be effective if it is offered in the will of God, from the right motive and pure heart and in faith.

Keywords: Effective prayer, aggressive prayer, monopoly of prayer, African Christians, Atwea Mountains.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of praying aggressively has become such a glaring and an open African Christian practice in most prayer sessions of many Christian groupings in Africa today, such that people employ all sorts of gesticulations and emotional elements such as persistent hand-clapping, stamping of feet, screaming, shouting with accompaniment of musical instruments, dancing, wailing, rolling on the ground, and imaginably shooting, boxing, roaring at and beating with canes, their perceived enemies. In the experience of Bruno Reinhardt, an Anthropologist, who joined a small group on the Atwea Mountains in Ghana for prayer sessions, describes how during the “chronotopes of *warfare prayers*, the prayer points and moods visibly changed, transitioning from hopeful pleas toward a dark and militaristic ambiance, filled with authoritative attacks on the devil.”³ “Bodies shook more and gestured more aggressively,” he observed.⁴ Some Ghanaian Christians engage in some of these practices for one reason or the other and stress these requirements for more effective prayer. Implying that prayer becomes more potent when it is loud, forceful and with physical gesticulations (aggressiveness). This is affirmed by Ampong, who considers persistent hand-clapping in Ghanaian Christian prayers as a form of “Aggressive Prayer” and has this to say:

The phenomenon of hand-clapping at prayer meetings seems to have become so common across denominational groupings and congregations in contemporary times. Much as gestures are known and accepted as a means of communication, this practice seems to have assumed a twist which suggests that it is a theologically appropriate gesture that has a catalytic power to ensure that expected results are obtained. The phrase; *se mebo me nsa mu bo mpae a ...* literally, “if I clap my hands and pray...” is suggestive of this notion⁵.

Some aged believers and a couple of well-known preachers are repugnant of this phenomenon and have described that prayer trend in various derogatory words. Many of them are prominent leaders and influential members of Pentecostalism and or Charismaticism in Ghana. Notable among them is Mensah Otobil of International Christian Gospel Centre (ICGC) who in expressing his concern, described such phenomenon of prayer

³ B. REINHARDT, “Waiting for God in Ghana: The Chronotopes of a Prayer Mountain”, in: M. K. JANEJA – A. BANDAK (eds.), *Ethnographies of Waiting Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2018, 129.

⁴ B. REINHARDT, “Waiting for God in Ghana...”, 130.

⁵ A. E. AMPONG, “Doctrine or Experience? A Theological Assessment of Persistent Hand Clapping in Contemporary Ghanaian Christian Prayer”, *Ghana Journal of Religion and Theology (New Series)* 8.1 (2018) 49.

in the contemporary church in Ghana as a “symphonic orchestra”⁶. Duncan Williams agrees with Otabil on this unconventional phenomenon of prayer as he refers to it as a “lazy way of praying, foolish and or unnecessary spirituality”⁷. The remarks from these two particular leaders did not go down well with advocates of the so-called “aggressive prayer” phenomenon in Ghana, thus, attracting bashings, castigations and strong criticisms from the faithful against Otabil and Duncan Williams. Many described them as old folks in leadership who have lost steam and gone off the boil in real ministry⁸.

This paper sets out to examine the so-called “Aggressive Prayer” phenomenon in Ghana in the context of hermeneutics of effective prayer. It discusses the concept of prayer and what constitutes effective prayer from the biblical perspective, monopolization of prayer, and goes on to analyze the precursors of “aggressive prayer” in African Christianity. The data was organized through structured and semi-structured interviews with random sampling techniques with some prayer patrons on Abasua (Atwea) Prayer Mountains in Ghana. Participant observation was also employed where the researchers during their visits on the Abasua Prayer Mountains, joined various prayer groups and prayer sessions in order to get in-depth understanding about the worldviews and praxis of those prayer patrons. The data collected was transcribed, sorted, analysed and has been thematically presented in this paper.

Atwea Mountain is located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, and became a place of pilgrimage in 1963, when the Methodist reverend minister, Abraham Osei-Asibey was led to it through a series of personal revelations. He eventually founded the *Kristo Mu Anigye Kuo*, “Happiness in Christ Fellowship,” a charismatic prayer group that met at the mountain’s top periodically⁹, claiming Atwea Mountain, which hitherto was a traditional shrine for a powerful Akan deity¹⁰, as a Christian territory. After the Pentecostal-charismatic revival coursed through the country in the late 1980s, Atwea became a widely known site of pilgrimage, attracting charismatic Christians from multiple denominations all across Ghana¹¹ who go there purposely to fast and pray.

2. Biblical Concept of Prayer

Generally, prayer is viewed to be a communication between a believer (worshipper) and his/her object of worship. Prayer, therefore, establishes a personal relationship between human and God, and it is the basic act of religion¹². To Karl Barth, cited in Ashley Cocksworth, prayer is the culmination of one’s conception of what it means to be a creature before God. The creature gains its creatureliness in faith, obedience and prayer – with prayer, as the chief exercise of faith, becoming the means through which the whole self is obediently gathered before God¹³. From a biblical perspective, “prayer,” rendered in Hebrew as *t^ephillāh*, denotes intercession and supplication (2 Sam. 7:27; 1 Ki. 8:22)¹⁴. The word, is a derivative of the verb, *pālal*, which connotes “to judge” or “decide” officially or mentally, executing judgement or having an expectation¹⁵. It could also mean to “make prayer,” “pray,” “entreat,” “intercede” “seek,” “cry” and “make supplication” (1

⁶ M. OTABIL, *Grace and Works: Spiritual Empowerment Program dubbed, Time with Dr. Mensah Otabil, (Sermon Preached at Calvary Charismatic Center), Anyigya - Kumasi, Ghana 2022.*

⁷ N. D. WILLIAMS, “Understanding the Right Way to Pray in Tongues”, *Facebook video post*, February 24, 2022, http://fb.watch/gfk5_8-Xba/ Accessed April 3, 2022.

⁸ A personal communication with some advocates of “aggressive prayer” during our visit to the Abasua (Atwea) Prayer Mountains, March 16, 2022.

⁹ K. J. ASAMOAH-GYADU, “On the Mountain of the Lord: Healing Pilgrimages in Ghanaian Christianity”, *Exchange* 36.1 (2007) 72.

¹⁰ Interview with OBAAPANIN ADWOA NSIAH and NANA KWAME WIREDU of ABASUA, February 3, 2022.

¹¹ K. J. ASAMOAH-GYADU, “On the Mountain of the Lord...”

¹² DE R. VAUX, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan 1997, 457.

¹³ A. COCKSWORTH, “When Prayer Goes Wrong: A Negative Theology of Prayer”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* (2023) 4. 1-14. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–75).

¹⁴ J. STRONG, *Strong’s Abingdon Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1980, 8605.

¹⁵ M. HAYNES, “Prayer in the Pentateuch”, in: A. J. COETSEE – F. P. VILJOEN (eds.), *Biblical Theology of Prayer in the Old Testament*, AOSIS Publishing, Cape town - South Africa 2023, 9.

Sam. 7:5; Gen. 20:7; 1 Ki. 13:6; 2 Chron 7:14)¹⁶. There is also the use of the verb, *siyach*, as found in Psalm 55:17 which presents the idea of to “lament,”¹⁷ “utter,” “converse with,” “commune with,” “complain,” “declare,” “meditate,” “contemplate,” “speak or talk with” God¹⁸. Its usage in the New Testament (NT) is not different from that of the Old Testament in the sense that the Greek, *proseuché*, which appears over 80 times would mean “an oratory,” or “prayer” to God (Mat. 17:21)¹⁹. The verb, *proseuchomai*, denotes “to pray,” “make prayer,” “pray earnestly” and “supplicate” to God (Mat. 6:6, 9)²⁰. It can be observed that prayer is first and foremost an intercession, a plea, request, communication and a supplication, asking for favour or graciousness from a superior by an inferior being.

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, there were times when believers had to go for lessons on prayer. It was one of the fundamental bulk or school of knowledge people acquired. In fact, long before Christianity, it was one of the rubrics that a young Hebrew had to go through during his studies in the synagogue schools. As it were, prayer is a great theological and ecclesiastical subject, taught by the great rabbis, prophets, scholars and monks. Hence, the existence of the “Prayer of Moses, the Man of God” (Ps. 90:1-12), “A Prayer of David” (Pss 17, 86 and 142), “The Prayer of Nehemiah” (Neh. 1:4-11), “Habakkuk’s Prayer” (Hab. 3:1-19) and “The High Priestly Prayer of Jesus,” (Jn. 17:1-26) recorded in the Bible for instructions for believers.

Prayer, being a subject to be taught and learnt, is widely supported by Scriptures. For instance, in Romans 8:26, the text asserts that a believer may be ignorant or have little knowledge about prayer. In Luke 11:1-13, the disciples of Jesus, having observed him pray, expressed their illiteracy in the subject of prayer and demonstrated their willingness for him to instruct them. As a result, Jesus ceased occasions to teach his disciples how to pray (Lk. 11:2-13, 18:1-8). Does that mean that a person has the right to determine whose prayer is effective and whose one is ineffective just because he/she happens to be the leader?

2.1. Monopolization of Prayer among African Christians

Prayer has become increasingly militarized in recent years, especially in African Christianity. The so-called “aggression,” is believed to be a catalyst for effective prayer. To the extent that non-aggressive (passionate) prayer modes are considered ineffective and are consequently annulled during prayer sessions by some prayer leaders. It can be recounted from a personal experience that on two occasions, some prayer leaders, having motivated patrons to pray, had to abruptly stop them from praying after they had prayed for about 30 seconds, because in their estimation, the prayer lacked enough emotions (aggression) and thus could not be effective. This is a clear case of monopolization of prayer by the prayer leaders. If prayer is meant to be a communication between a believer and God, it would not take a third person to determine its effectiveness or otherwise. In fact, similar monopoly of religious practices are observed in churches in Africa during the giving of offerings, where some leaders publicly trivialize and reject the money of some fateful whose offerings are thought to be too small.

This prayer monopoly can be situated in the larger idea of religious monopoly, deeply rooted in African Traditional Religion (ATR). In ATR, it is the priests who have the spiritual authority to determine the efficacy of the offerings and prayers of the worshippers. They seem to have the ability to notice when a particular sacrifice or offering has been accepted by the gods and vice-versa. A worshipper would be required to keep presenting new and “better” sacrificial items until the priest declares them

¹⁶ M. HAYNES, “Prayer in the Pentateuch...”, 9.

¹⁷ S. J. KSELMAN – L. M. BARRÉ, “Psalm 55: Problems and Proposals”, *The Catholic Quarterly* 60.3 (1998) 440-462.

¹⁸ STRONG, *Strong’s Concordance...*, 7879.

¹⁹ STRONG, *Strong’s Concordance...*, 4335.

²⁰ STRONG, *Strong’s Concordance...*, 4336.

efficacious and acceptable. In this case, the priest assumes a monopoly over the spiritual relationship between the worshippers and their object of worship. As it well, this is likely to create room for abuse of power and corrupt practices since the worshippers have no means of verifying the claims of the said priest.

From the foregoing, one could speculate that some African Christian prayer patrons have adopted the idea of prayer monopoly from the priests of ATR. This explains why some prayer leaders would boldly annul the prayers of prayer patrons just because of the absence of emotions. These prayer leaders seem to have developed their own criteria for effective prayer. To them, an effective prayer is that one which is “aggressive,” full of emotions and physical “gymnastics.” The goal of monopolization of prayer among prayer leaders in Africa could simply be to model a prayer pattern (aggression in prayer) for their prayer patrons and also to arrogate to themselves an unwarranted superiority. This is confirmed by Uroko et al., that “Religion has been so commercialized and commoditized to the extent that we now have “prayer consultants and contractors” whose task is to assist spiritually “weak” people to fast and pray for divine solutions to their problem²¹. These “prayer consultants” arrogate to themselves the right to determine whose and which prayer is effective. Their ability to make their followers believe that they are experts regarding prayer and the fact that they are considered to occupy a privilege place in the heart of God, gives them the impetus to monopolize the prayer of people.

2.2. “Aggressive Prayer” among African Christians

It appears “aggressive prayer” is more common and gaining much ascendancy in African Christianity than in Europe and other parts of the world. Marshall affirms concerning the prayer sessions in the Mountain of Fires and Miracles Ministry (MFMM) in Nigeria, to be “prayers full of violent, aggressive language”²². “Aggressive Prayer,” is a recent trend of prayer where a believer infuses and incorporates emotions such as wailing, screaming, laughing; and physical actions such as hand-clapping, walking vigorously, stamping of feet, throwing of fists and legs in a fighting stance, rolling on the floor, hitting the ground with sticks and stones and drumming and dancing as catalysts for effective prayer. Since the emotions they attach to their prayer and the bodily actions they exhibit are usually characteristic of violent people and describe acts of aggression, the prayer patrons themselves call it “Aggressive Prayer”:

In such prayer sessions, believers are exhorted to dip their fingers in the blood of Christ and poke out the eyes of their imaginary enemies and violent words like “die,” “break,” “destroy” and “fire” are repeated like bullets, fired in rapid succession. It is literally machine-gun prayer that is heaven bombarding that gives God an understanding that he has no alternative but to answer –it is intensely physical, and often induces violent shaking, vomiting, and writhing on the ground or complete loss of consciousness²³.

These fateful are of the view that the aggression and the physical “aerobics” they exhibit in their prayer, constitute essential catalysts for effective prayer. This trend of prayer is very common at prayer grounds in Ghana such as the Abasua (Atwea) Mountains, Abono Mountain, Achimota Forest, KNUST Botanical Gardens, Buoho Grotto; on football parks, university campuses, and recently, at dawn on radio stations and churches. One could suspect that in Ghana, the trend must have emerged from the patrons of Abasua Prayer Mountain in Ashanti Region. It is arguably the most famous, frequently and largest patronized prayer ground in Ghana. On that prayer ground, one

²¹ C. F. UROKO – B. OKPONUNG – A. NGOZIKA, “A Theological Pastoral Perspective to Prayer Ministry in Nigeria”, *KhazanahTheologia* 5.1 (2023) 43.

²² R. MARSHALL, “Destroying Arguments and Captivating Thoughts: Spiritual Warfare Prayer as Global Praxis”, *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2.1 (2016) 96.

²³ R. MARSHALL, “Destroying Arguments...”, 96.

would observe that almost every prayer patron engages in the so-called “Aggressive Prayer” in all sessions of prayer (from adoration to supplication). Reinhardt, from a personal experience, affirms that on his visit to the Atwea Prayer Mountains in Ghana, he observed this prayer practice of militaristic intensity, where a group of prayer patrons he accompanied, expanded a list of prayer weaponry, (recited from a book) into a ‘machine gun,’ ‘bomb,’ ‘submarine,’ ‘grenade,’ an ‘armour tank,’ and so on to bombard the devil and his hordes for many hours²⁴.

The attribution and the phenomenology for this trend of prayer could be well-grounded if one takes into consideration the chilly weather on that mountain, especially in the evenings and early mornings when majority of the patrons prefer to engage in prayer. Psychologically, the prayer leader would have to militarize the prayer group by psyching them to throw their fists, stamp their feet, clap, walk vigorously, shout, dance and so on in order to keep themselves warm to enable them participate fully in that prayer session. This reason could not be religious, left alone, it being biblical but psychological, which helps the members to keep warm and achieve attentiveness throughout a long period of prayer session²⁵.

The “Aggressive Prayer” phenomenon in African Christianity has also been attributed to the idea that Africans believe that their environment is full of spirits whose activities could have adverse effects on the corporeal beings. Asante defines worldview in terms of the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which the members of a culture assent, (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value system”²⁶. This definition according to Asante, presupposes that culture is the bearer of people’s value system which is the product of their worldview²⁷. Amevenku and Boaheng who in another way couch worldview as “a mental model of reality, a framework of ideas and attitudes about the world, ourselves and life”²⁸. According to Martin, worldview is “a people’s basic set of beliefs, or system of faith, or way of thinking”²⁹.

Baidoo affirms that “African Christians’ prayer phenomenon that goes with clapping of hands, jumping, rolling on the ground, moving around, throwing up of hands and legs vigorously in a fighting fashion, only mimics African traditional worldview of worship; which also expresses the understanding that life is a warfare, as the scriptures say “we wrestle not against flesh and blood”³⁰. This is in keeping with one popular quote of David Oyedepo, that: “Life is a warfare not a funfair, those who mistake it for a funfair ends up becoming casualties of war or worse still prisoners of war –everyone living, there is either something is fighting you or you are fighting something and in both parts of the equation, there is a war”³¹. “Satan and his demons are real, and they constantly intervene in the material natural world to nefarious ends, holding sway over entire nations or territories; satanic powers seek to thwart the Christian at every turn”³².

This attests to the fact that most Africans see life as a battle ground with ancestral spirits, witchcraft spirits and idol spirits among others that one needs to subscribe to the demands of that battle by being “aggressive” in prayer. Thus, sometimes, when prayer patrons are under dreadful and emotionally traumatized situations, seeking for God’s intervention, they may appear distressed and would physically express agony and

²⁴ B. REINHARDT, “Waiting for God in Ghana...”, 130.

²⁵ An interview with A. F. BLESSING, “The Senior Pastor of Glory House Chapel International at Santa Maria in Accra”, at Abasua (Atwea) Prayer Mountains, Camp Three, March 16, 2022.

²⁶ E. ASANTE, *Issue on African Traditional Religion, Humanities, Ethnicity and Development: Impact on African Christianity*, SonLife Press, Accra 2017, 1.

²⁷ E. ASANTE, *Issue on African Traditional Religion...*, 1.

²⁸ M. F. AMEVENKU – I. BOAHENG, “Use of Imprecatory Prayers in Contemporary African Christianity: A Critique”, *ERATS* 1.2 (2015) 86-104, 1.

²⁹ J. MARTIN, *The Evolution of a Creationist*, Biblical Discipleship Publishers, Texas 2002, 22-23.

³⁰ Interview with J. BAIDOO, of the Methodist Church, Ghana, Tamso Circuit in Tarkwa at Atwea Prayer Mountain, March 16, 2022.

³¹ D. OYEDEPO, *How to Win Battles of Life*//SHILOH, 2006. <https://youtu.be/qjnXUUsXzTQ> Accessed October 3, 2022.

³² R. MARSHALL, “Destroying Argument...”, 93.

“aggression” as was in the case of Jesus (Lk. 22:42-43)³³. Such a context of constant spiritual battle for domination, would evolve a belief that there could be spiritual impediments standing between patrons’ prayer requests and responses and that their awareness of this reality could cause them to act physically—throwing their hands in combat, kicking, yelling, breaking, untying, pushing, cutting and stuffs like that.

It is therefore worthy of note that the African world space into which the European-American Christianity entered, was a religious one in which God, the Supreme Being, was known and was ascribed “the attributes of Almighty and Omnipresent”³⁴. Africans were not only sure of the existence of God, but were also aware of the activities of corporeal and tutelary spirits. In fact, they believed that the world belongs to the Devil and will continue to do so until Christ returns³⁵. Christianity then, was understood as white people's religion because of its European-American characteristics— worship style, language used and related idioms, as well as beliefs and disbeliefs.

Talking about Africa, Werner Simpfendorfer posited that; “the principal religions are African Traditional Religions (ATRs), Christianity and Islam. These have not lived in watertight compartments but have interacted with each other, principally because traditional African thought and religions, having cultures of hospitality, tends to absorb ideas from elsewhere”³⁶. With the establishment of African Instituted churches (AICs) which encourage clapping, singing and dancing, Christianity was now seen to fit the African context than before; “a place to feel at home”³⁷. This means that the AICs came out of both the background of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and the Western Mission Churches, absorbed some of the characteristic beliefs and practices of these two religious’ institutions. This avers further that the Christianity situated into the African space, led to the infusion of elements of the African religion and beliefs, raising issues suggestive of syncretism.

The syncretic African Christian community today, according to Koduah, has made African Christianity to develop “demon-conscious Christians” rather than “Christ-conscious Christians”³⁸; informing their aggressiveness in prayer. For this reason, Among cited Mbiti as posited that African people respond in many and various ways to their spiritual world of which they are sharply aware. This response generally takes on the form of worship, which is eternalized in different acts and sayings. These acts may be formal, regular or extempore, communal or individual, ritual or unceremonial, through word or deed³⁹.

The evolvement from traditional religion to Christianity in a very good observation, seems to have had little or no influence on the African worldview; as it stands evidently that most African Christians still believe that there are forces opposing their progress. Assenting to this revealing fact, Asamoah-Gyadu, argues that “Anybody who knows African Christians intimately will know that no amount of denial on the part of the church will expel belief in supernatural powers from the minds of the Christian”⁴⁰. Pobee agrees to same as he also indicates that all AICs have exuberant styles of worship which engage everyone present in song, clapping and prayer. They are said to be primarily interested in the adaptation of Christian teaching and liturgy to indigenous cosmology and ways of worship; they stress expressive and emotional phenomena and cater for strong fears of

³³ O. BARNES, a minister of the Methodist Church, Ghana, in an interaction with the researchers on Abasua Prayer Mountains, February 1, 2022.

³⁴ K. GYEKYE, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Sankofa Publishing Company, Accra 1998, 4.

³⁵ B. REINHARDT, “Waiting for God in Ghana...”, 133.

³⁶ W. SIMPFENDORFER, “Africa”, in: N. LOSSKY – J. MÍGUEZ BONINO – J. POBEE – T. F. STRANSKY – G. WAINWRIGHT – P. WEBB (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva 2002, 5.

³⁷ S. J. POBEE, “African Instituted (independent) Church”, in: N. LOSSKY – J. MÍGUEZ BONINO – J. POBEE – T. F. STRANSKY – G. WAINWRIGHT – P. WEBB (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva 2002, 13.

³⁸ A. KODUAH, *Christianity in Ghana Today*, Advocate Publishing, Accra 2004, 34.

³⁹ A. E. AMPONG, “Doctrine or Experience...”, 51.

⁴⁰ K. J. ASAMOAH-GYADU, “Pentecostalism and the Missiological Significance of Religious Experience: The Case of Ghana’s Church of Pentecost”, *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* XII.1.2 (2002) 29-34.

witchcraft among Africans⁴¹. Thus, many patrons of “aggressive prayer” would cite: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood...” (Rom. 6:18), “Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. Take up shield and armor; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to me, ‘I am your salvation’” (Ps. 34:1-3), “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (1 Pe. 5:8-9) etcetera. All of this is to say that the overriding scriptural authority seems to serve a good substrate for most of the African worldview, if not all, in favor of “aggressive prayer.” Thus, to the African Christian mind, prayer is not only offered verbally or said, it is also acted.

2.2.1. Influence of Pentecostalism/Charismatism on “Aggressive Prayer” in Ghana

One significant feature of Charismatism/Pentecostalism is their emphasis on prayer and the need for one to be “born again” and enjoy life free from the manacles of the devil. For charismatic Christians, prayer is the most important tool and catalyzer of faith⁴². To achieve this, there is the need for one through the power of the Holy Spirit, to discern the activities of evil or demonic forces, then, through aggressive prayer as in words that cannot be altered and the blood of Jesus which could neutralize their diabolic plans, counter every real and perceived demonic orchestrations against him/her. This is usually referred to as “spiritual warfare” that is, the deployment of the power of the Holy Spirit in the fight against destructive powers in the lives of people. Alluding to this, Adu-Boobi stated, “The hallmark of every Charismatic/Pentecostal Christian is the baptism of the Holy Ghost with its evidence of speaking in tongues for the purposes of prayer to God and for the destruction of the works of the devil”⁴³. This implies that to him, if one can speak in tongues, then God has given him/her an aggressive weapon to engage in warfare against evil forces. Pentecostalism is defined broadly to encapsulate Christian groups that evince a manifestation of the gifting of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), healing, deliverance and prophecy⁴⁴. Asamoah-Gyadu, defines Charismatism/Pentecostalism from an intercultural perspective, as a Christian group that places emphasis on: salvation in Christ as a transformative experience, wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic phenomena, including “speaking in tongues,” prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general, perceived as standing in historic continuity with the experience of the early church as found especially in the Acts of the apostles, are sought, accepted, valued and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experiences of his Spirit⁴⁵.

There are about three shades of this group in Ghana based on the eras within which they operated and the religious trend they evolved and leadership styles. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movements emerged in Ghana in the 1900s, with the first strand classified as the African Initiated Churches/African Indigenous Churches/African Instituted Churches (AICs), whose main uniqueness was prophetism, centering on a prophet or prophetess leader⁴⁶. The second, called the Classical Pentecostal Churches who are noted to remain orthodox to the biblical Pentecostal characteristics with emphasis on the agency of the Holy Spirit domination of the believer with evidence of

⁴¹ S. J. POBEE, “African Instituted...”, 12.

⁴² B. REINHARDT, “Praying until Jesus Returns: Commitment and Prayerfulness among Charismatic Christians in Ghana”, *Religion* 47.1 (2017) 51.

⁴³ A. BOOBI, *Personal Communication with the researchers on Abasua Mountains*, 2022.

⁴⁴ F. BENYAH, “Commodification of the Gospel and the Socio-economics of Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana”, *Legon Journal of Humanities* 29.2 (2018) 118.

⁴⁵ K. J. ASAMOAH-GYADU, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*, E. J Brill, Leiden 2005, 23-28.

⁴⁶ G. C. BAETA, *Prophetism in Ghana: A Study of Some Spiritual Churches*, SCM Press, London 1962.

speaking in tongues and the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit⁴⁷, and the third or new wave, is categorized as the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic strand, whose emphasis is on the need to be “born again” in order to experience the blessings and transformation, success and prosperity and empowerment of God, which includes material salvation – healing and deliverance from the power of darkness⁴⁸. This is consistent with Asamoah Gyadu’s observation that healing and deliverance from the perspective of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements is geared toward rebuking and binding demons, castigating witches and defying them by the power of Jesus Christ⁴⁹. In a more recent times, the new trend identified, is the addition and application of *mpaebc akadej*, “prayer objects,” such as scarfs, handkerchiefs, oils, creams, fruits, water, kenkey, porridge, and many others, believed to possess divine enduements; which if appropriated in the name of Jesus and faith, facilitate the effectiveness of a believer’s prayer and can ward off and neutralize demonic onslaughts.

It is imperative to discuss the influence of Pentecostalism/Charismatism on pilgrims’ appropriation of the Abasua Prayer Mountains because of its presumed indispensability and overarching significance in contemporary Christianity in Ghana. For instance, Adogame maintains that:

The debut, visibility and mobility of the Pentecostal movement and the Charismatisation of mainline Christianity have combined to reshape the African [or Ghanaian] religious landscape so profoundly that its footprints [and influence] can hardly be sidestepped. Its stark emphasis on personal pneumatic experience, expression and committed evangelical re-engagement of depth spirituality has implications that transcend the religious sphere to how humans deploy religious power for economic, social and political gymnastics vis-à-vis the sacraments of life⁵⁰.

This African Christian reality has become even more real at a time when many Sub-Saharan Africans are struggling to live above the poverty line. The economic hardships seem too extreme that health care systems have almost broken in many of these nations of Africa. Religion as it were, is the only opium. Prayer grounds have become havens for the people against further spiritual onslaughts. Thus, the so-called “Aggressive Prayer,” could only be an expression of their frustrations and a reprisal display of counter-hegemony of “enough is enough!” “What will happen will happen,” today, is today.” Uroko et al, observes a similar trend in Nigeria. He reports that “Nigerians seek refuge in churches and mosques to escape the economic crisis, poverty, unemployment, family issues, and other societal problems”⁵¹. “People prefer to project their hearts’ cries to God and seek his intervention in their concerns through prayer ministry”⁵². This is confirmed by Olukoya that “violent’ prayer coupled with “violent” faith gives you uncommon breakthroughs –it is adamant prayer; stubborn prayer; enough-is-enough prayer; unapologetic prayer, that is, prayers you pray without regret; bold prayer, that is, fearless with courage to demand a response; unwavering prayer; steadfast prayer, which has just one goal: elimination of the enemy”⁵³. Atiemo also indicates that one of the changes in Ghana since 1995 is the obvious Pentecostalization of the Ghanaian traditional churches. He affirms that most of the Ghanaian “mainline churches,” which he now prefers to call “traditional churches” have become almost completely Pentecostal; and there are hardly any distinctions between them and the newer churches in terms of grassroots theology,

⁴⁷ J. CHATFIELD, “African Independent Churches: Friends or Foes? An Exercise in Doctrinal Dialogue”, *Cyberjournal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research* 13 (2004) <http://www.teenet.net/vol4p8.htm>.

⁴⁸ F. BENYAH, “Commodification of the Gospel...”, 118.

⁴⁹ K. J. ASAMOAH-GYADU, *African Charismatics...*

⁵⁰ A. ADOGAME, “Foreword”, in: J. KWABENA ASAMOAH-GYADU, *Sighs and Signs of Spirit: Ghanaian Perspectives on Pentecostalism and Renewal in Africa*, Regnum Africa, Akropong-Akuapem 2015, xvii.

⁵¹ C. F. UROKO – B. OKPONUNG – A. NGOZIKA, “A Theological Pastoral Perspective...”, 45.

⁵² C. F. UROKO – B. OKPONUNG – A. NGOZIKA, “A Theological Pastoral Perspective...”, 45.

⁵³ D. OLUKOYA, *Wicked Powers, Crashland Power Must Change Hands Service*, MFM Ministries, London 2013.

worship patterns and other practices. Pentecostalism has become more “mainline” than the churches which previously carried that designation⁵⁴. One of the essential ramifications of the above quotations is that Pentecostalism has become so dominant and attractive in Ghana that it influences almost every aspect of the Ghanaian Christians’ life, including their prayer life and pilgrimage to the Prayer Mountains. Atiemo classifies the reasons for which people are attracted to the Pentecostal/Charismatic wave under psychological, social, intellectual and spiritual⁵⁵. The spiritual reasons, according to Atiemo, are:

The need for sense of mystery – the desire to be united with God; the search for a spiritual experience that transforms and restores, the desire for super-natural power to overcome destructive habits, weaknesses, and difficulties in one’s life e.g., help to overcome smoking, drunkenness etc., the need for spiritual guidance and direction e.g., people want leaders they can rely on and look up for guidance through life, and the desire to overcome the felt or the perceived effects of the activities of malevolent spiritual forces such as witches and demons⁵⁶.

This is telling of the reason Pentecostalism is very striking to many Christians with its special unique exhibition in prayers; promoting “aggressive” forms of prayers because it seems to have answers to almost all their existential concerns. It is sometimes born out of, or at least shaped by, a certain mutual cognition in which phenomenological, social-anthropological and historical standpoints are complementary methodologies⁵⁷. The point is, a person’s prayer mode is usually occasioned by factors such as context, prevailing conditions, lived experiences, beliefs and others.

2.2.2 Biblical and Theological Basis for “Aggressive Prayer” among African Christians

There are biblical and theological basis for “aggressive prayer” phenomenon according to many African Christian prayer patrons. They cite some of the teachings and acts of Jesus as proofs for their display of aggression and physical antics in prayer. One of Jesus’ prayer sessions prior to his death as recorded in Luke 22:42-44 “...Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.’ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground,” is taken as a proof-text for the “aggressive prayer” phenomenon. To them, Jesus could not have perspired, let alone have his sweat, drop like blood if he had prayed silently or calmly. Implying that Jesus was an aggressive prayer patron and remains the perfect example to be emulated by Christians⁵⁸. This view is in keeping with Olukoya when he says: “As God’s children, we are supposed to do all our things militantly. We read the Bible militantly, speak militantly, evangelize militantly and pray militantly because God himself is not a civilian but a soldier ... The Lord Himself is a man of war. So, when you pray, you are employing a very powerful military strategy...Militant prayer must have power and fire in it”⁵⁹.

There are controversies surrounding the authenticity of Luke 22:43 and 44⁶⁰. It is interesting to read the numerous scholarly contributions arguing for or against whether or

⁵⁴ O. A. ATIEMO, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections*, Heken Ltd., Accra 2016, IV.

⁵⁵ O. A. ATIEMO, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections...*, 29-30.

⁵⁶ O. A. ATIEMO, *Aliens at the Gate of Sodom and other Reflections...*, 30.

⁵⁷ A. ADOGAME, “Foreword...”, 498-518.

⁵⁸ D. SAMOAH, a minister of the Methodist Church, Ghana, interviewed on Camp Three of Abasua Prayer Mountains, March 16, 2022.

⁵⁹ D. OLUKOYA, “Prayer as a Military Strategy”, *SermonCentral* (2022), <http://www.sermoncentral.com>. Accessed on February 3, 2022.

⁶⁰ M. POPE, “The Downward Motion of Jesus’ Sweat and the Authenticity of Luke 22:43-44”, *The Catholic Quarterly* 79.2 (2017) 261.

not the verses (43 and 44) belong and why they might have been omitted or inserted in the Lukan corpus. The question has been disputed among Christian theologians since the fourth century, by Epiphanius, Jerome, and Hilary of Poitiers⁶¹. These scholarly debates have arisen because there appear to be variant texts in some important ancient manuscripts⁶². It is worthy of note that more classic and recent text-critical arguments and solutions regarding the place of this controversial verse in the Gospel of Luke have been offered by scholars⁶³. Whether or not Ghanaian Christians whose advocacy for “aggressive prayer” mode is based on this text (Lk. 22:43-44), are aware of and care at all about the scholarly debates regarding the authenticity of these verses in Luke, is another issue for another time. Their position on this prayer mode has been outright and straight forward: Jesus prayed like that when he desperately needed God’s intervention, why not Christians?

However, if one looks at the text (Lk. 22:42-44) critically, it appears that Jesus’ actual prayer demand, in part, is ignored completely by the Father to whom he prays but rather something different, “strength,” is delivered to him (v. 43). That is to say, the purported “aggression” in Jesus’ prayer made no contribution to the effectiveness of the prayer. God, the Father, knowing what really Jesus needed (strength), gave that which was completely different, and not requested for. One could also advance the point that Jesus’ request was answered suitably, since his request was of two prongs—God was appealed to take away the looming sufferings from him or to go ahead and make him face it; whichever way, he was at his beck and call and under his sovereign will. Christian soteriology that avows that the sacrificial death of Christ is the only propitiation rite, capable of redeeming sinful humanity (Isa. 53:1-12; 1 Cor. 15:3; Heb. 9:22-26) would have been in question if the Father had acceded to the first part of Jesus’ request. Thus, Jesus, bracing himself up for the inevitable and imminent task (sufferings and death of a sinner), could evolve an understanding of the paradoxical content and the agonizing nature of the prayer.

This analysis would suggest that the case of Christ Jesus’ “aggressive prayer” in the Gethsemane experience, seems to be a much serious version of what is practised today, in that the scriptures are silent on the possibility of his physical involvement but majored on the possible battle of the mind, expressed in the ferocity of his own words against his own will “...if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will” (Matt. 26:39). Today’s “aggressive prayer” phenomenon unfolds with much elaborations of physical involvements such as clapping, shouting, running, walking, drumming and dancing among others which makes sweating during the events of prayers obvious. This implies that one may not be completely out of tangent to say that Christ Jesus’ supposed “aggressive prayer,” was essentially “aggressive” in words and not just in action or gesticulations. This view comes forcefully when one closely reads the Lukan writer’s description of the two immediate actions of the Christ appearing in the verse (v. 41) before the pericope that generates the subject of prayer. According to Luke, Jesus withdrew from the disciples and knelt down (v. 41) before praying. Even though this aspect is often overlooked in the discussion on the Gethsemane prayer of the Lukan Christ, it could postulate that this prayer of Jesus, was a private one; not public and a silent (though intense); not a loud one. This view is affirmed by Clivaz that “the silent prayer of Jesus in Luke 22:43 has been seldom commented on by scholars focusing on Luke 22:42 ...”⁶⁴.

MacArthur postulates that the phrases, “this cup,” and “not my will,” as contained in these scriptures, “do not imply that there was any conflict between the will of the Father and the will of the Son. It was a perfectly normal expression of His humanity that He

⁶¹ C. CLIVAZ, “Luke 22:43-44 and Judeo-Christian Memories” *REJ* 182.3-4 (2023) 283.

⁶² M. C. TUCKETT, “Luke 22, 43-44: The ‘Agony’ in the Garden and Luke’s Gospel”, in: F. J. DELOBEL – A. DENAUX (eds.), *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis*, Leuven University Press, Leuven 2002, 131-144.

⁶³ C. CLIVAZ, “The Angel and the Sweat like ‘Drops of Blood’ (Lk 22:43-44: P69 and f13)”, *Harvard Theological Review (HTR)* 98 (2005) 420-422.

⁶⁴ C. CLIVAZ, “The Angel and the Sweat like...”, 300.

shrank from the cup of divine wrath. But even though the cup was abhorrent to Him, He willingly took it, because it was the will of the Father. In this prayer, He was consciously, deliberately, and voluntarily subjugating all His human desires to the Father's perfect will. Thus, there was neither conflict between Father and Son, nor between the deity of Christ and His human desires"⁶⁵. This is telling that one prays amiss if prayer requests are skewed towards selfish interest which do not reflect the will of God concerning particular situation in life. God cannot be put under compulsion by people's agony, emotional gestures and postures attached to prayers.

The facts in verses 43-44 are related only by Luke, the physician. The phrase, "like great drops of blood" (v. 44), suggests a dangerous condition known as *hematidrosis*, which describes the effusion of blood in one's perspiration. It can be caused by extreme anguish or physical strain. Subcutaneous capillaries dilate and burst, mingling blood with sweat. "Christ Himself stated that His distress had brought Him to the threshold of death"⁶⁶. Wiersbe agrees with MacArthur as he posited that; "Luke is the only gospel writer who mentions "sweat ... like great drops of blood." His use of the word "like," may suggest that the sweat merely fell to the ground like clots of blood. But there is a rare physical phenomenon *hematidrosis*, in which, under great emotional stress, the tiny blood vessels rupture in the sweat glands and produce a mixture of blood and sweat"⁶⁷. This is corroborated by Matthew Henry that:

It is some dispute among the critics, whether this sweat is only compared to drops of blood, being much thicker than drops of sweat commonly are, the pores of the body being more than ordinarily opened; or, that real blood out of the capillary veins mingled with it, so that it was in colour like blood, and might truly be called a bloody sweat; the matter is not so great. Some reckon this one of the times when Christ shed his blood for us [i.e., the other time being the crucifixion], for without shedding of blood there is no remission. Every pore was as it were a bleeding wound, and his blood stained all his raiment⁶⁸.

Here, scholars are of diverse views. Some limit their interpretation to the physical elements at the Gethsemane scene of the plot while others take a theological position by connecting this scene to the broader Christo-redemption theme in the Lukan Gospel. The statement in Luke, by itself, could be classified as garden-centered since the cross is not immediately mentioned⁶⁹. Nevertheless, in the words of Thomas Scott, "when one contemplates Christ, the Redeemer in 'an agony, praying more earnestly' [Luke 22:44], and 'his sweat like great drops of blood falling down to the ground' [Luke 22:44], while 'he was bruised for our iniquities' [Isaiah 53:5]; we shall pray also to be enabled 'to resist unto blood, striving against sin' [Hebrews 12:4], if we should ever be called to it"⁷⁰. Clearly, here, the Lukan Jesus sweating blood in Gethsemane is identified with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53⁷¹. This paper's interest, is mainly a hermeneutical exploration of the Lukan description of the scene (vv. 42-44) that has solicited for a similar prayer mode among some Christian patrons of prayer in Ghana.

However, the condition of *hematidrosis*, occurring at a prayer session can earn a very important positive argument that such prayers cannot be any solemn prayers but an aggressive one. For such an instance, it is however suggestive that such aggressive prayer was very highly intensely ferocious; which when subjected to investigation might reveal

⁶⁵ J. MACARTHUR, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary: Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville 2005, 2008-2009.

⁶⁶ J. MACARTHUR, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary...*, 2008-2009.

⁶⁷ W. W. WIERSBE, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*, David C. Cook, Italy 2007, 216.

⁶⁸ M. HENRY, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament... with Practical Remarks and Observations*, R. Carter, New York 1827, 4:541-42.

⁶⁹ G. ADAMSON, "Gethsemane and Atonement Again" *Dialogue* 57.3 (2024) 6.

⁷⁰ T. SCOTT, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, According to the Authorized Version; with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References*, S. T. Armstrong, Boston 1827, 434.

⁷¹ G. ADAMSON, "Gethsemane and Atonement Again...", 7.

that no man has ever gotten to and or will ever get to that level Jesus got to with aggressive prayers. But yet without favorable self-willed results until final subjugated submission to the will of the Father which seems to have attracted the compensatory angelic strengthening.

Likewise, in reference to Hebrews 5:7-8, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence," one may argue that in Gethsemane, Jesus agonized and wept, but committed himself to do the Father's will in accepting the cup of suffering which would bring His death (Matt. 26:38-46; Luke 22:44, 45). Anticipating bearing the burden of judgment for sin, Jesus felt its fullest pain and grief (cf. Is. 52:14; 53:3-5, 10). Though He bore the penalty in silence and did not seek to deliver himself from it (Is. 53:7), He did cry out from the agony of the fury of God's wrath poured on his perfectly holy and obedient person (Matt. 27:46; cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus asked to be saved from remaining in death, i.e., to be resurrected (cf. Ps. 16:9, 10)⁷².

MacArthur, here, seems to be portraying a winning thought in favor of aggressive prayer that reflects the will of God as in praying the will of God aggressively. However, this does not give any special consideration for praying aggressively in that it is obvious; what put God on duty to answer prayers is His will and not our emotional gestures and postures. Wiersbe further agrees with MacArthur as he highlights that "the writer of Hebrews 5:7, focused on the Lord's experience in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46). As he faced the cross, it was not the physical suffering that burdened Jesus, but the fact that he would be made sin and separated from his Father. Other servants of God have faced death and not expressed such great emotion; but no other servant ever bore on his body the sins of the whole world. In his Gethsemane prayer, the Lord did not oppose the Father, but prayed, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). He was not praying to be spared from death, but to be saved out of death. He was praying for resurrection from the dead, and God answered that prayer"⁷³. "The writer of Hebrews states that Jesus' prayer "was heard" (Heb. 5:7), that is, answered by the Father. Since he did die on the cross, this could not have been what he was praying about; for if the Father had answered, the Son would not have been crucified. He did not pray to be saved from death, but out of death, and God answered his prayer by raising him from the dead"⁷⁴. Wiersbe seems to portray same understanding with MacArthur that Jesus subscribed to the will of God; was heard; and God answered his prayers by the resurrection from the dead. This means that Jesus was praying for a specific outcome in the future in line with the will of God for his life.

This brings an important observation that seems to underscore human's struggles with faith that seems to create room for aggressive prayers; as the humaneness of Jesus seems to wrestle with His divinity (His God Nature) on the grounds of his faith. He knows that God is able to do it; and God will do it; however, his human experiences present an impossibility in the earth realm, because what God has promised him does not look normal as to what is permitted to happen on earth realms: Jesus probably was wondering if God will interrupt his grand plan and design for life on Earth just to fulfil his promise to him; but that was exactly God's will for him and he only needed to subscribe to it. One may argue that, the angels which came to strengthen Jesus was a sign to prove to him that God will come through on his promised will, as well as Lazarus who was brought back to life. Jesus, knowing all this and yet seems to struggle with accepting God's will for him, brings to bear his and our human nature. The New International Version of Galatians 5:17 says that; "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the spirit, and the spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not

⁷² J. MACARTHUR, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary...*, 2756.

⁷³ W. W. WIERSBE, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary...*, 815.

⁷⁴ W. W. WIERSBE, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary...*, 815.

do whatever you want.” This arguably is what necessitated and or resulted in Jesus’ aggressive prayers; yet these emotional responses expressed in that agonizing or aggressive prayers could never have been fruitful if the will of God was not identified and engaged in that prayer. This is to say that God tolerated all that as far as he was able to bring himself back into God’s will for him in prayer.

Patrons of “aggressive prayer” also lay hold on Luke 18:1-8 which records Jesus’ parable of a poor widow and a wicked judge as a biblical and theological basis for their prayer phenomenon. The parable relates that the poor widow’s case was unduly delayed by a certain ungodly presiding judge, yet the widow kept on going to the judge to inquire about the outcome of the judicial investigations and a possible date for the determination of the matter. Her persistence was becoming irritating to the judge and consequently, he delivered the needed justice to the woman. Here, the Lukan narrator states clearly right at the onset that the purpose of the parable is to teach persistence in prayer. The content of the parable reveals nothing more than consistency and persistence. The widow is not portrayed as violent and aggressive. All that she symbolizes in the text is a person who does not give up but steadfastly pursues a goal in prayer.

This is affirmed by Stuart. He expressed that:

Jesus talks about some of the positive qualities we need to have to be recipients of the abundant blessings He has for us. The first one is constancy. The parable of the unrighteous judge and the widow teaches just one point. The point is not to describe the woman or the nature of God. The single point is that if an unrighteous judge, secular judge will finally hear your appeals, how much more will your appeals be heard by your heavenly father, who loves you and cares about you supremely. This then does not give any justification for aggressive prayers as a requisite for answered prayers⁷⁵.

Stuart, in this commentary seems to draw home the understanding that God is always willing to answer our just prayers. He is not a man who looks at the outward and as such, gesture and emotions attached to prayers may not appeal so much to Him but rather the disposition of the heart in relation to His will. McGee agrees with Stuart, even though he subtly overthrows the argument of whether this parable is teaching Christian the need for persistence and or constancy. To him, the parable is by contrast and not by comparison. He therefore maintains that:

Many Bible teachers say that this parable teaches the value of importunate prayer... This is not a parable on the persistency of prayer—as though somehow God will hear if you hold on long enough. This is a parable by contrast, not by comparison⁷⁶. We act as if we have to hold on to Him or He will not hear us at all. We don’t have to hang on to His coattail and beg and plead with Him. God wants to act in our behalf! If we would come into His presence with an attitude of knowing that He wants to hear, it would transform our prayer lives⁷⁷.

Wiersbe strongly agrees with McGee as he reflects that “Unless you see that Jesus is pointing out contrasts, you will get the idea that God must be “argued” or “bribed” into answering prayer! God is not like this judge, for God is a loving Father, who is attentive to our every cry, generous in His gifts, concerned about our needs, and ready to answer when we call”⁷⁸.

One of the cardinal issues that point “aggressive prayer” patrons to find support from the Bible for their way of prayer, is the reality of enemies, demons, evil spirits and Satan

⁷⁵ D. B. STUART, *The Preacher’s Commentary Series volume 1 through 35. Geneses – Revelation*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville 1987, 34371. (Z-lib. Org, epub).

⁷⁶ V. G. MCGEE, *On Prayer: Praying and Living in the Father’s Will*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, USA 2002, 11.

⁷⁷ V. G. MCGEE, *On Prayer...*, 12.

⁷⁸ W. W. WIERSBE, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary...*, 200.

with whom they are in constant combat. Rodd affirms:

Evil spirits cannot be reformed or negotiated with. They can only be expelled in a forceful way that has to be considered an act of spiritual violence. We think of Jesus as the standard for a peace-loving, non-violent approach to one's enemies, but he taught it was to human enemies only that we are to turn the other cheek, not to demonic foes. He never allowed Satan and the demons to have their way. Instead he took a forceful, authoritative, even violent posture, at every turn re-buking, resisting and casting out these evil forces. He speaks of Satan in Mark 3:27 and says this strong man must be bound if his captives are to be liberated. Binding a strong man involves violent combat, yet it is a battle the Church can win through the power of God...Prayer is the decisive weapon in this struggle— and is often aggressive and violent. The structures and forces of injustice, oppression and war are so overwhelming that all our efforts to help will fail unless we first invite God into the fray. Until we have achieved victory in prayer, it is hopeless to engage the outer world in combat⁷⁹.

Rodd and others like him are of the view that Jesus Christ himself, taught and demonstrated the need for Christians to handle Satan, demons or evil spirits and human enemies of the kingdom of God with aggression through the power of God, invoked in prayer. The term deployed by Paul in the famous verse of his second letter to the Corinthians concerning the nature of “the weapons of our warfare” (2 Cor. 10:4), is *strateias*, which he also uses in his exhortation to Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12), a term which translates as (military) campaign, or expedition, and which is used figuratively by Paul to describe the apostolic career⁸⁰.

One could further consider the prayer of Hezekiah as a proof text for “aggressive prayer”:

Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: “Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD (2 Ki. 20:3-5).

Prayer patrons who use this scripture to support the reason they pray aggressively, are of the view that aggressive prayers seem to be equipped with the potency of changing God's mind on certain issues of life. As they interpret king Hezekiah's weeping bitterly as praying in a loud voice with shedding tears; as the scripture said, “I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears,” for this reason, God heard his prayer and gave him an instant intervention. Even though the Bakers commentary on Isaiah 38 seems to confluence with them on their understanding of “wept bitterly” as posited; “in lamenting his early death, Hezekiah compares himself to be like a bird, he made a noise in his anguish”⁸¹, but does not suggest same as the reason for the answer to his prayers. According to Wiersbe, God's favorable response to Hezekiah's prayer was strictly on the terms of God's covenant promises enshrined in his word (2 Chron. 6:16-17). “This promise was part of the Lord's gracious covenant with David and his descendants (2 Sam. 7:1–17), and Hezekiah was simply reminding the LORD that he had been faithful to obey His law. In other words, as a faithful son of David, he was “qualified” to live”⁸². Rydelnik and Van-

⁷⁹ D. J. ROBB, “Strategic Prayer”, *World Vision* (1997), 77-78.

⁸⁰ R. MARSHALL, “Destroying Arguments...”, 94.

⁸¹ A. W. ELWEL, *Bakers Commentary on the Bible*, Baker's Book House Company, Michigan 1989, 498.

⁸² W. W. WIERSBE, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary...*, 717.

laningham agree with Wiersbe as they aver that “He sent Isaiah back to Hezekiah to inform him that He was about to heal him and add fifteen years to his life. But the rationale for doing so was God’s own covenant-keeping character. The Lord stated, “I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David’s sake (v. 6)”⁸³.

This is very important of note that the LORD God is not moved to answer prayers due to the emotions attached but rather by his own will. And from the experience of Hezekiah’s son; the late repenting Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:12, 13:

And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.

Readers are however presented with the swift gracious and favorable response of God to emotionally attached prayers; understood as aggressive prayers; because of a person’s desperation to return back to doing God’s will and proving that the LORD is God. This however is telling that God does not bend His will to meet human needs but rather humans have to fulfill His word to have their needs met. In this particular scenario, one could argue that emotionally attached prayers offered in line with God’s word could be a catalyst to a swift favorable response to prayers. What actually makes prayer effective from the Bible’s perspective remains a daunting task and has become almost an unresolved theological question.

2.3. Biblical Hermeneutics on Effective Prayer

There is arguably some clear difference in putting the word of God into practice which is acting on the word and acting out the word of God as in making an outward exhibition or just a public show without a personal intimate connection and or commitment to the word. Some patrons of “aggressive prayer” seem to put up an act of the word of God for an outward recognition as a serious and effective prayer which could be deceiving of one’s self. Richard Afriyie, the caretaker at the Camp Three site of the Abasua Prayer Mountain, affirms that “If one looks at the aggressiveness at which some people pray; one might assume that their prayer modus constitutes an effective work of prayer, while in the sight of God it may not turn out to be so”⁸⁴. He adds that “people pray, focusing too much on the gymnastics of prayer than their personal commitment to the word of God: some may pray actively clapping; dancing; moving in and out while their mind or heart might not be on what is being prayed about. They may be seen in physical gesticulations and aggressively in prayer yet, without attention and focus. This is to say that, the one who prays a prayer must have a personal relationship with the God of the Bible”⁸⁵. According to Afriyie; God does not answer prayers when one’s heart is not committed to him⁸⁶. That is the reason scriptures states from 1 Samuel 16:7 that “man looks at the outward appearances but God looks at the heart.” His assertion seems to affirm that when one prays, the word of God, the mind, the thoughts and spirit must all be in alignment.

Afriyie further buttressed his point with a vision of one woman from Aburi who had gone to pray in February 2020 to wait on the LORD at the Camp Three site of the Abasua Prayer Mountain. In her vision, she saw a cargo car on the Abasua Prayer Mountain fully loaded with packages of goods and angels were offloading and sharing them to people on the mountain. She was surprised however to see that these angels were not giving the

⁸³ A. M. RYDELNIK – M. VANLANINGHAM, *The Moody Bible Commentary: A One Volume Commentary on the Whole Bible by the Faculty of Moody Bible Institute*, Moody Publishers, Chicago 2014, 1057.

⁸⁴ An interview with R. AFRIYIE, Camp Three of Abasua Prayer Mountains, February 1, 2022.

⁸⁵ AFRIYIE, interviewed at Camp Three Abasua Prayer Mountains, February 1, 2022.

⁸⁶ An interview with AFRIYIE, Camp Three Abasua Prayer Mountains, February 1, 2022.

packages to everyone who was there, so she inquired from one angel who said they were instructed to give the package to only those who were praying; not those making noise⁸⁷. One could assert that on many times, people may be seen praying aggressively but in actual sense they may be just making noise as the Bible puts it; “they pray amiss” (Jas. 4:3).

However, there appears to be important principles that the Bible teaches believers on what constitutes effective prayer and or how one ought to approach prayer. Biblical teachings one gleans from the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, include the need for prayer to be made in the will of God. According to John, the confidence believers have is that God hears prayers (requests) that are made according to his will (1 Jn. 5:14). This would imply that praying in the will of God is one of the conditions for effective prayer. It can be observed that this idea of prayer was pragmatically employed by Jesus himself in his prayer of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, prior to his crucifixion, when he said, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be down” (Lk. 22:42). Here, Jesus, in his humanity, would wish that the horrific death prepared for him would be assuaged but he reckoned that the possibility or otherwise of his wish, was contingent on the sovereign will of God.

Another principle for effective prayer that the Scriptures points out is that prayer must be made with the right motive. This principle is succinctly captured in the Epistle of James as: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures” (Jas. 4:3 NRSV). In this text, the writer clearly affirms that one’s prayer may be ineffective and or wrong. He establishes that the motive of a prayer patron is what determines effectiveness. A self-centred, self-gratifying and vindictive motivated prayer is likely to be ignored by God. This implies that the idea that seeks to justify aggression in prayer among African Christians because the patrons have their spiritual and physical enemies in view, could be theologically problematic.

The clearest biblical principle for effective prayer is that prayer must be made from a pure heart. The effectiveness of one’s prayer is therefore contingent on the purity of his or her person in the sight of God. This commensalistic relationship between purity and prayer is advocated for on several occasions in the Bible. For instance, in the Wisdom Literature and the Prophetic Books, having a sinful heart and engaging in wickedness alienated one from God. In Proverbs, it is stated: “If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov. 28:9, ESV). The Psalmist also avows: “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the LORD would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer (Ps. 66:18-19, ESV). The Prophet Isaiah graphically reveals: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear” (Isa 59:1-2, ESV). Likewise, Micah avers: “Then they will cry to the LORD, but he will not answer them; he will hide his face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil” (Mic 3:4, ESV). From the biblical perspective, not all prayers are effective and not all prayers would be answered by God. One could observe that in the sight of God, the person of prayer (prayer patron) is as important as the prayer of that person. This prayer ideation is so crucial that from the viewpoint of the Christ, an unforgiven-hearted prayer patron would have his or her prayer blocked and rendered ineffective (Mk. 11:25).

Another principle necessary for effective prayer would be the element of faith (belief). On one occasion when Jesus Christ was explaining to his disciples the reasons behind effective prayer, he stated: “Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. So I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer,

⁸⁷ An interview with AFRIYIE, at Abasua Prayer Mountain, February 1, 2022.

believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mk. 11:23-24, NRSV). To Jesus, disbelief could be one of the reasons why people would not have their prayers answered. This is affirmed in the Epistle of James that prayer patrons must always make their prayer in faith, never doubting, for if they doubt, the LORD may not listen to them (Jas. 1:6-8).

3. Conclusion

At best, “aggressive prayer” achieves alertness and concentration among prayer folks. It has become an unconventional means by which some Ghanaian Christians express and deal with their existential fears, anxieties and frustrations. However, the attempt to cite some biblical texts and ascribe theological motivations in order to lend credibility to it as a catalyst for effective prayer, falls short of critical biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. Effective Christian prayer would not depend on the magnitude of screaming and howling, preciseness and coordinated nature of clapping, headshaking, walking and jumping nor speaking unknown words (tongues), but on the motive behind the prayer, the pure state and unwavering faith of the prayer patron and ultimately, the sovereign will of God. If the prayer of even Jesus Christ was ever considered effective at all, it was because the prayer was made in accordance with the principles adduced from the Bible. That is, Jesus submitted his will to God, the Father, and the fact that his reverence and obedience to God was unquestionable but not just because he prayed with loud cries and tears. This paper argued that the so-called “aggressive” phenomenon of prayer could simply be considered as part of Christian experience and individual Christians may use it as their preference at one time or the other. However, aggression in any way, does not facilitate an effective prayer. Thus, it is recommended that pastors educate their members about the biblical concept of effective prayer.

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