

Even though it is not the intention of this research to validate the propriety of the practice it needs to be pointed out that both the motives and the activities of SSV have not passed without criticism. This makes the rationale for undertaking this study justifiable especially as it attempts to examine the significant contributions SSV is making towards the building of a vibrant, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led Church at the forefront of holistic Evangelism and discipleship for the transformation of society.

But also of crucial importance to the study are:

- a) The fresh insights the practice of SSV seems to be introducing into the church's liturgical expression;
- b) The justification for the practice becoming a measure for people's spiritual standing in the church;
- c) The contribution of the practice towards the MCG renewal.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

A number of apprehensions have been expressed about the Methodist Church Ghana's involvement in institutionalized mass pilgrimages to sacred sites both at the connexional and diocesan levels notwithstanding their popularity. Among these are the SSV's linkage with the churches' renewal programme, especially the MPRP, with its slant towards selected tracks out of the five main tracks,¹² the issue of lay-clergy conflicts,¹³ unorthodox practices prevalent at the Church's prayer centres¹⁴ and the duplicities of the connexional programmes at the diocesan centres. The study therefore seeks to examine

¹² The most preferred tracks, preaching, praise and worship, healing and deliverance, but very little of counseling and teaching, nothing on social and welfare and discipleship.

¹³ Abamfo Atiemo, *The Rise of the Charismatic Movement in the mainline Churches in Ghana* (Accra: Asempa, 1993), 48.

¹⁴ See Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 260. A view affirmed by Very Rev. Isaac Boamah, a supernumerary of the Methodist Church Ghana and a very close associate of Rev. Abraham Osei-Assibey, in an interview he granted the researcher on March 19, 2011.

the perceptions of the church authorities as well as the laity about the practice and all its related issues, in the light of these challenges.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study include the following:

1. To examine the role of SSV and its contribution towards the renewal programme of the Methodist Church Ghana.
2. To evaluate the renewal programme of the Evangelism Mission and Renewal Ministry of the Methodist Church Ghana.
3. To analyze SSV and related concepts from the perspectives of the Methodist Church Ghana.
4. To Collate and analyse the views and perceptions of the Church, both the hierarchy and lay, on SSV in regard to the contribution it is making towards the Renewal Programme of the Church.

1.4 Research Question

In light of the problem of the research, I posed the question: what are the views and perceptions of the Methodist Church (clergy and lay), regarding the practice of SSV? To expound the above, I posed a further question thus: what contribution is the practice of SSV making towards the Renewal programme of the Church to ensure the realization of the Church's vision towards growth which is the sole rationale of the church's renewal programme?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study is confined to the Methodist Church Ghana. The work focuses on three selected sites operated by the Methodist Church Ghana, namely, the William de Graft Memorial Centre (WdGC) at Azani in the Sekondi Diocese in the Western Region,

Thomas Birch Freeman Memorial Centre (TBFC) at Adansi Kusa in the Obuasi Diocese in the Ashanti Region and Abasua Prayer Centre (APC) in the Effiduase Diocese in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. These sites have been selected by reason of the high regard accorded them in terms of their worth in the eyes of the church as well as the local communities and in the case of Abasua, its international appeal.

1.6 Significance of Study

The study is important because it enables the Methodist Church Ghana to find out the understanding people have about sacred sites and how such sites are influencing the spirituality and general behaviour of church members. The Methodist Church Ghana will thus have an effective means of disseminating policies that will regulate the mode of spirituality in the church.

Furthermore, it helps the church to strategize on ways to promote the spiritual and material benefits derived from SSV. The promotion of spiritual and material benefits of members of the church will ultimately lead to the welfare of the church and the global community.

Academically, the findings in this research provide indices for further hierophanic studies. People will appreciate the fact that members of the church are trooping to sacred sites and are giving testimonies about benefits. The data collected will be very useful to others who would want to delve into further research on SSV.

Furthermore, the research contributes to the on-going discussions on Church renewal. At meetings at various levels of the church, there are discussions about renewal of church members and attitudinal change in members. This research shows how SSV can be used to effect renewal in its intended form in the church.

Finally, the work constitutes a concise and readable historical record on Methodist pilgrimages to sacred sites. Records reflect that though SSV was not part of Methodist spirituality, the practice has now been embraced by the church and it is influencing people greatly.

1.7 Literature Review

This section engages with selected works that reveal some connectedness or linkage between SSV and renewal. A great number of works have been consulted but not all can be reviewed within this limited space. Most of them have been integrated in the main discussion.

From a more general perspective comes the innovative contribution, ‘Hierotopy’¹⁵ by Alexei Lidov in his classic work, *Hierotopy, the creation of sacred spaces as a form of creativity and subject of cultural history*. This material is worth reviewing, as a result of the wealth of insights it sheds on the current research. Alexei Lidov, of Research Centre for Eastern Christian Culture, propounded this neologism not only as a conceptual framework for the study of spatial icons but also as a field of study. Lidov reveals and analyzes various miraculous icons pertaining in ecclesiastical and public settings in his works. Icons aid meditation and reflections on Christian truths and enhance public worship¹⁶ but how does creation of sacred sites relate to the present study? A number of scholars attest to the fact that spatial icons, relics and the general sacred milieu which are usually crystallized to perpetuate the memory of supernatural occurrences at such places have tended to become great worship centres. The Methodist centres under review are not exceptional.

¹⁵ The term ‘hierotopy’ (ierotopy) is a neologism, which consists of two Greek words; hieros (sacred) and topos (place, space and notion). It refers to the creation of sacred spaces, which are regarded as a special form of human creativity. As a field of historical research, hierotopy reveals and analyzes particular examples of that creativity.

¹⁶ View buttressed by a former first Clergy of the MCG, interview granted the Researcher at the respondent’s residence, February 25, 2013.

Beyond this, the icons/mementoes/relics (used interchangeably) taken from these centres also enhance the centres popularity.

Talking of interaction with other disciplines, Lidov believes that what really exists as studies on sacred places and visitations are a highly variegated range of empirical works influenced by different disciplines. These disciplines (archaeology, anthropology, art history and history of religion), have treated various aspects of SSV. However, as a rule, they tried to solve the problems of their own respective disciplines, emphasizing particular aspects without consideration of the whole. As a field of study Hierotopy spans studies in art, history, anthropology, architecture, religion and many other disciplines that attempt to translate sacred space and sacred objects into meaningful concepts in their field of study. Hierotopy recommends the use of traditional methodological approaches to the study of these spatial icons and the rituals and social mechanisms that determine them. To practicalize this approach of study Lidov reveals and analyzes several works. For want of space only two of these works are cited here. These are 'Tuesday Miracle'.

A weekly occurrence during which a painting of Luke the Evangelist (a double-sided icon named *Hodegetria*, showing the mother of God pointing to Christ (*Hodegosvia*, Greek term for "the Way") on one side and the Crucifixion on the other side), performs a lot of miracles when carried to the public square in front of the monastery Hodegon in Constantinople, by a member of the Lucan clan. Every Tuesday the icon is believed to lift in the air the icon-bearer, and whirl him round within the public square in front of the monastery, Hodegon. Public healing', 'collective supplication', 'penitence and liturgical acclamations' are reported. Then also, the Holy Fire or 'Holy light' which on the eve of every Easter Sunday descends on the holy sepulchre, to the extent that when empty lamps are placed there they glow with the fire, even when they are taken out.

Lidov suggests that the ‘Tuesday miracle’ comprised a spatial iconic re-enactment of Crucifixion of Christ. The miraculous “Holy Fire” or “Holy light” in the Eastern Orthodox Church, recorded since the ninth century, historically, is one of the greatest miracles, signifying the Resurrection and the promise of the Second Coming. Without going into the analyses Lidov provides on these icons, two other scholars; Tsuji Shigebumi and Jelena Bogdanovic do not merely recommend the concept but also draw parallels from their social contexts.

The understanding that visits to the sacred sites is to crystallize foremost the memory of a hierophany¹⁷ is also reflected in the current research; Abasua in particular. Beside this, the Methodist Church pilgrims go beyond just perpetuating the memory of a hierophany to seek their personal needs. The limitation however, rests with the lack of references to any renewal processes within the Byzantine examples. This notwithstanding, close parallels can be drawn in the area where receiving answers to pilgrims’ needs at the Hodegon for instance, results obtained could bring to them emotional fulfilment. It is in this sense that Lidov’s work becomes useful to the present study and ‘Hierotopy’ a very useful concept for this research.

Renewal at sacred places is again partially portrayed by Nelia Hyndman- Rizk in her work, *My Mother’s Table: At Home in the Maronite Diaspora: A Study of Emigration from Hadchit, North Lebanon to Australia and America*¹⁸. The return journeys in the story can be likened to renewal experiences in pilgrimages. They are avenues for spiritual purifications (not from sins or any wrongs). They provide means to rectify all the stressful

¹⁷ Hierophany: A sacred appearance or manifestation of the sacred.

¹⁸ Nelia Hyndman-Rizk, *My Mother’s Table: At Home in the Maronite Diaspora: A Study of Emigration from Hadchit, North Lebanon to Australia and America* (New Castle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 315. See also, Nelia Hyndman-Rizk, *Pilgrimage in the Age of Globalisation: Constructions of the Sacred and Secular in Late Modernity* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2002), 170.

life experiences people go through in the Diaspora. The Maronite Church in Hadchit encourages the purification ceremonies.

GiorgosTsimouris¹⁹ also sees spiritual renewal in the annual summer visits by Greeks who were forced out from their homelands by Turkish officials to Bosnia. These journeys to ancestral homelands do not only result in reunion but also through the rituals performed on these feast days, the returnees are able to construct new identities by breaking down among other things walls of false identities as diasporan Greeks.²⁰

The focus and range of activities in these two works and the MCG's visitation differ. But the question of return and identity construction undergirds the MCG's practice. Underneath the Church's return to the APC is the view that 'the Church is carrying out the directives of the Rev Abraham Osei-Assibey, (founder of the APC) to the MCG to make use of the mountain.'²¹ This remark was made in response to the claim of deviation from the Church's real agenda at the sacred site in Abasua. Some participants expressed similar sentiments when they indicated in focus group discussion their predilection for the APC. Some asserted that Methodists should feel proud about APC because it was revealed to their ancestor (Abraham Osei-Assibey)²². Since Rev. Assibey started the practice of visitation, it was understood that going back each year to the place suggests a commemoration. APC becomes therefore the spiritual *rendezvous* for the MCG. The two works above thus serve very useful purposes as dialogue partners for the current research.

¹⁹ GiorgosTsimouris, "Pilgrimage or a Way to Reclaim a Homeland? Contesting Place on the Island of Gökceada (Imvros)," in John Eade and Mario Katic (eds.), *Crossing the Borders: Pilgrimage, Politics and Place-Making in Eastern Europe*. www.academia.edu.Pdf. (Accessed, 31/7/2015).

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 8.

²¹ Director of Evangelism Mission and Renewal, interview granted the researcher, June 2, 2014. Reacting to the argument offered by his predecessor, he stated that there is no deviation in purpose.

²² FGD with members from the Accra Diocese, February 22, 2012.

Victor Turner on the other hand, presses home the view that pilgrims achieve both healing and renewal during the stage of *Communitas*. During this period, the totality of the pilgrim's health is inextricably bound to the peace and harmony that exudes from the community experience.²³ Healing is thus associated with all the activities carried out at the sacred centres.²⁴ We can interpret the renewed zeal of participants at the prayer centres, as being able to do things they could not do before, for instance praying for long hours. The claim is amply attested by most of the participants who were engaged in the field study.²⁵

Mircea Eliade unearths issues relating to sacred space and experiential religion. Eliade regards sacred location as a place to encounter or experience the divine.²⁶ The sacred location also establishes relationship between the transcendental world and the world of man.²⁷ The present work goes beyond studying just a religious phenomenon, and description of the experiential to interpret the views of people who are associated with a phenomenon. Their being at the sacred ground is viewed by most research participants as being close to heaven where answers to prayers are very prompt. Eliade's view on the sacred location as a place of divine encounter is shared by most scholars, and also constitutes the essential and basic ideas in the current research. From Harold Turner's perspective, though divine beings are not confined to any space but rather located in their

²³ Turner, "The Centre out there", 217.

²⁴ On associating healing with the benefits derived at sacred sites, see Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Healing Pilgrimages," *Exchange*, 36 (2007): 65-86.

²⁵ 'Coming together as a church and doing things together challenge those who are weak to renew their prayer life' (34 year old female, a Society Steward of Calvary Methodist Church at APC). 'Coming to places like this is the best way to revive ourselves, because everything about the place; fasting and prayer, harsh weather conditions, inadequate living accommodation, etc. contributes to our spiritual growth. You decide to leave your comfort zone and wrestle with God. For instance, when you climb Abasua Mountain and come and sleep on the bare floor in the cold and you decide that you will not seek God's face and be serious, then I will say its sheer craziness' (Female member of the GHAMSU executive at Methodist University College, MUCG during a FGD, April 18, 2014).

²⁶ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York:Harvest Books, 1959), 26.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 20-32.

own realm of existence, the sacred location is a portal that opens up into their realm of existence.²⁸ This view is widely espoused by almost all the visitors of the study sites.

In the African context, particularly in the south of the Sahara, R.E.S. Tanner posits that Africans' visits to sacred sites are purely need-driven,²⁹ a view espoused also by Asamoah-Gyadu.³⁰ Tanner identifies three categories of pilgrimage foci; foci being the sacred location, the cult object or the ritual specialists. The criteria for such classifications are geographical and social distance, devotion to the sacred centres, devotion to the sacred practitioners and the level of institutionalization at work.³¹ In all of these categories or types, pilgrims' needs determined the exact foci. Some scholars believe that when it comes to the African's quest for religious encounter it does not matter where he or she could secure such support, even if it means travelling long distances.³²

This view is debateable though. Perhaps church members may travel outside their own Dioceses to meet with very dynamic evangelists. The rest of Tanner's classification reflects the inclinations of most adherents in the Church. The particular need determines the particular site to visit. The annual connexional visit brings Methodists from even the remotest corner of Ghana to the APC.

In Ghana, besides being indigenous initiatives, SSV or African pilgrimages, are all directed towards a single end, which is healing'.³³ The forms of healing, Asamoah-Gyadu explains, are 'spiritual, social, communal and material wellbeing'.³⁴ The spiritual,

²⁸ Turner, *From Temple to Meeting Place*, 16-39.

²⁹ R.E.S. Tanner, "Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Study in the Development of Religious Foci," *Journal of Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2003): 127.

³⁰ Asamoah-Gyadu, "On the 'Mountain' of the Lord," 65-86.

³¹ Tanner, "Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa," 127.

³² P. J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 33.

³³ Asamoah-Gyadu, "On the 'Mountain' of the Lord," 65-86.

³⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, "Healing Pilgrimages," 65-86.

physical and emotional healings required are discerned in the motives of the research participants in the current study.

The co-existence of historic missionary forms of Christianity with the Pentecostal and the Charismatic waves in the mainline Churches poses some challenges. This view is taken up in most literature on Charismatic movement. In the Methodist Church Ghana, the sense of Charismatism is understood as part of the Wesleyan revivalism. Abamfo Atiemo discusses and appraises the upsurge of this phenomenon.³⁵ He cautions the mainline churches about possible conflicts likely to occur in the stages of transition as the mainline Churches attempt to integrate or incorporate charismatic ideals. His views on conflict with lay-leaders and the Clergy, among others have had their toll in the Methodist Church Ghana in the past. It is still a shared sentiment in this era of SSVs. Hence, Abamfo's work offers significant views for the present study. The upsurge of the Charismatic wave finds expression in *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*³⁶ and *Pentecostalism* by Cephas Omenyo and Kingsley Larbi respectively.³⁷ Omenyo's entire work is on the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement in general, but he equally devotes attention to the phenomenon in Ghana and subsequently its upsurge in the historic mission churches. The section about the Methodist Church has greatly enhanced the foundational account about the phenomenon of SSV.³⁸ Altogether these works offer most essential insights into the Charismatic renewal, the form of spirituality observed in the SSV of the Methodist

³⁵ Abamfo Atiemo, *The Rise of the Charismatic Movement*, 48.

³⁶ Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 102-306

³⁷ K.E. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Blessed Publications, 2001), 379.

³⁸ Larbi opines that the Pentecostal and Charismatic waves gave birth to the phenomenon of SSV in the mainline Churches.

Church Ghana, and thus useful historical backgrounds for the current research. It is crucial to note however, that none of them relate the Charismatic renewal (as a form of transformation) to SSV.

Two works which are somehow of comparable discussions to the present study are the unpublished M. Phil. theses of P. Y. Acheampong, “A Structured Attempt at Revival in The Methodist Church Ghana”³⁹ and Philip Okyere’s “Reconstructing Sacred Space: The Place and Relevance of Abasua Prayer Mountain in Ghanaian Contemporary Christianity.”⁴⁰ Each one of these touch on some major areas of interest in the current research work, namely, ‘Methodist Renewal’ and ‘Sacred Site Visitation’. But Abasua Prayer Centre is Okyere’s main focus. Acheampong discusses Abasua and mentions other Methodist sites in passing. His main focus is the MPRP. He links the visitation to Abasua as renewal and shows its positive impact on MPRP. He declares that the MCG has returned to its roots. His major presuppositions are that, MPRP has stemmed the bouts of spiritual fluctuations within the MCG and the Church has returned to its Wesleyan tradition. To say that the Church is practicing the historic tradition of the Wesleys through the MPRP, and that the visit to Abasua is MPRP or that it is a renewal programme are all debatable. His assertion that pilgrimage to sacred sites answers the spiritual pitfalls of the Methodist Church Ghana is also worth probing. The distinguishing features of the current work are its empirical studies. It also lacks the strictly African Traditional Religious outlook of Acheampong’s work. What the current research has in common with Acheampong’s are the ‘Antecedents of the MPRP’ and the account on MPRP itself.

³⁹ P.Y. Acheampong, “An Evaluation of a Structured Attempt at Revivalism” (Mphil Thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 2010).

⁴⁰ Philip Okyere, “Reconstructing Sacred Space: The Place and Relevance of Abasua Prayer Mountain in Ghanaian Contemporary Christianity” (Mphil Thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 2012).

Philip Okyere looks at the following: a) the history of Abasua community and the development of the ‘Kɔ̀boboɔ’ as a sacred space, b) the dynamics of encounter between Traditional Akan Religion and Christianity in the Abasua community and c) the extent to which the reconstruction of the sacred space empowers or upsets both the Abasua community and the people who patronize the site from outside Abasua. The present research focuses on the Methodist site on the Atwea Mountains, APC alongside two others, TBFC and WdGC, all in Effiduase, Obuasi and Sekondi Dioceses respectively. Okyere’s historical account of the Abasua community however, affords this study a comprehensive historical foundation.

In conclusion, it needs to be stated that the absence of direct references to all the themes in this research makes the work original and able to fill a gap in the history of the Methodist Church Ghana regarding SSV and the Church’s renewal programme.

In summary, it may be said that sacred sites are places of divine encounter,⁴¹ places where prayers are believed to be heard or answered promptly. There are different categories of sites but the particular need determines the particular site to visit and their popularity usually stems from the supposed prompt answers clients receive. Within the mainline historic missionary churches, among which is the MCG, SSV emerged on the wings of the Charismatic renewal to fill a spiritual void. But it is saddled with its peculiar challenges, challenges which, the mainline historic missionary Churches should be careful to avoid.

⁴¹ Tanner, “Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 127.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The undergirding theory for this research work is Victor and Edith Turner's theory on *Communitas*.⁴² The Turners discuss three distinct forms of *Communitas*:

1. Existential/spontaneous *Communitas*, which is the first impression of common brotherhood or oneness amidst a teeming crowd or a group of people at sacred sites when all barriers of race, language, sex, among others, do not exist.⁴³
2. Normative *Communitas* is subsequent to the spontaneous system where maintenance systems are set in motion to keep it thriving but not to structuralize it.
3. Ideological *Communitas* describes certain idealistic systems to represent the situation in the spontaneous *Communitas*.

In the Turners' view, a survey of pilgrimage data reveals situations which promote the emergence of the spontaneous *Communitas*, yet the normative *Communitas* characterizes the experience of interpersonal and social bonding that exist between pilgrims and their service providers at the pilgrim centres⁴⁴ and all those who offer them support on their sacred journey. In line with the Turners claims, the normative *Communitas* reflect the situation of the Methodist Church Ghana at the sacred sites under study.

The Turners considered pilgrimages as liminal phenomena, characterized by *Communitas*. In their view, pilgrimage offers the opportunity for pilgrims to celebrate a bond of universal humanity and freedom; a fresh kind of social existence, which is devoid of structural divisions, and it is anti-hierarchical.

Victor Turner was a social anthropologist. As he perceived some inter-related dynamic social processes, in other words, group formation in pilgrimages, it led him to

⁴² *Communitas* is the Latin term for community

⁴³ Turner, "The Center out There", 198.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 191-230.

propound the theory on Christian pilgrimage. He based his views on Arnold Van Gennep's theory on Rites of Passage.⁴⁵ The three phases of Gennep's ritual processes, separation, and liminality and re-integration state are the main concepts in Turner's theory. Though pilgrimage is not a rite of passage, Turner makes use of it symbolically and refers to the whole process as a liminoid phenomenon; it is purely a voluntary act.

The state of separation represents the detachment of the individual, or group, from an earlier fixed point in the social structure. This is where in the context of this research, interested Church members from the various Dioceses from all over Ghana homes, jobs, and everyday social life travel to a common centre. The liminal or margin or the threshold state, is where the pilgrim goes through a realm with none of the attributes associated with his/her past life-setting. This state is anti-structural and anti-hierarchical.⁴⁶ At the sacred space, the pilgrim or the Christian believer undergoes a spiritual renewal as he/she encounters the sacred. A miraculous healing or a personal transformation occurs.⁴⁷ The third phase is the reintegration state. It marks the end of the sacred journey. The pilgrim reconnects with the larger society again but this time in a transformed state.

The vital elements in this theory that have meaning for the research are identity construction⁴⁸ and transformation of healing and renewal.⁴⁹ In the process of bonding at the sacred centre, the self is denied and the individual finds himself or herself overwhelmed by group consciousness. In the context of this research, the question of identity

⁴⁵Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. Trans. M.B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffé (Chicago: University of Chicago Press.1960), 1-36.

⁴⁶ Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimage*, 326.

⁴⁷ Maria A.Peon Arceo, "New Modes of Experiencing Pilgrimage: Devotional Tourism in Yucatan, Mexico" (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Florida, 2009). http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/UF/E0/02/43/97/00001/peonarceo_a.pdf

⁴⁸ Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 15.

⁴⁹ Turner, "The Center out There," 191-230.

construction becomes an issue. As an institutional pilgrimage it is expected that the corporate image or identity will be uppermost for the Methodist Church Ghana, yet, since the whole programme seeks, to a very large extent, to “*Create space for people to retreat and commune with God*”⁵⁰, the individual’s spiritual development is seen rather as the uppermost ideal for the Methodist Church Ghana.

Turner’s theory of *Communitas* has been critiqued widely for its sweeping generalizations⁵¹, but in the context of this research, it provides the best setting for image construction, renewal, love and harmony among many others.

1.9 Methodology

1.9.1 Design and Framework

A study of SSV and renewal of the Methodist Church Ghana addresses issues of religious experience. It is, therefore, discussed under Christian spirituality. Michael Downey’s appropriative method presents the most suitable methodological framework for this study.⁵² This method seeks to understand the Christian spiritual life as experience and proposes an inter-disciplinary approach. The appropriative method therefore demonstrates how following a process of interpretation and application, real transformational understanding of the Christian experience is achieved. Thus unearthing existing trends that share similar patterns, to interpret the current practice in the MCG, finds support in Downey’s methodology.

⁵⁰ The current director of EMR, interview granted the researcher, February 2, 2014.

⁵¹ Dale Eickelman engaged with Turner’s model and concluded that while pilgrims to Mecca might be involved in *Communitas*, at the Moroccan shrine ‘there is no free comingling of pilgrims from different social groups’ and no break from ordinary social order. See also, BawaYamba, *Permanent Pilgrims. An Anthropological Study of the Role of Pilgrimage in the Lives of West African Muslims in Sudan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), 12. According to the author, West Africa pilgrims to Mecca transiting halfway in Sudan, ‘must be regarded not as something that occurs outside of life daily lived, breaking the regular flow, but rather as something that is part of everyday life itself’ (12).

⁵² Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 126-129.

Among other things, Downey discusses three interrelated steps for analysing data which is derived from a field study of any experiential religion. Downey approaches the first by describing the manifest experience of the spiritual life. Regarding this first step, Downey believes that spiritual life entails a broad range of experiences, thus describing the manifest experiences of the spiritual life is essential, in order that insights into the perspectives of other religious traditions and cultures may be revealed.⁵³

The second involves a critical analysis of past or present spiritual experience or its manifestations. This will require insights of contemporary investigative tools, not just theological. For instance, Downey asserts that, certain acts of asceticism like prolonged fasting, and forms of religious obedience of earlier epochs, when viewed in the light of contemporary investigative instruments like psychosocial dynamics, nature of personal maturity, and communal responsibility) may be found questionable. Thus he calls for a critical and ‘vigorous wrestling of the object of interpretation’ for the true meanings to emerge.

The third step in this method is constructive interpretation which is designed to build on the earlier steps. The researcher was to construct an understanding of the Christian spiritual life. Insights from past and present modes of perceiving and living the Christian spiritual life are were to be correlated to illuminate today’s Christian spiritual experience.

According to Downey, the driving concern for this methodology is that true understanding must lead to transformation. Therefore, when ‘meanings’, ‘purposes’ and ‘values’ behind Christian rituals are understood from “the inside out”, the result should be transformational. Downey suggests an interrogation of past and present movements,

⁵³ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 129.

spiritual experiences of people to interpret not just the obvious, but also the ‘silences’, ‘what is assumed’, as well as ‘voices’ which have been lost or ignored in the Christian tradition. In doing this, a researcher is admonished to hold his own convictions and pre-conceptions in check.

With respect to the present study, links from past trends of SSV and contemporary trends were included to provide a perfect understanding of the MCG experience. The primal tradition of the African past⁵⁴, the Bible and Church history were considered appropriate paradigms in this interdisciplinary research.

The study on SSV and the renewal programme also attempted to unearth the purposes behind the Methodist practice, the meanings and values of the activities to see how they correlate to bring about transformation. Thus the process of description, critical analysis and constructive interpretation were strictly adhered to.

The present research also placed in perspective the MCG’s religious experiences by looking at its past. It began by looking briefly at the history of the Wesleyan Methodist Church as a renewal movement. This was followed by another brief account of the Ghanaian Methodist’s past SSV experiences before it became institutionalized.

Through these successive steps, the ‘lost’ or ‘ignored’ ‘voices’ in the Church’s tradition were to be discovered.⁵⁵ The descriptive technique was adopted for the historical background of SSV and the events at the various prayer centres.

Data from the field was critically analysed and subjected to constructive interpretation. During this stage of constructive interpretation, the views expressed generally by people outside and inside the Church, concerned what had been observed at the sites; the

⁵⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, “Healing Pilgrimages,” 65-86; Tanner, “Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 127.

⁵⁵ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 129.

programme of activities over the years in their Churches since their involvement with the practice of SSV. these were carefully and constructively interpreted. The stage of transformation had to be the impact of the programme on the lives of Church members and all those who might have benefitted from the practice of SSV in one way or the other.

Apart from the biblical, historical and anthropological perspectives to the study of experiential religion, Downey also discusses theological, historical and anthropological methods. All of these approaches are quite relevant for the current research. The theological method employs certain concepts and principles from the bible to help ‘clarify, evaluate, support, challenge, and sometimes correct’ views and practices. In the current research, the origins and developments of SSV from primal traditions, biblical and Church historical perspectives were incorporated. These were to provide allied areas of research. Examining biblical examples of SSV in relation to the practice in the MCG required the support of some definite theological principles like the Wesleyan quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. John Wesley’s, teachings on the IMOG and the PMOG. A further, theological principle on the renewal programmes was discussed in juxtaposition with the Church’s practice of SSV. The main aim in doing this was to discover the links between the Church’s SSV and its analogous practices in other established traditions.

The governing concern in the historical method is to gain access to authentic spiritual experiences or relevant information from documents, and records of geographical, archival, and oral sources as well as experiences and views of older people gone by.⁵⁶ In the current research, the historical method was fully utilized, when discussing brief historical records on the study sites, selected church historical records from the period AD

⁵⁶ Downey, *Understanding Spirituality*, 126-127

327, to the era of the patristic to contemporary history. This helped to glean specific views on SSV and to discover possible links with the Methodist practice today.

The anthropological method considers the experience of individuals. The undergirding view in this is that human experience endows people with the capacity for self-transcendence. This implies that the very constituent nature of humans place them in proper stead for self-transcendence.⁵⁷ Though this approach was not adopted in the present research, it was still seen as a useful approach, in that some of the Church members who visit these sites do so to seek meaning in life or to understand themselves. A view shared by Peter Jan Margry as he discussed pilgrim experiences at Glastonbury. He asserted that the individual is on a perpetual voyage of discovery. Many do really find themselves at sacred places.⁵⁸ In the context of the Methodist Church Ghana the opportunity offered Church members at the sites predisposes them to receive what they set out to achieve both spiritually and physically. It is the assessment of these perceptions and views that were collated and presented as the Church's overall position on SSV.

Being an experiential study, the appropriative method offers the most essential foundational tool important for the critical analysis and constructive interpretations of the MCG' phenomenon. The steps outlined in the approach, namely, understanding, interpreting the meanings, purposes and values of the phenomenon of study are all in perfect accord with the concerns in this study, restated as the perceptions and views of church members, both hierarch and lay on the incidence of SSV and renewal programme of the Methodist Church Ghana.

⁵⁷ Downey, *Understanding Spirituality*, 129.

⁵⁸ Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimage*, 275.

The only challenge with Downey's procedure is the ultimate transformation which is either double-edged or ambiguous. Possibly, both the researcher and the research participants end up being transformed. On the side of the research participants, the transformation could be both individual and corporate when the objects of study are persons.

The Research Methods cover the research design, the research approach, the population of the study, the sample of the study, the data collection procedure, data collection instruments and data analysis procedures. Issues of data reliability and validity are incorporated in the section on limitations.

Fundamentally, research design provides the main guide on how any study will be undertaken. This study is designed as both exploratory and descriptive. It essentially explores the field of SSV to obtain facts that can explain or describe the rationale behind the practice, the value, motives and the organization of same in the MCG. The primary sources of data are mainly the Lay and the Clergy in the Church. The Clergy represents specific individuals like, the former first Clergy (Presiding bishop), immediate past and current Directors of the EMRAT, some Bishops. The Lay represents any other member of the Methodist Church Ghana not in the category of Clergy. These included Evangelists and Caretakers.

With the help of Downey's Method the views and apprehensions of the participants in this study were critically examined 'through interpretations, application, real understanding and transformational experience' of the respondents

1.9.2 Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized for this study. Semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and document analysis were used as the main primary source of data collection. Detailed discussion of these sources of data collection has been provided below.

Secondary sources for this research included articles, journals, books and online sources that explain the basics of the research topic and theories or models of several authors in the field of this research. The sources were read and reviewed to provide the needed basis regarding possible gaps in previous works. For clearer and more objective views, other works on digital information management, articles, journals and books were sought. These sources consisted mainly of journals and books on digital documentation.

1.9.3 Population and Sampling technique

The term 'Population' in this study is defined as the members of the Methodist Church Ghana and the indigenous communities of the prayer centres. The Methodist population was made up of the Clergy and the laity of the Church. The laity of the Church comprised both the elderly and the youth, male and female. All these were structured into segments namely, the senior Clergy, who comprised bishops, past and current Directors of the Evangelical, Mission and Renewal Advisory Team, an Evangelism coordinator, executive members of the Ghana Methodist Students Union (GHAMSU) at the Methodist University, Methodist pastoral students of the Trinity Theological Seminary, Lay members found at the three sacred sites of APC in Effiduase, WdGC in Azani, Sekondi, TBFC in Adansi Kusa, in the Obuasi Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana, with the various Caretakers. Also the indigenous community members and some of their royals who were both Methodists and non-Methodists, then finally, church members from a cross-section of Methodist Churches in Accra.

Out of these segments, the researcher purposively, and in some cases with the snowball approach, sampled participants for the study. The sampling of participants was organized in different phases. Firstly, eleven (11) senior Clergy of the Methodist Church Ghana were selected. Secondly, thirteen (13) executive members of the GHAMSU of the Methodist University College were also selected. Thirdly, seven (7) members of the

Methodist Church Ghana Pastoral students from the Trinity Theological Seminary were selected. Sixty (60) pilgrims encountered at the sites at Abasua and the two subsidiary sites were also selected. Additionally, three (3) caretakers of the prayer centres, in addition to one who had been transferred were also included. From the various communities, with exception of Abasua which had a lot of information from previous research works, fifteen (15) indigenes including some royals were selected. Lastly, thirty-five church members from a cross-section of Methodist Churches in Accra were selected. Details of all the churches included in the sample can be found in the Appendix A of this study.

1.9.4 Research Instruments and Data Collection Procedure

Tools for data collection for the purpose of this study included Semi-Structured interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Document Analysis and Participant Observation. The combination of different data collection methods was to enable the researcher get a holistic picture of the subject matter under consideration. Using these tools, the researcher was able to probe further views and opinions of interviewees to explore new paths which were not initially considered.

For the current research, semi-structured interviews were organized for the senior Clergy, the laity found at the three study sites, the Caretakers, indigenes and some royals of the two communities of the prayer sites (none engaged at APC), for reasons already stated above.

In conducting the semi-structured interviews, advance appointments were made with the Bishops, Directors and Caretakers of the study sites. Telephone contacts were made for follow-up questions with some respondents, for general clarifications before and during the categorization, coding and interpretation stages. The interviews offered in-depth and collective set of values, experiences, and observations of participants' perception about the research topic. They allowed participants to describe their individual

experiences which a survey questionnaire would not have been able to achieve. In addition, the context used for the interview and group discussions was appropriate equally so was the selection of the right participants.

The interviews were held once for each group. At the commencement of each interview or group discussion, the researcher thanked the participants. Consent and demographic forms were completed by the participants. The researcher provided opportunity for participants to ask for clarification related to the study or any of the interview questions. The interview sessions were conducted in a very conducive atmosphere.

Sitting arrangement was in a horse-shoe form. Participants were assured of confidentiality regarding the information they gave. The researcher explained the procedure for the interview session. The sessions were audio-taped, and space was created for clarification on any points that were not understood or not clear.

Furthermore, FGD, a data collection technique which makes use of group interviews rather than single interviews, with the aid of a facilitator enabled the researcher to interview groups of people who shared a common interest as far as the topic was concerned. It also afforded the researcher the chance to source varied opinions, explore different perspectives and experiences of the participants on the same topic, with the main objective being to explore and gain greater understanding of the target group's perspectives and opinions on the specific phenomenon or topic under investigation. An added advantage is its efficient generation of in-depth information on the specific topic of discussion. This was organized for the GHAMSU executive officers at the MUCG campus, Trinity students at the TTS, both representing the student groups. Also for some of the members of particular Dioceses represented at the prayer sites as well as church members from a cross-section of Churches in the Accra Diocese.

Adopting participant observation, two of the study sites were visited once each and the researcher maintained consistent telephone conversations with the caretakers of the place and some retreatants as well. The main pilgrimage site was visited three times during the annual pilgrimages. This excludes a pilot study the researcher had earlier on engaged in at an all pastors' retreat at the beginning of the study.

Pilgrims engaged at the APC were from sixteen (16) Dioceses out of the nineteen (19) Dioceses in the entire connexion of the MCG. These were engaged between 2011 and 2013 they excluded pilgrims from the TBFC and the WdGC in the Obuasi and the Sekondi Dioceses respectively.

Document analysis was also used in the research. A document is any substance that gives information about the investigated phenomenon and exists independently of the researcher's actions. It is normally produced for specific purposes other than those of the research but it can be used by the researcher for cognitive purposes. Documents used in case studies help act as or corroborate evidence from other sources'. But they may also have some limitations in terms of the accuracy and completeness of data. In the current research, a number of documents from the district offices of the various study sites communities, a historical record of the founder of APC were critically analysed. Such documents were of great value to the examination of the study from different angles and they enriched the researcher's knowledge about SSV and renewal in the MCG. By using this method, the researcher was able to identify any contradiction in the evidence which could emerge as a result of the inconsistencies between the data produced in the documents and the respondents claims.

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1.9.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis entailed determining frequencies for gender, work position, age groups and years of utilizing the service provided by the case organization. Data analysis entailed determining frequencies for gender, work position, age groups and years of utilizing the service provided by the case organization. The data obtained through the participant demographic information forms were collected and summarized. Audio-tapes were transcribed for each interview session, and the accuracy of transcription was checked by the researcher. Transcriptions were identified by each interview sessions. After these procedures were completed, the data followed a process of analysis. The data analysis process followed several aspects to obtain rich information and meanings from the participants.

Text data relating to the interview questions were aligned with the research questions, and analysed by content analysis in order to describe the phenomena in relation to each of the research questions. Content analysis of the data was done manually, that is no qualitative analysis software was used in the process.

The analysis focused on understanding the meaning of the experiences shared by each participant. The appropriative method pointed out in the design of this study played an essential role in analysing the data. The appropriative method according to Downey involves three interrelated steps. The first involves describing the spiritual life as experienced or manifested. Secondly, there is critical analysis in the form of theological criticism and appropriate analysis. The third is that of constructive interpretation which is to arrive at a final determination of the meaning, transformational value, and understanding as far as spirituality as a central purpose is concerned. This process enabled the identification and categorization of the various themes. The procedure was flexible enough for the researcher as far as data interpretation was concerned.

Hamersley asserts that ‘an account is valid if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorize’.⁵⁹ Validity is concerned with two main issues: whether the instruments used are accurate and whether they are actually measuring what they were intended to measure. Ritchie and Lewis⁶⁰ indicated that the validity of research is conceived as the preciseness or correctness of the research findings.

G. A. Winter identified two different dimensions to the concept of validity, namely internal and external validity.⁶¹ Internal validity ensures that the researcher investigates what he claims to be investigating. External validity concerns the extent to which the research findings can be generalized to a wider population.

In terms of the current research, validity was achieved by undertaking multiple methods to investigate the problem from different angles and strengthen the validity of the findings. The researcher also considered selecting different positions within the Methodist Church Ghana to cover the entire issues related to the study and increase the probability of generalization. Moreover, all the questions posed in the interviews were directly linked to the researcher’s objectives and covered all aspects of the topic.

Data was also transcribed and analysed with a very high degree of accuracy. Finally, secondary sources of data used were initially assessed to determine the validity of the information given.

⁵⁹ M. Hammersley, “Some notes on the terms ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’.” *British Educational Research Journal*, 13 (1987): 73-81.

⁶⁰ J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (eds.) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 336.

⁶¹ G.A. Winter, “Comparative Discussion of the Notion of Validity in Qualitative and Quantitative Research,” *The Qualitative Report*, 4 (2000): 89.

1.9.6 Ethical Consideration

All the participants expressed their approval before they were engaged in the data collection exercise. The Committee members of this study however, were privy to the names of key participants, the senior clergy whose views determined the position of the MCG. The rest of the participants however, were assured of their anonymity.

Interviewees were made aware that their views were being recorded. Protocol structure was made available to most of them. These included the following: what the research entailed, whether participants' anonymity will be maintained, whether information will be confidential, the benefits of the information to the researcher, the time-frame within which the interviews were to last, the need for audio recording, all these ensured mutual understanding for both the researcher and respondents regarding expectations during and after the research.

The interview guide outlined the objectives of the interview and topics to be discussed on the agreed day of the interview and sent in advance to participants to ensure productive and beneficial interviewing session. All information gathered from the participants was kept confidential. To protect the identity of participants, the researcher did not record participants' names. The need for confidentiality and respect for ethical principles for all data collected were kept safely. Finally, ideas which were not of the researcher were duly acknowledged.

1.9.7 Limitations in the Research Method

There were limitations but none of them could influence the overall findings since measures were put in place to mitigate them all. The researcher being a Methodist already introduces bias to the research. Secondly as a qualitative study there are some inherent weaknesses in terms of generalization of findings. Further, in the use of the instruments

there is possible lack of confidentiality associated with focus group discussion which might cause inhibitions.

Since the medium of communication was not English in all cases of the field work there could have been a few possible misconceptions in some instances. For instance, interpreting views from Documents (Document Analysis) presents possible inherent inaccuracies. Almost all of these weaknesses are mitigated in the process of ensuring validity, triangulation and reliability. A valid research represents accurately those dimensions of a phenomenon the research seeks to ‘describe’, ‘explain’ or ‘theorize’.

1.10 Organization of Chapters

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter One deals with the introduction of the research and it comprises the background to the study, motivation for the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, the significance of study, a brief overview of literature, the theoretical framework that guides this study, the methodology and the organization of chapters.

Chapter Two addresses the concept of SSV from primal worldview, biblical and Church historical perspectives. This forms part of an extensive quest to comprehend SSV and its related concepts. The chapter also explains renewal as a concept and its reference to spiritual enhancement of mankind particularly Christians.

Chapter Three discusses contemporary Ghanaian Wesleyan Methodist Spirituality, a religious style which seems to blend elements of Wesleyan tradition as well as the present Ghanaian Charismatic Renewal and African primal religious thought. It discusses and examines the Ghanaian Methodist Renewal Programme, its historical beginnings and frame of reference. It also presents an outline of the history and current state of SSV in

the Methodist Church Ghana and the role the three prayer centres of interest in this study plays in the SSV discourse in the Church.

Chapter Four discusses the views of the church authority and pilgrims on visitation to the three selected sacred sites. The presentation of findings incorporates the views and perceptions of the Church, both hierarchy and lay, on SSV in regard to the contribution it is making towards the Renewal Programme of the Church.

Chapter Five presents the discussion of findings in line with the objectives of the study. Chapter Six, the final chapter, presents the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPTS OF SACRED SITE VISITATION AND RENEWAL

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the phenomenon of sacred site visitation from three main perspectives: Primal religious thoughts (this includes the African worldview), biblical and Church historical perspectives, which are interrelated but each is distinct. The first part discusses the complex issues surrounding the usage of the term, the nature, characteristics and purpose of sacred sites. Secondly, the issue of visitation as a pilgrimage process is investigated from biblical and historical perspectives, highlighting theological interpretations and significance of pilgrimage as basis for the Methodist Church Ghana's practice. Lastly, renewal is examined as an essential motive in SSV in Christian tradition.

2.2 The Concept of 'Sacred Site'

The term 'sacred site' has multifarious usages.⁶² It may refer to both animate and inanimate things, people and places, which may have both secular and religious associations. As it defies any single definition, it is necessary to examine the component parts in order to understand what it signifies.

Firstly, the word 'site' is understood and interpreted as a place where something stands or is located, or a place where a significant event has occurred. Sacred on the other hand, is a Latin originated word meaning in abstract terms, 'holy'. It refers to 'something set apart for religious purpose' or 'dedicated for the service or worship of a deity' or

⁶² See Tanner, "Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa," 127-135.

devoted to a divinity for destruction, or forfeited.⁶³ Associating the term with something devoted to a divinity for destruction carries with it a sense of malignancy or benignity. In primal societies it is believed that divinities may punish when offended. Just as much as they will bless when pleased. Some other derivatives indicate particular uses of the term. For instance, the root word of sacred, ‘sac’ is related to the Hittite term ‘sakklais’ which means custom, or rite. The same root word ‘sa’ is related to the Greek term ‘safe’ from which the Latin Sanctus (holy person) and Sanctum (sanctuary or holy place) are derived. These basic etymologies present the expression sacred site, with quite a number of interpretations. The terms accursed, execrable, or forfeited’ introduce the idea of that which is forbidden or taboo. Embedded in this same view, is the sense of holiness or impurity. From the primal worldview, with particular reference to traditional African context a religious personage or a chieftain or a king is a revered person, yet it is a taboo to touch them. This perception pervades the Old Testament as well. It was a taboo to touch or get close to the holy Mount Sinai in an unclean state lest the victim died (Exod 19:12-13).

Many arguments have emerged around this admixture of positive and the negative dimensions of the term ‘sacred site’. Given these basic etymologies, the sense of ritual, safeness or haven is derived from sacred. Consequently, a sacred site can be said to be a holy and sanctified haven or sanctuary, which offers solace, safety and security from the pressures of the world and need not be approached fortuitously.

In order to preserve the sanctity of these locations, ritual acts are prescribed for all who draw nearer. For, example, at the entrances of some traditional homes in

⁶³ Thomas A. Idinopulos and Edward A. Yonan (eds). *The Sacred and its Scholars. Comparative Methodologies for the Study of Primary Religious Data* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 127; See also, “Sacred” in Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus; Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th ed., s.v., “sacred.”

Akropong in the Eastern Region of Ghana there are small rocks enclosed in plants or flower beds which serve both protective and purificatory functions. Other purificatory rituals, removing of hats and shoes/sandals like Moses and the burning bush (Exod 3: 5) can also be regarded as means of preventing the sacred precinct from contamination.⁶⁴

2.3 Origins of Sacred Sites

It is interesting how places come to be designated as sacred sites; sometimes through audition, dreams or visions,⁶⁵ through consultations between ritual practitioners and local deities and chiefs. At other times through the instrumentality of mystics and sages, sacred sites emerge. Thus a sign from the deities affirm the sanctity of a terrain. In most religious traditions, great pains have been taken to invoke a sign from heaven so as to determine where a shrine should be built. Sacred sites are not chosen nor created arbitrarily.⁶⁶ This has been noted also by Harold Turner when he writes, ‘neither natural nor human agency makes a place sacred’.⁶⁷ Even where a Church’s leadership has decided to build or create a site they will have to be taken through consecration rituals. It is the immanent presence of the divine that empowers the site.⁶⁸ But what is important is ‘the intrinsic value of the land in question’ at a particular point in time.⁶⁹ In West Africa, it is enough for a diviner to indicate that a particular deity inhabits a place and wishes that it becomes its abode. In that sense, all those natural features associated with the sacred are believed to be abodes of the supernatural presence.

⁶⁴ Harold Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 13-32.

⁶⁵ J. C. Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred* (New York - Chicago: Macmillan - Prentice-Hall, 1989), 60.

⁶⁶ John James, “Significance in Sacred Sites: The Churches around Positano,” *Annals of Science*, 35 (1978): 103-130.

⁶⁷ Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 17.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 16.

⁶⁹ Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*, 52, 53.

Based on the foregoing facts, most African spiritual leaders believe that sacred sites are places where primordial events have occurred, places of origin where sources of all knowledge and natural law which inform and support a local culture, as well as creation myths are prevalent.⁷⁰

Sometimes the place of origin is metaphorically conceived. A garth within the landscape of monasteries for instance, is considered as the first place of creation where life symbolically begins afresh for the occupants as if they are in Eden. Here in this sacred space, occupants regain some measure of perfection as they wait for their ultimate perfection at the Parousia.⁷¹ This can be likened to the case of the Ghanaian indigenous Churches which keep similar cloisters called ‘garden’. It is a place where the sick are kept until angelic visitations make them perfect.

2.4 Features and Functions of Sacred Sites

Besides being places of supernatural encounters, *Harper’s Encyclopaedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* describe sacred sites as ‘power points,’ places believed to possess magical or supernatural energies. The ‘power points’ are believed to emanate from an ineffable spiritual source or part of the living Earth. Coming in contact with them instil feelings of wonder, awe, fear, fascination, and mystery.⁷² Supernatural presence may not only be manifested but divine favour may be bestowed. Such favour may result in healing, spiritual transformation for an individual or community. Community lore is

⁷⁰ This was a comment from the former Presiding Bishop of The Methodist Church Ghana in an interview with the researcher on 24th February 2013, Sunday afternoon at 4.00pm. He said any where there has been a primeval experience like the beginning of the Asante tribe; Asantemanso, Sampson Oppong Village, Abasua and the Grottoes of the Catholic Church. All such places can be referred to as sacred sites. There could have been a great numinous experience. See also A. Thorley and C. Gunn, Sacred Site --- An Overview. A Report for the GAIA Foundation, 2007, 145. <http://www.earthskywalk.com/SacredSiteReport.pdf> (Accessed 6-7-2014).

⁷¹ Mary W. Helms, “Sacred Landscape and the Early Medieval European Cloister. Unity, Paradise, and the Cosmic Mountain,” *Anthropos*, 97, no. 2 (2002): 435-453. <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

⁷² *Harper’s Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience*, 460.

imparted, initiation rites, religious conversion, rite of passage are organized and good counsel and direction are given to the younger generation. There is also a quest for vision⁷³ beside the search for balance and harmony.⁷⁴ At such sites, one finds all types of rituals, which naturally influence a people's experiences in more than one way as they pray, seek guidance and learn.

The sites are believed to be the centre of the earth, the meeting point, the earthly microcosm of the heavenly realm and as immanent transcendent.⁷⁵ At the 'centre of the earth' one gets revitalized, becomes self-conscious; gain fresh insights into life situations. Distinguished from the everyday world, the sacred site is 'self-perpetuating;' it is able to sustain itself. It is 'unassailable', capable of offering humankind all the security they need in life. This is the ideal world Eliade refers to as cosmos created out of chaos.⁷⁶ At 'the meeting point' the sacred site is sanctified and holy; a threshold where the boundaries between earth and the realms above intersect. Communication between mankind and divine beings is possible. There are two main types of this meeting point; the 'threshold' and the 'point of intersection'. The threshold is a portal that opens into the presence of a cultic object or a divine presence. At 'the point of intersection', there is a symbolic object, a single pillar, tree, stone, cross. This serves as the altar at the sacred precincts. To date one can find a cross planted at the centre of Abasua Prayer Centre, the exact spot the founder was transfigured.

⁷³ Thorley and Gunn, 'Sacred Sites—An overview,' 72.

⁷⁴ Vine Deloria, *Sacred Lands and Religious freedom*, <http://www.sacredland.org/PDFs/SacredLandReligious-Freedom.pdf> (accessed, 11/12/2015).

⁷⁵ Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 32.

⁷⁶ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20,32.

The Sacred place as the earthly microcosm of the heavenly realm is believed to be the exact replica of the abode of the divine beings. The sacred place as immanent transcendent expresses the idea that though the higher powers live beyond the realms of the living, anytime they are invoked, they appear. At the same time they do not permanently live in man-made temples.

Sacred sites afford people from different walks of life the opportunity to come together to express their beliefs. Glastonbury is one case in point.⁷⁷ Another is Osun-Oshogbo Shrine in Nigeria,⁷⁸ believed to be a melting pot for all religions: Islam, Christianity and traditional' religion.⁷⁹ All of this provides an avenue for dialogue and peaceful co-existence among different religious groups. There is also a sense of existential *communitas* among the independent groups. Thus sacred site is to be understood as social integrator.

In most religious communities, sacred sites are accessible to all but at the same time, as pointed out earlier, they are cordoned zones. They do not allow for inappropriate dealings.

In the African primal conception, the entire cosmos contributes towards the knowledge and understanding of sacredness. Rocks, mountains, river bodies, groves all emit certain cosmic powers. J. Paris says; 'all reality (human and natural, animate and inanimate) was thought to be derived from a common, primeval, divine source on which its continuing existence depended'.⁸⁰ The ancestors would often resort to these places for

⁷⁷ Magry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, 248.

⁷⁸ "The Osun-Oshogbo Sacred Grove", World Heritage Scanned Nomination 1118.pdf UNESCO Region: Africa, 23.

⁷⁹ N. Dudley, "The Links between Protected Areas, Faiths and Sacred Natural Sites," *Conservation Biology* 23, no. 3 (2009): 573.

⁸⁰ P. J. Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 34; Andrew Walls, *The Cross Cultural Process in Christian History* (Edinburgh - Maryknoll: T & T Clark - Orbis Books, 2002, 124-126; See also Pascal Fassouo, "Primal Religion and the Cosmos," *Journal of African Theology*, 2(2008), 49.

communion with the divinities. The summits and the plains of Ndouongue-Manengouba of Douala in Cameroun both contribute to the people's religious knowledge and expression.⁸¹ But most significantly the summits of the mountains have been the most privileged places of contact with the supreme God.

Apart from the foregoing characteristics, there are also a number of symbolisms that are employed in the primal worldview to demonstrate the creative principles in nature and the earth's ability to bring renewal and vitality to humankind.⁸² These symbolisms were extended to the performances of rituals which took place at certain seasons and specific locations on the sacred sites or shrines. These locations had full advantage of the sun. The understanding was that there was a release of productivity and fruitfulness; a renewal of creativity to the earth and all that depended on it.⁸³ It is not surprising therefore to note that most sacred site activities are organized at such times of the year one would usually associate with fruitfulness and revitalization. At Abasua prayer Centre, for instance, since the founder's time the month of August has and continues to see pilgrimage activities.⁸⁴

2.5 Typology of Sacred Sites from the African Primal Worldview

Tanner identifies five categories of pilgrimage foci - the sacred location, the cult object or the ritual specialists. The 'criteria for such classifications are geographical and social distance, devotion to the sacred centres, devotion to the sacred practitioners and

⁸¹ Pascal Fassouo, "Primal Religion and the Cosmos", 49-52.

⁸² Mary T. Condren, *Sacred Places: What makes them sacred?* http://department.monm.edu/classics/Courses/Reflections/Sacred_Spaces-libre.pdf (Accessed, 07/06/2013)

⁸³ Oral Tradition of the Akans, see also James, "Significance in Sacred Sites," 103-130.

⁸⁴ An account compiled for the researcher on Rev. Abraham Osei Assibey by his closest friend, Rev. Boamah reveals him as a mystic and an eccentric. See appendix F for brief information on the founder of Atwea mountains. In confirmation of this mystic nature Rev. Assibey had founded the prayer site in Wenchi in the BrongAhafo region called 'Mmepomu' literally meaning inside the rocks. The location is a rocky area (not a cave) where one never gets wet when it rained.

the level of “institutionalization” at work.⁸⁵ In all of these categories or types, pilgrims’ needs are paramount in determining the exact foci to adopt.

Adopting Tanner’s views in relation to this discussion, the first category falls under independent sites, which have attained recognition by reason of their success in helping people. In Ghana, a number of Christian sites are of this nature. They revolve around a single Charismatic figure. But apart from the study sites being institutional, all other features in this category reflect the realities about them. They develop outside the clients communities. Their success stems from their ‘religious connections with spiritual powers and the calibre of the personalities involved. ‘They are marketed through public opinion’.⁸⁶

The second are tribal cultic centres which originated among migrant tribesmen of the pre-industrialized period. People carried along some objects that bore testimony to their success. Like the ‘packet of earth’ Nuer of Sudan at Mbesa shrine keep. These sites do not attract worldwide recognition. People, who have associated with the cult in the past whilst still in travel, may return to access it when in difficulty.⁸⁷ ‘It is basically of significance to individual families. The biblical story of Naaman after he was healed is an example of this. (2 Kings 5:7). Most visitors to Abasua prayer sites carry home memorabilia with varied intents, some to give to friends and relatives who have some needs.

The fourth category involves migrant traders and workers of different cultures and societies. In their daily activities they may encounter or even trade new ideas about some religious cults. This allows for transference of some cultic systems which may become

⁸⁵ Tanner, “Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa,”127.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, 129.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

adaptable to new terrains and provide 'local religious foci'. Pilgrimage to such cult centres is common among peoples of West Africa. The Boghar cult and the Tigare cult in Northern Ghana enjoyed a heavy flow of pilgrims, some of whom consequently tapped into the powers and transferred it.⁸⁸ The duplication of the Catholic Marian shrines may be reflected here. For instance, Lourdes is originally in Paris, but they are duplicated in several other places in Ghana. The discomfort created by the large numbers of Methodists who throng the Abasua prayer Centre made the Church hierarchy decide that prayer centres should open-up in all the Dioceses. This does not suggest that Abasua is being duplicated but rather to demystify the place.⁸⁹

The fourth category involves people who traverse long distances to receive spiritual support. The social and geographical distances prevent any local knowledge about them and hence give clients confidence to discuss their needs.⁹⁰

The last category is almost like the hajj that places obligation on people to make pilgrimage. The MCG's system is almost akin to this but not necessarily compulsory. Tanner believes these types of pilgrimages provide opportunities for pilgrims to choose from. The overriding motive however is to satisfy existential needs such as job, marriages, fertility issues, healing, deliverance from spiritual bondage.

This clearly reveals the African orientation towards pilgrimage. In effect Tanner's typology helps us to distinguish between two types of Pilgrimages, namely, devotional and Need-Driven Pilgrimages. The hard fact therefore is that among Methodist pilgrims one

⁸⁸ Tanner, "Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa," 129.

⁸⁹ Interview granted the researcher, by Very Rev. Adu Boateng, the director of EMR in 2014 showed that so far about seven Dioceses have created prayer centers.

⁹⁰ Tanner, "Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa," 130.

does not normally encounter pilgrims with deep spiritual yearnings, for spiritual advancement and growth.

The past Director of Evangelism Mission and Renewal, based on the foregoing said going on pilgrimages as observed among Ghanaian Methodists is a misnomer.⁹¹ Because the deep spiritual yearnings that characterize pilgrimages in other contexts is totally missing in the Ghanaian Methodist context.

2.6 Sacred Sites in the Bible

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery(DBI) defines a sacred space (site) as ‘a place where God is encountered in a special or direct way, by virtue of which the very place becomes holy and set apart from ordinary space’.⁹² Wilkinson asserts that divine revelation is the causative factor that necessitates the visitation of sacred sites.

The Christian tradition furnishes us with myriad examples of theophanies and hierophanies. As a paradigm for the present research two of these key sites are selected for examination to furnish us with biblical views on their features and also people’s attitudes towards them. It would also help to interpret the Ghanaian Methodist perception on SSV in the light of the bible. Many of these biblical sites predate the formation of Israel and the Bible. At such places, manifestations such as the appearance of Yahweh in a cloud (Exod 19: 16-20, 24: 9-10) angelic visitations (Exod 3: 2; Gen 32:24-30) were common.

Beginning with Bethel, its first association was with the patriarch Abraham. His tent was on a mountain east of Bethel (Gen 12:8). Matthew Henry asserts Abraham, after his sojourn in Egypt returned to Bethel. This indicates he attached some religious importance to the place

⁹¹ Very Rev. Mathias Forson, in an interview granted the researcher at his residence on May 7, 2014.

⁹² “Sacred Place” in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVastity Press, 2010),748.

because of the altar he had erected there⁹³ (Gen 12:9-15). This may seem to be a renewal of religious ties, besides acquaintances. Bethel is said to be located in some olive groves.⁹⁴ Sacred sites are usually connected with such features. It was at this same place that Jacob, when running away from his brother Esau dreamt about the angels ascending and descending (Gen 28:19; 31:13). Jacob named the place Bethel, set up a pillar, and anointed it with oil to mark the place where God spoke with him. However, the DBI contests that Bethel was just as ordinary as any other place until God revealed Himself to Jacob (Gen 28:16-18). Bringing these slightly opposing views into conformity with each other, we can only conclude that both writers support the notion that Bethel is a sacred site. The only divergent point has to do with the person in whose time Bethel became a sacred site. Bethel subsequently became a sanctuary for the Northern Kingdom. Any present association with the place suggests that it is an attempt to crystalize the memory of that sacred appearance.

Another sacred site in the Bible worthy of note is the Mount Sinai. The name probably means ‘to shine,’ which occurs in Syriac, and which in Babylon is found in the name *sinu* for ‘the moon.’⁹⁵ Sinai is the name of a peninsula, a wilderness, and a mountain in the Bible. All three of these played a prominent role in the lives of the Jews as they searched for the Land of Promise following their miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt.⁹⁶ The area serves as a land bridge between Egypt and Israel. The peninsula is bounded on the west by the Gulf of Suez and on the east by the Gulf of Aqaba.

⁹³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: Genesis 13:1-4* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005). CD-Edition. See also “Kiel & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament”, <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/kdo>.

⁹⁴ Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary: Genesis 13:1-4*. Kiel and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Gen 13:1-4. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown *A commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997). Electronic Database BibleSoft.

⁹⁵ C. R. Condor, “Sinai,” in James Orr, John Nuelsen, Edgar Mullins, Morris Evans, and Melvin Grove Kyle (eds.) *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). Electronic Database BibleSoft.

⁹⁶ See “Sinai,” in Ronald F. Youngblood, F. F. Bruce and R. K. Harrison (eds.), *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Edinburgh, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986).

The area around Mt. Sinai was a sacred place before Moses received his vision of the angel in the burning bush (Exod 3:1-3). In fact, Mt. Sinai was called Mt. Elohim (God). For this mountain to be called Mt. Elohim, many visions or supernatural occurrences may have happened there. The inhabitants of this region considered it a sacred place. The angel told Moses in his vision to put off his shoes from off his feet, for the place upon which he stood was holy (Exod 3:5).

Exod 19:1 indicates that in the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.⁹⁷ This phrase may refer only to the particular wilderness which lies at the foot of Mount Sinai and in which the Israelites pitched their camp. But the phrase may also refer in a broader sense to the entire wilderness area of the Sinai Peninsula. If this is the case, it would include the Wilderness of Sin, through which the Israelites passed between Elim and Mount Sinai (Exod 16:1); the Wilderness of Paran, in the central Sinaitic Peninsula (Num 10:12); the Wilderness of Shur, east of Egypt in the northern Sinai (Gen 16:7); and the Wilderness of Zin, close to the border of Canaan (Num 13:21).

Perhaps the most frequent use of the word 'Sinai' is in connection with the mountain. This was the mountain where God met Moses and gave him the Law (Exod 19:3, 20). This mountain is to be identified with Mount Horeb (Exod 3:1), or perhaps Horeb refers to a mountain range or ridge, and Sinai to an individual summit on that ridge.⁹⁸ The name Sinai is used at the time when the Israelites were actually at the foot of the mountain (Exod 19:11), whereas Horeb is used upon reflection about the events that happened there.

⁹⁷ "Sinai," 324.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

After the Israelites left Egypt, they camped first in the Wilderness of Sin, then at Rephidim, and finally at Sinai. Moses climbed the mountain and received the tablets of the Law from God. When he came down, a thick cloud shielded the mountain and his face shone with the glory of God (Exod 19:11, 16). A stirring atmospheric disturbance accompanied God's meeting with the people (Exod 19:17-20:18). These and many more examples can be derived from the Old Testament as places where God revealed Himself either to individuals or groups of people. The mountain, the encounter of the Jews with God and the renewal of bond, the divine encounter that led to the giving of the law all resonate with current sacred site experiences.

The New Testament, partly an extension of the Jewish culture and of the Christian culture recognized a few of the sites in the lives of the patriarchs but was interpreted with some subtle nuances. Instances of these are; Heb 12:22; Revelation 14:1. In Jesus' time, the most recognized sites were the Temples in Jerusalem and Samaria. According to Dee Dyas from the post apostolic period, through to contemporary times several scenes in Jesus' earthly life have constituted a mosaic of sacred places for Christians. These include; the nativity scene, depicting the annunciation and the place of his birth, the Mount of Olives where he was transfigured, to name only a few. But with Jesus being the central focus of the New Testament, his response towards the temple is crucial for determining the value that was accorded sacred sites in the New Testament. Regarding this, Harold Turner offers a comprehensive discussion which is both positive and negative. It has to be noted that the temple was the most propitious of sacred sites in the lives of the Jews.

Turner considers the concept of the New Temple in the lives of Jesus and some apostles. We are constrained by space to discuss that of the apostles. But starting with Jesus, he said Jesus' involvement with the Temple dates back to his childhood. Luke's account of the infancy narratives (Luke 2: 41-52) specifically, his dedication, the yearly

visits with his parents shows a positive attitude. Could his adult life have been any different? Turner answers yes and no.⁹⁹

Jesus' attitude to sacred sites is captured in the dialogue with the woman from Samaria whom Jesus met at the well (John 4). The DBI suggests that Jesus saw 'sacred space ...in the process of being spiritualized and universalized, supplanting the OT emphases on particular holy places like the Jerusalem temple'.¹⁰⁰

2.7 Sacred Sites and the Concept of Visitation

According to Alphonse Dupront, there is no pilgrimage without sacred site.¹⁰¹ But the converse is also true. Hence, discussing sacred site visitation necessarily involves examining pilgrimages. The two are sometimes used interchangeably in modern scholarship though the preferred term is 'visitation'. SSV focuses on religious pilgrimages and not secular pilgrimages which scholars claim is intertwined with the former. The journeys made to such places are referred to as the visitation. They are undertaken by pilgrims or people who are usually in search of divine power, intervention, personal transformation, or moments of self-meditation or soul searching.¹⁰²

Visitation entails travelling across a geographical terrain. In the history of the Church, journeys made to sacred sites have been the visible part of the phenomenon. Any theoretical discussion about sacred sites therefore will not be complete without movement or visitation. Since pilgrimage is a quest for something that is of ultimate value to a person,¹⁰³ the movement becomes a definite aspect of that quest. Hence in most pilgrimage traditions, the harder and strenuous the journey, the more real the pilgrimage. In places

⁹⁹ Turner, *From Temple to Meeting Place*, 107-129.

¹⁰⁰ "Sacred Place," *DBI*, 749.

¹⁰¹ Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, 23.

¹⁰² Peon Arceo, "New Modes of Experiencing Pilgrimage," 146.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

where the journey is made on foot, there are accounts of both physical and spiritual healing¹⁰⁴ and of course the group experience also fosters solidarity. But the question one needs to ask is whether all visits to sacred sites require that long and arduous journeys when people could undertake virtual tours inside their rooms? This is where the view of the Turners becomes crucial.

Pilgrimage is a liminal activity hence there is the need for separation. All pilgrimages must cover some distance and pilgrims need to extricate themselves physically and mentally from their everyday life. Moreover, pilgrimage centres should be dissociated from *cultus* within the visitor's own society and from other places of worship such as local Churches, which attract visitors on a more regular basis and from a narrower geographical range. Visiting a sacred site in the immediate vicinity is local worship. Since almost all the features discussed above apply in the case of the study sites, it stands to reason that the annual, quarterly and monthly programmes organized there should be described under the research topic, sacred site visitation.

2.8 Distinctive Elements in SSV

2.8.1 Local Sites and Universal Sites

It is important to note that some cultural traditions acknowledge hierarchies of shrines in which some sites are regarded as superior to others. Jerusalem is significant as a *rendezvous* for the three main feasts as well as other minor celebrations of the Jews. Of the three, Pesah commemorates the Exod from Egypt and the slavery that preceded it; Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai and Sukkoth an ancient harvest festival which commemorates the booths the Israelites dwelt in after the Exod.

¹⁰⁴ Respondents' views about their journeys along the mountain trail in Abasua attest to this.

All of these feasts draw pilgrims to the temple. However, the events in the life of Jesus Christ has made pilgrimage to locations associated with Jesus' earthly life, from the time of his birth till his death, much more important.

In Rome the sites where some of the early martyrs were interred have become very prominent, and are considered global sites. In the MCG, there is a greater predilection for the Abasua prayer Centre than most other smaller centres. Though this is a local site the nature and the history of the site has given it more prominence above all other sites in Ghana.

2.8.2 'Communitas' and the Pilgrimage Process

As pilgrims band together and journey to various sites, there is a certain sense of bonding. The environment allows a horizontal movement outward towards the devotees by creating interpersonal bonds, allowing for the individuals to negotiate their status (that is losing themselves), and constructing a collective identity.¹⁰⁵ This is evidenced in the coming together of the various Churches in similar Church uniforms like T' Shirts and caps. This enhances their sense of identity and belongingness. The immediate past Director of the Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Division attested to this fact that among Methodists, pilgrimage to Abasua defines them. He was expressing views on the need to travel in such large numbers. Among other things he said Church members from remotest societies of the connexion are given the opportunity to observe and learn practices that are approved by the Church.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Tweed, "John Wesley Slept Here: American Shrines and American Methodists," *Numen* 47, no. 1 (2000), pp. 41-68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3270360>.

¹⁰⁶ Very Rev. M.P. Sackey, Immediate Past Director of Evangelism, Mission and Renewal, interview granted the researcher, April 29, 2014.

2.8.3 Experiences at Sacred sites and their Implications

A rich tapestry of experiences pertains at sacred sites and this is quite pertinent to the study. Quite often peculiar experiences may stem from the individual disposition, the rationale, the sacred site in question, and the ritual performances carried out at a site. What follows are some of the significant experiences pilgrims are likely to go through at the sacred locations: spiritual, cultural, environmental, secular, and educational.¹⁰⁷

Spiritual experience for pilgrims usually comes through withdrawal first and foremost, then through fasting, prayer and meditation. It is for the purposes of renewal and transformation, strengthening of faith, or self-actualization. Because the sites are believed to be mediating spaces there is established a vertical movement toward the transcendent order, devotees are elevated and the transcendent is literally brought down. As Pilgrims remain focused, they receive their answers in due course.¹⁰⁸

Cultural elements are observed when relics or *memorabilia* are taken along back to the pilgrims' destinations. This is a sort of identification with the place. Usually, relics of holy water, herbs, sand, oil or other memorial objects connected with the sites, important persons, acquire such value and prestige to many pilgrims.¹⁰⁹ Not only do they become integral parts of the pilgrim's life, but also conjure in the pilgrims' minds the eternal presence of either a site, or a saint. By extending the pilgrimage centres to the pilgrims' home, the practice of gathering these relics or *memorabilia* establish closeness and bonding between devotees and the object or place of their devotion.

¹⁰⁷ Konstantios Androitis, "Sacred Site Experience. A Phenomenological Study," *Annals of Tourism Research* 36, no. 1, (2009), 64–84.

¹⁰⁸ Tweed, "John Wesley Slept Here," 19-20.

¹⁰⁹ Bitton-Askelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 147. Augustine is reported as saying that many miracles occurred through the powers of the martyrs. His repertoire of miracles includes healing that occurs through oil taken from a saint's tomb and claims that special powers adhere to flowers or clothing brought into contact with a martyr's relics. Cyril of Jerusalem, drawing on Acts 19:12, noted that if handkerchiefs and aprons could heal the sick, he was not surprised that the bodies of the martyrs were blessed with the same power.

The sacredness of those sites is equally extended. For example, bagging home relics of oil, water, sand, stones or plants from particular sites suggest that one believes in their unique efficacy and wants them to perform in the same way they would naturally do when one is at the sites. From Abasua and Adansi Kusa some Church members bring relics of sand, and leaves and bark of mangoes respectively. The relics of sand for pastors to sprinkle in their pulpits to be empowered in their ministry and the leaves and bark of mangoes are collected for the cure of many diseases. Furthermore, pilgrimage sites tend to have a material focus when certain emblems or iconic representations of particular saints are placed at the sites or shrines. On these iconic representations, Thomas Aquinas is believed to have said that ‘men apprehend intangibles through sensibles.’¹¹⁰ The presiding bishop affirms this view and said the African does not believe in abstracts but concrete things. Hence there must be visual representation of what they believe¹¹¹ that contemporary chapel halls are just as comparable as cinema halls and other social centres because of the lack of pictorial representations. In such empty Church halls, one does not feel ‘anything’ when one enters. As pointed out earlier, these sites become thresholds of the supernatural. They may be symbolized by statues, crosses, sacred scriptures or legal documents. The documents are usually encased in boxes as was the case of the Jewish Ark of the Covenant. Most shrines have the cross of Jesus as in the case of the Abasua Prayer Centre.

Educational elements are demonstrated when pilgrims travel to gain experience from other enlightened, visionary and charismatic personalities. At the feet of these

¹¹⁰ Frederick J. E. Woodbridge and Wendell T. Bush, “Psychology and Scientific Methods,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13, no. 1 (1916). http://www.archive.org/stream/journalofphiloso13lancuoft/journalofphiloso13lancuoft_djvu.txt

¹¹¹ The Presiding Bishop, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

knowledgeable individuals, in-depth knowledge in scriptural truths for example may be shared. The knowledge gained parallels a normal classroom experience. Secular education takes place where other non-religious experiences pertaining to the culture and the environment are also taught to pilgrims.

All these examples may have psycho-socio and theological implications on the individuals. They may be relieved from some pent-up emotion and enjoy a boost in their faith from other pilgrims, experienced leaders among others. A sum total of all these experiences emanating from the sites, the motives of pilgrim and their expectations become important lessons for the pilgrims and the larger Christian community. This makes the present study a very important one. Most of the Methodists who visit the Church's sites go through many of such rich experiences of healing and spiritual transformation.¹¹² They should be able to share their experiences to promote growth in the Church as asserted by Augustine that miracle experiences should be canonized and publicized abroad for all to know that miracles still occur as they did in the Biblical times.¹¹³

2.8.4 Drive and Motives of Pilgrims

Most scholars agree that this peculiar impulse of visiting sacred sites is a natural instinct, a 'typical human desire, to seek out the sacred'.¹¹⁴ Though, there could be several other motivating factors.¹¹⁵ For the religious it has always been the need to assuage the

¹¹² FGDs and interviews recorded some of these testimonies.

¹¹³ Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 147.

¹¹⁴ L. Tomasi, "Homo Viator: from Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism via the Journey," in William H. Swatos and Luigi Tomasi (eds.), *From medieval pilgrimage to religious tourism : the social and cultural economics of piety* (Westport, CO: Praeger, 2002), 125; E.M. Wainwright, 2011, "On pilgrimage with biblical women in their land(s)," *HTS* 67 no. 1, 7. doi 10.4102/hts.v67i1.918. See also Kathryn Rountree, "Performing the Divine: Neo-Pagan Pilgrimages and Embodiment at Sacred Sites," *Body & Society* 12, no. 4 (2006): 95-115. doi: 10.1177/1357034X06070886.

¹¹⁵ N. Collins-Kreiner, "Researching Pilgrimage; Continuity and Transformations," *Annals of Tourism Research* 37, no. 2 (2010), 440-456. See also, Thomas A. Thompson, "Pilgrimage and Shrines: A Recognition Long Delayed," *Marian Studies* 51 (2000): 117.

deep longings and thirst for the transcendent reality¹¹⁶ and a yearning for spiritual awakening and regeneration.¹¹⁷ Thus, Saint Augustine's remark, 'thou hast created us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee'.¹¹⁸ This may partially explain a people's drive for divine encounters at sacred sites, to get closer to their source of creation.

That pilgrimage is a natural impulse, not time-bound is suggested by J. Wilkinson, who asserts that 'God Himself will satisfy the craving he has created' (*in man to seek him*).¹¹⁹ This implies that people are divinely guided to sacred places. There is no point legislating on the inception of pilgrimage.¹²⁰ The following examples give proof to Wilkinson's argument. Melito, Bishop of Sardis, Pionus of Smyrna, Origen, Alexander and Firmilian, out of their own volition visited the holy land in the third Century.¹²¹ Out of the five cited above, Alexander alone demonstrated the necessities of pilgrimage as authenticating the biblical account. According to Peter Walker, this desire, is 'the germinal idea of pilgrimage'¹²² and essentially, conclusive support of pilgrimages as a natural impulse.

Basing our reports on respondents views about the selected study sites, almost all the three sites started by this same natural impulse before their official recognition. The story surrounding Abasua Prayer Centre suggests that the Holy Spirit prompted the founder

¹¹⁶ C.H. Schutte, *Retreats, Holy Places and Pilgrimages*, 27. See also Rountree, "Performing the Divine", 100.

¹¹⁷ Olsen Brad, *Sacred Places in Europe: 108 destinations* (San Francisco: CCC Publishing, 2010).

¹¹⁸ Augustine. *Confessions*. Electronic version Encarta 2009.

¹¹⁹ New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, 1. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>(accessed, June 6, 2012)

¹²⁰ Edward D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-460* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 379.

¹²¹ Pierre Maravel, "The Earliest Phase of Christian Pilgrimage in the Near East before the 7th Century" *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56(2002). <http://www.ttk.gov.tr/data/2002/dop56.htm>. See also Johnathan Sumption, *Pilgrimages* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 89. EBook Edition. Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places. The Myths of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 227.

¹²² P. W. L. Walker, *Holy city, Holy Places? Christian Attitude to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 12.

to climb the Atwea Mountain. Rev. Abraham Osei Assibey, the founder's ministry continued to use the site before the Methodist Church's official recognition. After Birch Freeman's exit the indigenes of Adansi Kusa as well as the early Methodists knew that a great man of God had lived in their midst. Therefore, whatever he touched and used could effect a cure in their lives. This was before the first Diocesan bishop Rev. Agyei-Mensah decided to turn the place into a prayer centre.¹²³ Very Rev, Solomon Eshun, received an audition from God for the WdGC to start. This was long before the place became adopted by the Sekondi Diocese for its sod-cutting to begin. All these seem to corroborate the argument of SSV being a spontaneous activity without any official fiat.

There is no gainsaying pilgrims have more than one motive when embarking on a SSV. A research carried out on pilgrims' motives revealed a wide range, as close as twenty reasons per pilgrim. These were beside the predominant religious motive.¹²⁴ It has been observed also that more often than not pilgrims set out on a journey with a view to have just an exposure. But on getting to the site, the beauty and fascination of a site with its thrilling effect disorient them. An insignificant number of the Methodist Church members however expressed more than one motive in this study.

2.9 Biblical and Church Historical Perspectives of SSV

2.9.1 The Old Testament and SSV

There are numerous references in the Old Testament of God's self-revelation and interventions in the lives of the people of Israel, corporately and individually that provide support for the practice of SSV. In Deuteronomy 16:16-17, Yahweh established three specific pilgrimages which required all males to appear before him. Three times a year

¹²³ Focus group GHAMSU Executives, May 5, 2013.

¹²⁴ Magry, *Shrines and Pilgrimage*, 29.

all men of Israel were to appear in the presence of *Adonai* in the place which he (God) would choose — at the festival of *matzah*, at the festival of *Shavu'ot* and at the festival of *Sukkot*. This was almost akin to renewal.

Since the Jews were not all located at a common place, each group travelled from their diasporic place to the sanctuaries to fulfil their religious obligation. With the rise of the Jerusalem Temple the presence of God became linked to a particular region and place.¹²⁵ Baruch Bokser also shares the view that the Jewish festivals gradually became a national festival based in Jerusalem (*which drew all and sundry to the place*).¹²⁶ Even though most scholars find in the Old Testament the basis of NT and Christian sacred site visitation, there are a few dissenting voices, for example, Taylor. In the view of the researcher if the Jews were making journeys to the temple in Jerusalem¹²⁷ and Jesus Christ also made journeys to Jerusalem (including the one with his parents as a child), and before his death, enough bases are obtained for such a practice among contemporary Christians.

2.9.2 The New Testament and SSV

A work on the concept of sacred site visitation in the Christian tradition would be incomplete without reference to the dialogue between Jesus Christ and the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's well (cf. John 4:19-24). The woman had asked Jesus Christ concerning the appropriate place to worship. Mt. Gerizim, the Samaritan holy site, was in full view of Jacob's well.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ See, Dee Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 2001), 20.

¹²⁶ Baruch Bokser, "Unleavened Bread and Passover," *ABD6* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 758.

¹²⁷ Alisa Cotter, "The Interplay of Politics and Piety" (MA Thesis - Wichita State University, 2010), 3.

¹²⁸ Graig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 231.

Being a mixed race and rejected by the Jews, the Samaritans established their own temple and religious services on Mt. Gerizim. Without going into the history of the division of the united monarchy into the Northern and Southern kingdoms and subsequently the Northerners becoming a mixed race in 727 BC, let the above suffice as background to the John 4 dialogue. The response of Jesus Christ to the woman must be perceived as spiritual. The temple is Jesus himself and perhaps within everybody who worships God in truth and in spirit. And wherever a Christian may be, he or she can worship without necessarily looking for a special mountain or sacred site. The Christian culture recognized a few of the sites in the lives of the patriarchs but these were interpreted with some subtle nuances. Instances of these are, Heb 12:22 and Revelation 14:1. In both passages there are references to Mount Zion. Unlike the Old Testament understanding, this Mount Zion is not a sacred place on earth but it is referred to as a heavenly city. It is not the Old Jerusalem on earth but a New Jerusalem from heaven. Turner asserts that Jesus' declaration presupposes that 'the day for sanctuaries...any special holy place was past. This worship in spirit and truth could occur anywhere, without benefit of shrine'. Further to this, 'the immemorial response of men', to crystallize 'all strongly-felt encounters with the divine', as observed about Peter in Matthew 17:1-8 receives a similar response; 'no more shrines....' Jesus enshrines the revelation now.¹²⁹

2.9.3 Apostolic and Post Apostolic Origins of SSV

During the Apostolic era, the Christian believers continued in the three yearly visits to Jerusalem. It was during one of such yearly visit, the Feast of Weeks, that they experienced the Holy Spirit baptism.

¹²⁹ Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 110.

The early Church continued in the steps of Jesus and his disciples, but the practice became much more pronounced in the reign of Constantine. With the era of recognition, and the Emperor's desire to identify the Church with its origins, Palestine became the obvious choice. So going there meant receiving afresh the original mandate which required the Jews to present themselves three times before God.¹³⁰

Three arguments in support of the era of acceptance and Constantine's official recognition of pilgrimage are as follows: firstly, Constantine's Holy land basilicas especially, the Holy Sepulchre and its highly accommodating size indicate the architects had pilgrims in mind.¹³¹ Walker notes that during this era 'groves, caves and pagan shrines' were turned into 'magnificent basilicas'.¹³² Secondly, Eusebius' affirmation of the pilgrimage situation in 320 is another attestation. Walker declares that:

About 320 A.D, only eight years or so after the Peace of the Church, Eusebius of Caesarea wrote with satisfaction that believers in Christ already streamed to the Holy Land from everywhere on earth to see for themselves, the truth of Christianity and to worship at the holy places.¹³³

Though there is a shade of doubt surrounding the view that Empress Helena, Constantine's mother was the first pilgrim to the holy land after the Christianization of the Empire, it is argued that her journey in 327 gave the whole phenomena an official character and this could have awakened people's interests in pilgrimage. Further to this is Euthropia, Constantine's mother-in-law's visit to the Oak of Mamre. This also called for the building of another basilica at that site to replace the Pagan cult. All these views lend credence to the claim that the royal family, at the time of Constantine generated interest

¹³⁰ Walker, *Holy city, Holy Places?* 12-15.

¹³¹ Kenneth G. Holum, "Hadrian and St. Helena: Imperial travel and the origins of Christian Holy Land pilgrimage," in Robert Ousterhout, *The Blessings of Pilgrimage* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 67-81.

¹³² Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* 17.

¹³³ Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 2.

in Christian pilgrimages.¹³⁴ But if Christians were merely observing age-long tradition of Jewish pilgrimages at the time of Constantine then it meant that Constantine did not officially sanction the practice. Besides, ‘many of the first pilgrimage sites kept after the exit of Constantine were those believed to have been patronized by Jewish–Christians. For example, the Oak of Mamre was sacred to pagans and Jews for a long time.’ But Constantine only refurbished it for Christian use in the year 324 after the visit of his mother-in-law to the place.¹³⁵

R.A. Markus criticizes the Pilgrimage sites of Jewish-Christian origins particularly the Oak of Mamre. Though the site dates back to Jewish antiquities and was patronized by Jewish-Christians, there could not have been any Jewish-Christian groups existing around the middle of the second century let alone a cult of holy place visitation extending from pre-Constantinian era to become the basis for the Christian practice even in the post-Constantinian era, Markus asserts.¹³⁶ Scores of argument both for and against Constantine’s official fiat on SSV in the post apostolic period still persist.

But since establishing a date for the onset of Christian pilgrimages is an unending debate the researcher espouses Thomas Thompson’s position that pilgrimages ‘arose spontaneously in the early Church without any official fiat.’¹³⁷ Thompson argues that pilgrimage was an age-long practice. Constantine’s building projects rekindled it without any official launch.

How did the Apostolic and post apostolic fathers view the popularity of the entire practice in the light of the Bible? P. L. Walker who sees the practice as having been

¹³⁴ Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places*, 2

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, 6.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁷ Thompson, “Pilgrimage and Shrines,” 113.

necessitated by the exigencies of the times presents an elucidating analysis of the phenomenon when he writes,

If the new and exciting demands of a Christian empire caused the Church to seek out its historic roots, to test out its new identity with the yardstick of its original identity, what was more natural than to look once again to Palestine, the place of the Church's origin, in order to receive as it were, a new mandate which was both authentic and original. If the eschatological hope of the persecuted minority gave way to a sharper historical sense a new desire to find and locate God in this world rather than in the next, what was more natural than to increase veneration for 'holy sites' and relics, things which could mediate God to the believer not from above, but from below? Above all if Christians now desire to affirm 'this world', if they sensed that they were now at home in the world, and not merely called out of 'from the world' what better place to celebrate it than to focus on the locality of the incarnation that event which more than any other might legitimate such an affirmation of this world. With Christianity becoming recognized and state-sponsored, Christians, in the view of Walker were no longer preoccupied with the imminence of the Parousia to grant them relief from suffering. Their ecclesiology suggested an affirmation of this world'. Palestine, Bethlehem the city of Christ's incarnation and Jerusalem, the city of his crucifixion became recognized pilgrimage centres together with other important sites.¹³⁸

Rome was also noted for its famous shrines embedding the remains of martyrs especially Peter and Paul. Occurring alongside, these pilgrimages were the cult of saints and relics which gradually became an integral part of the Holy Land pilgrimage in the mid-fourth century.¹³⁹ M. A. Hall asserts that with the discovery of the holy cross by

¹³⁸ Walker, *Holy City; Holy places?* 14-15.

¹³⁹ M.A. Hall, "Of Holy Men and Heroes: The Cult of Saints in Medieval Perthshire," *The Innes Review* 56, no. 1 (2005), 63.

Empress Helena ‘relics of the cross began to proliferate.’ The cult enjoyed much devotion. It is interesting to note that ‘... its popularity and the ambivalent theological issues raised make the issue of SSV with all its ramifications worthy of academic discussion.

2.9.4 The Patristic and Theological Concerns about SSV

Encountering the sacred in the era of the patristic falls into two main categories. There was the local veneration, which entailed visits to shrines or tombs of saints and universal or central pilgrimage which entailed visits to the holy city, which is Jerusalem. The Church fathers’ attitude and concerns about the holy land visitation vacillated between support and reservation. ‘We find that there exist two opposite opinions about worshipping in the Holy City of Jerusalem. The first (is) that of prudent, educated people, who do not consider it becoming. And the other (is) that of simple common people, who regard it as appropriate’.¹⁴⁰

Writing on the debate about the Christian attitude towards pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Gregory Barhebraeus, a thirteenth century Syriac scholar cited Galatians 4:26 and John 4:24 as passages that informed the solitaries and the Doctors at the time to pursue the heavenly Jerusalem, and to worship God who is a spirit, spiritually. Geoffrey of Vendome wrote about the same attitude in the Middle Ages by informing an Abbot in a letter not to stray from the path of the heavenly Jerusalem to the earthly Jerusalem since visiting the sites in the holy land was indicated for the lay but indicted for monks by the apostolic see.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 4.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 20-21.

The two scholars in their writings typified the prevailing thought on pilgrimage among Christian thinkers and monastic leaders in the East and the West in the Middle Ages.

Some historians rather perceived this debate on the validation of pilgrimages in the Middle Ages as a debate among the religious minds about a popular religious phenomenon. Thus, it should be understood as support or rejection of the religious behaviour of the ordinary Christians.

In the view of Bitton-Ashkelony, the issue rather rests with the faith of the simple or lay which in common intellectual parlance is termed 'popular religion'. The positions of the intellectuals on this issue should be instructive for the purposes of this research.

From the Latin West during the fourth and the fifth centuries learned people and the aristocrats patronized this practice. They travelled to holy sites in their immediate vicinities and beyond alongside the ordinary people or the lay. Among these learned men were Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa, Orosius, Basil of Caesarea, Paulinus of Nola and many more.

Three of these learned people, Jerome, Augustine and Origen are discussed here because of the deep theological concerns they contribute towards the practice of visiting sacred sites.

Jerome (347?-419[420]) lived the last thirty five years of his life in Jerusalem. One of his remarks that tended to validate the propriety in pilgrimages is that 'it is only in Palestine that the true understanding of scriptures would be gained'. Hence his translation of the Bible was carried out in Bethlehem. He invited others to visit the places of

Christ's birth, his passion and crucifixion.¹⁴² This notwithstanding, he opposed the tendency of people enclosing 'the omnipotence of God within close confines'¹⁴³ so to speak. To Paulinus, one of his disciples, he wrote that it is not the fact of living 'there (*the holy city*) but living there well, that is worthy of praise' as follow up on the view, he was averse towards those pilgrims who supposed that their souls would benefit by the mere fact that their bodies were in Jerusalem.

For this reason, Jerome decried the tendency of some pilgrims who overtly demonstrated their piety but did not live according to the biblical standards. Having lived there for years, he eventually came to reject the sanctity of Jerusalem, referring to it as the 'sin city'.¹⁴⁴ Apart from the relics which he did not condemn, Jerome did not adore the holy city any longer. On relics of saints, Jerome said: 'we do not worship their relics any more than we do the sun or the moon, the angels, or seraphim. We honour them in honour of He whose faith they witnessed'. 'We honour the master by means of the servants'.¹⁴⁵ And one could surmise that perhaps abuse and distortions of biblical precepts changed Jerome's attitude about the holy sites in Jerusalem.

Augustine (354-430) was, however, affirmative about the virtues in the saints' relics. He refrained from articulating any theology on sacred geography. Pointing to his classic work, *The City of God*, Bitton-Ashkelony makes reference to a recorded number of miracles which occurred at some important sites¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴² Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?*, 21.

¹⁴³ Cotter, "The Interplay", 18.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 53.

¹⁴⁶ Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 125.

Taking the totality of the views of these fathers, their later attitudes in light of their former positions, one can only say they acted like any normal human beings. ‘As the centuries pass, we find human nature the same in its complexity of motives. Its noblest actions are found to be often caused by petty spites or vanity or overvaulting ambition; and even when begun in good faith as a source of devotion, the practices of piety at times are degraded into causes of vice.’¹⁴⁷ Jacobs’ view aptly summarizes Jerome and Augustine’s perspectives. Being human, any of these could have applied in their case either directly or indirectly.

Origen (185-254 CE) visited the Holy Land but disapproved of the practice of pilgrimage. In his discourses against the great philosopher Celsus, he asserted: ‘we do not ask the question ‘how shall we go to God’ as though we thought that God existed in some place, he holds all things in His power’. That was Origen’s reservation on sacred site visitation. But his most significant contribution, as far as the debate of that epoch was concerned, was in favour of the faith of the ‘simple’ and common people. Just like Nazianzus in this poetic piece : ‘For many are the paths to salvation, all leading to communion with God; along these you must travel, not only along that based on eloquence.

For the language of simple faith is sufficient, and by this means God effortlessly saves the majority. If the faith were accessible only to the educated, nothing in this world would be poorer than God. Brouria asserts that Origen recognized the persistence of the faith of the common people as a clear category within the Church: a faith characterized by ‘unscholarly’ and ‘intellectual deficiency’. Origen however did not perceive Christianity’

¹⁴⁷ Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 125

to teach the simple in order to raise them to a higher level of understanding of the Christian doctrines'. He saw the common people as those in the process of ascending to God.¹⁴⁸

2.9.5 Medieval pilgrimages

The medieval period beginning around 350 -1450 saw pilgrimage assuming varied forms. This was the height of the cult of the saints. Pilgrimages were set down as punishments for certain offences. The arduous nature of the journeys made them efficient means of penance. One of the canons passed under King Edgar in England (959-975) states that it is with deep penitence that a layman would lay aside his weapons and travel far, bare-footed, and nowhere pass a second night, and fast, watch and pray fervently, by day and night, and willingly undergo fatigue, and be so squalid that iron comes, not on hair or on nail (a thorough description of the penitential journeys). Pilgrims were required to obtain written notes from their bishops. Special mass was said for them before they set out.

A pilgrim was identified by a special dress, a broad brimmed hat, a pouch and a long staff. It was also fashionable during this period for bishops to go on pilgrimage to the Holy City. Tombs of martyrs¹⁴⁹ became the epicentre of pilgrimages. Various cults arose within the Catholic Church. The martyrs were revered, their relics were cherished. They were believed to work miracles and esteemed as guardians of cities, patrons of trades. They became intermediaries between their devotees and God and were invoked to intercede on behalf of their votaries.

To these martyrs were added Christians of exemplary lives and angels, especially Michael. The reverence for the Virgin Mary became very pronounced.¹⁵⁰ The shrines were used as sacred buildings because of a relic, a sacred image, a miracle performed there or

¹⁴⁸ Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 20.

¹⁴⁹ Tweed, "John Wesley Slept Here," 3.

¹⁵⁰ K. S. Latourette, *Christianity through the Ages* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 20.

an indulgence obtained there. It was quite fashionable for pilgrims to place gifts at holy sites and send home memorabilia.¹⁵¹ The practice was subjected to abuse and this led to criticism from the reformers of the time.

2.9.6 Pilgrimage in Contemporary History

The pre-reformers of the early sixteenth century criticised the Catholic institution for the extremities in their theology on holy site visitation, apparitional sites and their numerous reliquaries. In the *Encyclopaedia of Voltaire*, pilgrimage was defined as a religious devotion badly understood. Erasmus in his ‘Religious Pilgrimage’ was very critical about the fact that people undertook pilgrimage for the wrong motives such as escaping work and family responsibilities. Martin Luther objected to pilgrimage as a type of ‘good work’ by which people sought to save themselves, rather than rely on the merits of Jesus Christ. Calvin denounced pilgrimage as false piety. Zwingli forbade pilgrimage to the shrine of the Black Virgin at Einsiedeln, where he was once chaplain. Many shrines, especially those associated with the veneration of relics and images of the saints, suffered from the iconoclastic outbursts. Sixteenth-century England witnessed the violent destruction of the shrines and images in Churches.

After the Reformation, pilgrimage and shrines gradually got revived in Catholic areas. Peter Magry reports that the Council of Trent sanctioned iconoclasm and the sale of indulgences. Pilgrimage, especially to Jerusalem, had been part of the spiritual program which Ignatius of Loyola bequeathed the Society of Jesus and it was pursued with vigour. The period of Enlightenment and the Jansenists were also not favourable toward pilgrimages or shrines, especially the legends associated with the latter.

¹⁵¹ J. Stopford, “Some Approaches to the Archaeology of Christian Pilgrimage,” *World Archaeology* 26, no. 1 (1994), 57-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/124864>.

The seventeenth and eighteenth century reforms in Catholicism, demonstrated the concern to avoid manifestations of devotion which could be interpreted as superstitious.¹⁵² From 1789, there was a notable decline in pilgrimage again. The nineteenth century, however, ushered in a tremendous revival. Large-group pilgrimage began. New laws were dedicated to shrines that they should be dedicated for the pilgrimage of the faithful, designated as national centres with the approval of the bishop's conference, and international centres with the approval of the Holy See, and that shrines should be places of evangelism. They should be places faithful Christians could obtain means of salvation: through the dissemination of the gospel, appropriate worship patterns, observance of the Holy Communion and other penitential acts.¹⁵³ The foregoing historical account is paradigmatic for upcoming institutionalized systems.

2.10 The Concept of Renewal and its Place in SSV

Expressed through a number of synonyms and metaphors as reformation, revival, and restoration, renewal happens to be a very essential core element in most ecclesiastical settings. Although each of the variants may express some slight nuances when used within specific contexts, they all express the same idea of change for the better, and indicate deliberate efforts to improve an existing status quo. Change being the focus, whenever issues of renewal are raised, and a sense of continuity with what has gone before is implied. Such changes usually occur at the institutional level with structural adjustments. It can also affect the individual Christian, calling and amending of ways. At other times, the call for change can be both spiritual and physical and can affect both the individual Christian and the Church as a whole.

¹⁵² "New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia." <http://www.newadvent.org/summa> (accessed, June 6, 2012).

¹⁵³ Ibidem.

Renewal comes in different forms namely, Spiritual, cognitive, personal and group renewal. Spiritual renewal is a transformation in the spiritual lives of pilgrims brought about by encountering the divine, necessitating spiritual transformation. The ultimate aim for visiting sacred site as a Church is to create space to encounter God. Therefore, all the religious activities organized there must be geared towards the achievement of this aim. By observing these religious activities, one puts oneself in the right condition for an encounter. And these religious activities, if properly done, will enable a person grow in his or her spiritual life. It is in order, therefore, to contend that spiritual renewal is a necessary dimension of visiting sacred sites. In the view of some scholars, if people who are seeking renewal and expected to show maturity in their spiritual lives after all these exercises still act like new born babies always asking for milk in other words, demand one existential need after the other then it can be assumed that renewal has not taken place.

Cognitive renewal is being used here to refer to the transformations that occur in the mind. Transformation comes through the renewing of the mind (cf. Rom. 12:2). Often, receiving information becomes a precursor to the renewing of the mind. On such spiritual journeys, one receives a lot of information (either through group or personal studies).

Moreover, the serenity of the place and the conduciveness of the atmosphere for times of reflection aid the process for people to see the Scriptures from a perspective not previously considered. And this is what stimulates and results in cognitive renewal. This cognitive renewal leads naturally to personal renewal.

Personal renewal occurs when the divine encounter which a person experiences at a sacred site positively impacts his or her life. Normally, this is often a post-pilgrimage experience because one can only tell of such changes when there is a notable change in the life of a person. It is essential to point out though, that spiritual renewal and cognitive

renewal are independent of each other. But there is a sense in which both can be components of personal renewal. This is because when there are spiritual and cognitive renewals, there will be a corresponding attitudinal change in one's relationship with God and humankind. It is crucial to point out that personal renewal does not occur only when people visit sacred sites both personal and group retreats essentially contribute to that. The significant point is that a change of behaviour in the individual lives of religious people who visit sacred sites shows that a renewal has taken place.

In the group renewal, the dynamism that comes with numbers is a determining factor. When a group of people come together with the purpose of encountering God, many benefits are derived. One example of such benefits is that while individuals come together for religious activities like congregational prayers and worship, they 'sharpen' each other as iron sharpens iron (cf. Prov. 27:17). By so doing, people who under normal circumstances are unable to pray for an hour are motivated to do so when they see others doing it. Moreover, coming into contact with other people with different abilities help to nurture hidden abilities in others.

2.10.1 Retreat as Renewal

Retreat forms are numerous and very diverse.¹⁵⁴ Among these are individually guided, contemplative, open doors, dialogical, group and personal. Whilst commenting on the importance of retreats to the vitality of the believer and the Church's life, J.N. Ward declared:

When people are persuaded to leave the environment of life and go some distance into a completely new spiritual situation (especially if it is in beautiful surroundings where there is a tradition of community prayer) they find that they are able

¹⁵⁴ Peter H. Jenkins, "A Study of the Origins, Development and Contemporary Manifestations of Christian Retreats" (MTh Thesis, University of South Africa, 2006), 180.

to receive in this isolation and concentration much more of God than they apparently receive in their familiar pattern of regular weekly meetings of worship or instruction in the life of the local Church. It is more likely that this more concentrated and prepared method of spiritual rehabilitation is going to replace some of the traditional weekly programmes of the average Church.¹⁵⁵

In the writings of this author, one observes that her concept of retreats gives so much attention to silence. This perhaps shows how pertinent the place of silence is in Christian retreats. She is of the opinion that silence is an integral component of retreat because the true self can hear itself speak in silence, instead of the false. Perhaps this will explain the Methodist Church's choice of places at the outskirts of towns. Ward further comments:

This repels or intrigues people according to their spiritual make up and present need, but to those who are intrigued the realization of the value of silence is a moment of true spiritual discovery in their lives. It is the awakening of a thirst that will never leave them, the thirst for silence.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, retreats are fruitful and their purposes are achieved when people who embark on such spiritual exercises get actively involved, to get drawn to their Maker. Looking at how various authors define Christian retreats, we can deduce the main drive for Christian pilgrimages.

E. Griffin defines spiritual retreat 'simply as a matter of going into a separate place to seek Christian growth in a disciplined way'.¹⁵⁷ In his view, Brother Roman states that retreat 'is the withdrawal from the noise and demands of ordinary, busy life to make time for God in interior stillness'.¹⁵⁸ It suggests that his understanding of retreat deals with making time to spend quality times with God devoid of distractions. For J. Townroe,

¹⁵⁵ J.N. Ward, *The Use of Praying* (London: Epworth, 1967), 125.

¹⁵⁶ Ward, *The Use of Praying*, 125, 127.

¹⁵⁷ E. Griffin, *Wilderness Time, A guide for Spiritual Retreat* (San Francisco: Harper 1997), 17.

¹⁵⁸ Brother Ramon, *Seven Days of Solitude* (Ligouri, Missouri: Ligouri Publications, 2000), 6.

‘retreat in a Christian sense, is to seek God and rest in His presence in a time set apart for prayer and reflection.¹⁵⁹ Solitude, silence and stillness, in varying degrees are normally regarded as necessary conditions’. This view takes the argument further to indicate that the time spent must be fruitful. And for this author, prayer and reflection are necessary to make it fruitful. According to T. A. Hudson, ‘retreat is a term that tends to be loosely used; often referring to almost any event on the Church's calendar that takes place away from familiar surroundings’.¹⁶⁰

A critical consideration of these definitions suggests that a time of retreat is a period of withdrawal from the daily routines of life to encounter God and it must be prayerful and reflective moments. But the manner in which the encounter takes place is crucial. R. Foster and K. Yanni assert that ‘the only reason for a retreat is to be available to God. Everything else is wholly secondary. One is seeking to create an open, empty space in one’s life where God can work’.¹⁶¹ If such is the desire of the one who is seeking to encounter God, then it must be carried out in a place that allows the realization of this aim.

There are different types of retreats. R. P. Job talks about retreats which are meant for enhancing the spiritual lives of both individuals in the Church and the Church as a body of believers. He points out four types of retreats that are prevalent among Christians. These include dialogical retreats, personally guided retreats, preached retreats and private retreats.¹⁶² However, a critical analysis of these reveals two major categorizations; personal retreats and group retreats.

¹⁵⁹ J. Townroe, “Retreat” in C. Jones Wainright and G. Yarnold (eds.), *The Study of Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad 1986), 156.

¹⁶⁰ T. A. Hudson, “Introduction to Spiritual Retreats” in C. Kourie and L. Kretzschmar (eds.), *Christian Spirituality in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000), 156.

¹⁶¹ R. Foster and K. Yanni, *Celebrating the Disciplines* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 267.

¹⁶² R. P. Job, *Spiritual Life in the Congregation* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997), 17-19.

2.10.2 Personal Retreats

Primarily, this is a type of retreat held alone with God. Job defines personal retreats as ones observed alone without the availability of spiritual guide.¹⁶³ This emanates from multiplicity of factors. Sometimes, the desire for experiencing and enjoying intimacy with God drives people to spend time away from their daily routines, in an atmosphere that promotes that aim. In most cases, the purpose of this type of retreat is personal growth. Other times, difficult situations make it so crucial for people to spend time alone with God to seek remedies to some of their circumstantial maladies of life.

Isolating one's self from the daily routines to a place of seclusion to encounter God is possible when it is accompanied by spiritual exercises like reading and meditating on the scriptures, praying, and singing spiritual songs. For Foster this process must begin with the aim for the retreat. He points out: 'it is a time to become still, to enter into the recreating silence, to allow the fragmentation of our minds to become (centred)'.¹⁶⁴ Diverse kinds of personal retreats exist in Christian spirituality but they cannot be discussed within the constraints of this research.

2.10.3 Group Retreats

This is exactly the opposite of personal retreats because it deals with a group of religious people who visit sacred sites. This implies that many things ought to be taken into consideration. N.V. Vandergrift presents five strategies for planning a group retreat.¹⁶⁵ The first strategy deals with the spiritual needs of the group. The presence of different people necessitates different expectations and abilities. Hence the need to ensure that all participants benefit.

¹⁶³ Job, *Spiritual Life*, 18-19.

¹⁶⁴ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 24.

¹⁶⁵ N.V. Vandergrift, *Planning and Implementing Retreats* (Ligouri, MI: Ligouri Publications, 2001), 9-11.

The second is biblical education. This is where appropriate passages are selected to address specific needs. The third is the format for the retreat. N.V. Vandergrift considers age, needs and number of participants.¹⁶⁶ The fourth strategy which Vandergrift proposes is the structural design of the retreat and this implies the timetable of the retreat.¹⁶⁷ The final stage looks at the ambience and setup. What is most crucial here is the furnishing lighting, space, music among others.¹⁶⁸

Preaching, Personally Guided, Dialogical, Daily-life, Emmaus and Shalom retreats are but a few of the group retreats. We consider here the Emmaus walk.

2.10.4 Emmaus Walk

Unlike the formal forms of retreats which have prayer and silence as the focus, the Emmaus Walk emphasises listening to talk. However, it merits the term retreat because it possesses other characteristics of retreats like prayer, withdrawal and divine encounters. Due to its highly structured nature, it must be handled by a trained team. Three consecutive meditations are prescribed for the morning, followed by a period of silence during the first evening of the walk.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, five talks are given on each of the three days of the retreat, focusing on topics like prevenient and justifying grace, sanctifying grace and many others. On the first day of the retreat, prevenient and justifying grace is treated. On the second day, pre-eminence is given to teachings on Christ as the model for response to gracious offer and how to live in grace as disciples.

Finally, the last day is devoted to teachings on the work of the Holy Spirit as the transformer of our society through the agency of religious people who visit sacred sites

¹⁶⁶ Vandergrift, *Planning and Implementing Retreats*, 36-40.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, 4.

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem, 3-58.

¹⁶⁹ "An Introduction to Walk to Emmaus, the Upper Room," <http://emmaus.upperroom.org/resources>.

and the Church's mission. Apparently, this retreat is considered by the first Director of the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme as one source of renewal discipline for the Church as it does not take huge numbers. Except being on the Almanac, it is not publicized like Abasua.

Considering the nature of Christian retreats, one must be disciplined enough in order to achieve one's aim of retreating. It must be noted that strictly following the discipline also can stifle one's relationship with God. In such instance, relationship with God takes pre-eminence over discipline. In that sense, there is the need to ensure that religious people who visit sacred sites are guided and guarded from extremes.

2.11 Conclusion

The undergirding idea is that sacred sites generally are distinct geographical locations set aside by a person or a group so as to pursue spiritual ideals, or some sort of fulfilment. They lie beyond the physical and mental boundaries of a people and designated for religious activities. In Ghana, the sacred sites are also some prayer centres of the Christian Churches which require that people travel, sometimes not less than five kilometres (it could be more) in distance to get there.

Visitation describes journeys made to these places for spiritual purposes, physical and emotional balance. In the non-Christian contexts, a sacred site is believed to have been originally identified by ancient peoples as the abodes of divinities, human origins, the intersection between the terrestrial and the transcendental worlds or sites that orientate towards the lunar or astral galaxies. In the contemporary secular settings sacred sites exist in many modern communities around people and events.

Most scholars note that sacred sites are places that contribute to: a) learning psychic and spiritual abilities, higher knowledge and wisdom, b) healing of physical bodies,

emotional and spiritual conditions in man either personally or corporately, c)power generation and dynamism to people, etc.

Withdrawal, solitude quietness, prayer and meditation are some of the factors that promote renewal at sacred sites. Participants may be part of a religious group or cultural group, travelling from far and near to get in touch with another realm beyond themselves. However, varied their desires, the common thread that runs through them all is desire for change. Wherever change occurs, there is renewal. And this can be collectively or singularly acquired. Moreover, Christian renewal can be both cognitive and spiritual, individual or group oriented.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEMPORARY GHANAIAAN METHODIST SPIRITUALITY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses contemporary Ghanaian Methodist Spirituality, a religious style which seems to blend the Wesleyan tradition as well as the current Ghanaian Charismatic Renewal patterns. The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part, which deals with the background information to the Wesleyan Methodist tradition, addresses the understanding of Christian Spirituality and the roots and elements of the Wesleyan Spirituality. The second part discusses Ghanaian Methodist Spirituality, which comprises Pentecostalism and Charismatism historically and contextually, Ghanaian Methodist Spirituality and the Renewal Programme of the Methodist Church Ghana.

The Ghanaian Methodist Spirituality which is crucial to the main theme of this research highlights Evangelism, Mission and Renewal generally, and then focuses on the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme, its historical beginnings and its mandate of operation. It also presents an outline of the history and current state of SSV in the MCG and the role the three study sites play in the SSV discourse of the Church.

3.2 Understanding Christian Spirituality

Christian Spirituality in this discussion is understood as a godly quest, or desire to get to know God better and to live out the sense of the sacred in relationship with others¹⁷⁰. The term also conjures ‘a personal, intuitive, experiential involvement with the divine,

¹⁷⁰ Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 30.

the supernatural, or the Universe'. A few scholarly views depict similar thoughts about the concept of spirituality. Geoffrey Wainwright asserts that spirituality is the combination of praying and Christian living contrasted with secular life. J. Townroe in *The Study of Spirituality* also asserts that an individual's spiritual development means growth towards a fuller union with God through prayer. This is a development which is in conformity to God's will in life, and ultimately leading to growth in our mutual relationships towards one another. These views, in their emphasis on closer relationship with God and cordial human interaction were strongly espoused by John Wesley and advocated for all Methodists.

To Methodists, Christian spirituality is a state whereby an individual stands in a vertical relation with his maker (the transcendent being) and in turn builds up a harmonious relationship with others to make Christ known.

Studying the spirituality of Christians entails observing both their individual lifestyles and their public worship (in this context the Methodists) and sometimes how this lifestyle influences or impacts the lives of the observing community. As the next segment addresses the roots of the Wesleyan spirituality, the Christian lifestyle of the founding fathers is discussed to know what informed their spirituality and what Wesleyans today have to learn.

3.3 Roots and Elements of the Wesleyan Spirituality

It is argued that Methodism as a concept lies beyond the Wesleys.¹⁷¹ But technically, the term Methodist originated with the Oxford Reformers during the 18th Century

¹⁷¹ W.H. Bevins, "A Pentecostal Appropriation of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 2 (2006):229-246. doi:10.1177/0966736906062134.

as a pejorative college nickname for their rigid ascetic and methodical lifestyle. Beginning 1729, the movement met every week, fasted regularly, abstained from most forms of amusement and luxurious life styles. Their style of worship was inspirational; bringing renewal and revitalization of the divine knowledge, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the inner life of the Christian community, and demonstrating gifting of revelation, prophecies, miracles, etc., such as was present in the early Church, but had lain dormant in the Church of England or ceased to be. A significant number of the Anglican clergy got involved. They became open-air preachers and established Methodist societies wherever they went. The 'strong evangelistic revivals set in motion blew out of gear an initial desire to seek reforms within the Church of England. The reforms swept through the whole of England, thus spanning 'more than three centuries of global Christianity'.¹⁷²

The background of the early Methodists was quite significant in the renewal they were able to spin in their time. This notwithstanding, in the Wesleyan tradition, Methodism was always about John Wesley and his ideals.

As a leading figure of the 18th century evangelical revival, Wesley's doctrines on the evangelical faith was transmitted down through the centuries to the Methodist commission. Growing up in the Anglican Communion, John Wesley espoused some tenets of Catholicism, Lutheranism as well as some ideals of the Eastern Church Fathers.¹⁷³ As an avid reader he fully engaged with works of the great minds of his time and was greatly influenced by them. For instance, he used to his great advantage works from the early Church Fathers (works of Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century), the 'primitive Church', and 'Christian antiquity'.¹⁷⁴ John Wesley's theological

¹⁷² Paul Boafo, *John Wesley on the Road to Aldersgate* (Accra: Methodist Book Depot, 2006), x

¹⁷³ Bevins, "A Pentecostal Appropriation," 229-246.

¹⁷⁴ Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, 18: 212.

approach to Scripture interpretation was greatly enhanced as a result of these works. He thus brought to the fore his understanding of ‘true and genuine Christianity’. The Eastern Christian tradition was an important reference point for Wesley, especially for his doctrine on Sanctification.¹⁷⁵

On issues of spirituality, he was influenced in no small measure by St. Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitations of Christ* and William Law *The non-juror*. Laws were the most influential of all the works he read. He read especially *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*; thus, Wesley’s sermons bore eloquent testimonies of Law’s rigidities. Law’s, ‘ideals’ and ‘method’ of Christian devotion were also greatly espoused by John, John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley often visited with Law and he impacted them both.¹⁷⁶

In a picturesque portrayal, John Bailie shows the extent to which John Wesley as a scholar allowed himself to be influenced by the great institutions he was acquainted with;

... in many senses, Wesley was Lutheran in his insistence that the doctrine of justification be key; Roman Catholic in his conviction that a life of holiness was essential and indeed possible; Eastern Orthodox in his belief that faith confessions can be a means of grace; Reformed in his understanding that believers will continue to battle sin until their death; Anglican in that he expected God to work in the sacraments to mediate grace and Pentecostal in his assurance that life in the Spirit would yield visible fruit, either personal or corporate.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Ted A. Campbell, “Back to the Future: Wesleyan Quest for Ancient Roots: The 1980s,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no.1 (1997). http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/wesleyjournal/1997-wtj-32-1.pdf

¹⁷⁶ William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (Albany, OR: Sage Software, 1996), 8. See also, G.W. Taylor, *Project Canterbury, John Wesley and the Anglo-Catholic Revival* (London: SPCK, 1905).

¹⁷⁷ John Bailie, “The Impact of Liberation Theology on Methodism in South Africa with Regard to The Doctrine of Christian Perfection” (D. Th, Dissertation, University of South Africa, 2009).

In the view of Bevin, even though Wesley was greatly informed by these great institutions, the way in which he used reason to rationalize religion can be traced strictly to his Anglican background.¹⁷⁸ As observed from above, Wesley's Methodism belonged to 'a long line of Church traditions'¹⁷⁹ Hence Methodism was a dynamic religious pattern greatly spiced by the religiosity of the early Church fathers. But undergirding it all was Wesley's own rich Anglican heritage which was also the cradle of the spiritual ideals of all the founding fathers.

The Wesleyans espoused Armenian theology, the fundamental principle of which rejects predestination and affirms freedom of the human will, suggesting that there is the possibility of falling away from Grace and hence the need for every believer to persist in their faith. This is the state of working out one's own salvation; a salvation which is not automatic and can be lost as well. Christian perfection or entire sanctification was to the Wesleyans, a post conversion experience that allows a Christian to live a sinless life.¹⁸⁰ This doctrine was also referred to as 'second blessing' or 'second work of grace.

It is explained as an intense personal experience confronting the Christian with the presence of God. Since John Wesley was very instrumental in the spiritual lives of the Methodists, besides projecting his doctrinal ideals, he also advocated 'right belief', 'right practice' and 'right relations' as the core principles in his entire theology. These core principles are evidenced in the succeeding discussions.

As Methodists pressed on towards holiness, they were encouraged to practice the Instituted Means of Grace (IMOG) as well as the Prudential Means of Grace (PMOG). Of

¹⁷⁸ Bevins, "A Pentecostal Appropriation," 236.

¹⁷⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica, 15thed., s.v. "Wesley, John"

¹⁸⁰ S.J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 133.

the two forms, the IMOG is identified as: Eucharist, prayer, fasting, scripture and Christian relations (conference).¹⁸¹ In observing these, Methodists would find grace. The early Christians' constant practice set this beyond all dispute; for so long as 'all that believed were together, and had all things in common'(Acts 2: 44) 'they continued steadfastly in the teachings of the Apostles, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers'(Acts 2:42). These ordinances are not ends in themselves. They point out to Jesus Christ as the ultimate and the Holy Spirit operates through them to bring power in the souls of believers and bring about full salvation even to those who are yet to experience salvation.¹⁸²

3.3.1 Scripture

For Wesley, scripture spoke to life, in its reading and proclamation, at all levels of existence. His hermeneutical process was not as sophisticated as it is today, but it was not a static process too. When confronted with difficult passages, Wesley would first turn to divine guidance; he would compare the text with similar parallel passages, meditate upon the text and consult other commentaries written by 'those who were experienced in the things of God.' He was deeply concerned that the meaning of each text should be accessible, so he wrote explanatory notes on the Bible.

His concern for his translation and accompanying notes (many of which he acknowledged borrowing from other commentators) was not only for an 'academically precise text,' but also to make them simple for the ordinary person. His distinguished approach in the way he handled theology is evident in the way he equipped his members; every Methodist man and woman to theologize for themselves not by following any laid

¹⁸¹ Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, 8: 323-324.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, 16: 1771.

down paradigm but by adopting his way of reflection as their own.¹⁸³ Therefore, his genius was not in writing a catechism or systematic theology, but in allowing his people to ‘think in a way that was consistent with the written Word of God and doctrinal authority.’¹⁸⁴ How is this playing out in the lives of contemporary Methodists?

3.3.2 Prayer and Fasting

Prayer and Fasting are a spiritual discipline just as the Eucharist. Through the practice one grows in the knowledge and love of God.¹⁸⁵ Wesley asserted that the one who never fasted was no more in the way to heaven than the man that never prayed.¹⁸⁶ Prayer held a vital place, just as much as fasting among the evangelicals. Wesley enjoined his followers to seriously adhere to these. And not only should it be practiced individually but also congregationally. He declared:

... we believe, that not only the babes in Christ, who have newly found redemption in his blood, but those also who are `grown up into perfect men, are indispensably obliged, ... by fasting, as well as temperance, to `keep their bodies under, and bring them into subjection; and, above all, to pour out their souls in prayer, both secretly, and in the great congregation.¹⁸⁷

Wesley enjoins almost at all times not one without the other prayer and fasting almost like bedfellows as prerequisites for holy living. A heartfelt prayer was a central theme for Wesley. It was a lifting up of the heart to God. All words of prayer, without this, are mere hypocrisy. ‘Whenever therefore thou attemptest to pray, see that it be thy one design to commune with God, to lift up thy heart to him, to pour out thy soul before him’. What is significant in this is that Wesley advocated that this heartfelt prayer could

¹⁸³ Bevens, “Pentecostal appropriation,” 233.

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁵ Henry H. Knight III, “John Wesley: Mentor for an Evangelical Revival,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (1997), 185.

¹⁸⁶ Wesley, *John Wesley’s Forty-four Sermons* (London: Epworth, 1944) 237-238.

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem.

be found in many forms either extemporaneous or written prayer. In advocating extemporaneous prayer in the morning, Wesley said: ‘Consider both your outward and inward state and vary your prayer accordingly’. He believed that this form was ‘a more excellent way’ of prayer than dull repetition of a standard form. Wesley identified four basic elements of prayer: petition, confession, intercession and thanksgiving. He also cherished written prayers and kept a personal diary of other people’s prayers. The major source for Wesley’s written prayers was his Anglican heritage.

In 1733, Wesley published a series of written prayers for the morning and evening of each day of the week, with questions for meditation and themes for each day. He also wrote morning and evening prayers for families to use each week and also prayers for children. The power behind these written prayers was that Wesley expected them not only to be read but to be prayed as well. Each prayer would be read until their meaning was a part of the person who read them. The prayers then become a daily extension of each individual and each community.¹⁸⁸

As church members engage in both corporate and individual prayers at the Church’s prayer centres, one wonders whether these prayer patterns are taught to members and if yes how are the members appropriating these in their lives.

Fasting is tied in with prayer especially when it is purposely planned to occupy a substantial amount of time in one’s life. It is either abstinence of food entirely or pleasant foods. Wesley associated fasting with ‘almsgiving’ explained as ‘works of mercy, after our power, both to the bodies and souls of men’. Citing Isaiah 58, he noted that fasting had ‘a very social consequence as well’.¹⁸⁹ Wesley believed it is usually either embarked

¹⁸⁸ Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, 11: 201-259. See also Dean G. Blevins, “Means of Grace: Toward a Wesleyan Praxis of Spiritual Formation,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (1997): 79.

¹⁸⁹ Blevins, “Means of Grace,” 76.

on for the wrong motives or to the extreme. In which case he suggested that true intention should guide its observance. Being mindful of the sick, Wesley encouraged moderation. Though these injunctions of moderation are enforced for the sick, during the prayer camp activities especially pilgrimage at the Abasua prayer site, most people undergo all manner of fasting. Some protracted fasts which people believe should commensurate the expected outcomes. Though Wesley observed that fasting could be varied in length, some go forty days because Jesus went through similar practice. The smacks of misplaced sympathy and cases of such nature need to be questioned and corrected with appropriate education.

3.3.3 Eucharist

Eucharist is a three dimensional system: a memorial which does not only recall but also enables Christians to relive the events of the passion. As the events are recreated in the celebration, the believer connects with the original supper and its eventual celebration. The divine presence proffers Grace in an instant. Wesley's view on this is that it was instituted by God to provide 'preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace', depending on people's specific needs. Secondly, all those who know and feel that they want the Grace of God, this Grace is offered them, to restrain them from sin, to assure them that their sins are forgiven and to renew their souls in the image of God. Thirdly, coming to the table of God well poised to receive from him is a necessary precondition suggesting that one is ready to take whatever Christ holds in store for one? Fourthly, it should be the idea that one is not worthy but sinful and helpless; a candidate for hell; the only condition required to be present at the Lord's Table.

The eschatological nature of the Eucharist offers an open invitation to all to participate as a sign that we will participate in the future banquet of the heavenly kingdom. It affords the Christian believer an opportunity to witness to its imminence. John Wesley believed the Eucharist embeds spiritual enablement. He personally observed it once every

four or five days. And he encouraged his ministers and the lay, to observe it every Sunday and all Christian holidays.¹⁹⁰The sacrament is a regular feature in the spirituality of the MCG. Also, not a single visit to the Abasua site passes by without the administration of the holy sacrament.

3.3.4 Christian Conference

Wesley was much concerned about the religious life in the Methodist communion. Christian conference, the coming together of the main social groupings within the Church was Wesley's idea of mutual support and growth in the Church. John Wesley used the word to describe groups of people, particularly lay preachers from different Methodist circuits, who met with the Church leadership. But again, he also intended the conference to be for spiritual renewal, mutual accountability, mutual responsibility, and levels of fellowship based on the different needs of the individuals. An overview of the different forms of the Methodist groups indicates they were to impact each other 'at the different levels of the Christian life'.

John Drakeford presents a five-tier group system with their accompanying levels of influence to demonstrate the extent of such mutual relationships:

- a) Associational (the Society), primarily for fellowship and encouragement, including non-believers.
- b) Behavioural (the Class), primarily for examining the behaviour of Christians and providing encouragement and correction.
- c) Motivational (the Band), extended examination beyond behaviour to the very intent of the Christian.

¹⁹⁰ See Steve Harper, *The Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: The Upper room, 1983).

- d) Aspirational (the Select Society), for the most enthusiastic member, seeking a full Christian life as possible.
- e) Reclamation (the Penitent Band), for those who had failed in other groups but were willing to return.¹⁹¹

In the Methodist Church there are quite a number of conferences that are held in a given period at the various levels of the Church structure, for both spiritual and administrative purposes. Almost all of these are stipulated in the Church's almanac and it really depicts how much store the Church placed on conferences as a real MOG.

The PMOG was considered circumstantial, intended to address direct needs as and when they occurred. Somehow, the prudential means of grace encompassed those activities found in the instituted and the general means of grace. They are contextual and opportunities offered beside the instituted means of grace to operate throughout the Christian communities in accordance with the prevailing cultures. They demonstrate how God is able to bless his people through other circumstantial means such as retreats and prayer meetings. This sort of authenticates the Church's ecumenical needs and, perhaps, its desire for SSV.

3.3.6 Retirement

John Wesley's commentary on Matthew 5:13-16 depicts Christianity as a social religion; hence he does not call for solitariness, however, retirement (Wesley's terminology for Christian retreat) is essential. It should not extricate Methodists and Christians at large from society to make us shirk our responsibilities; this being, an indictment against

¹⁹¹ John W. Drakeford, *People to People Therapy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), 11-20; Bevins, "Pentecostal Appropriation," 45.

aimless peregrinations, the sort that prevailed in the medieval era, making most responsible individuals shirk their duties. The early Methodist practice has ample proof of daily retreats. There was, however, no organized practice of extended retreat periods. The assertion below evidences John Wesley's position on religious retirement:¹⁹²

Not that we can in any wise condemn the intermixing solitude or retirement with society. This is not only allowable but expedient; nay, it is necessary, as daily experience shows, for everyone that either already is, or desires to be, a real Christian. It can hardly be that we should spend one entire day in a continued intercourse with men, without suffering loss in our soul, and in some measure grieving the Holy Spirit of God. We have need daily to retire from the world, at least morning and evening, to converse with God, to commune more freely with our Father which is in secret. Nor indeed can a man of experience condemn even longer seasons of religious retirement, so they do not imply any neglect of the worldly employ wherein the providence of God has placed us.

Among Methodists in Ghana, the visitation to the sacred prayer sites perhaps is in line with Wesley's view on longer retreats since it comes off annually at the connexion level but monthly or fortnightly, even weekly at the various Dioceses.

Some of the IMOG overlap the PMOG e.g. Christian Conference. This suggests that all the ordinances are to have 'contextual' meaning. The conclusion drawn out of all this discussion is that the ordinances must be approached from the perspective of scripture. Whether Instituted or Prudential, Wesley believed it was prudent to practice all for Christian development. In the use of these means, Wesley decried acts of self-righteousness and spiritual pride. He rather encouraged people to acknowledge God in those acts.

¹⁹² John Wesley, *John Wesley's Forty Four Sermons* (London: Epworth, 1944),237.

The researcher can say for certain that Methodists believe and observe all these. The foregoing has been an outline of the Wesleyan spirituality which was handed down to all those who espoused the Wesleyan ideals, the MCG, inclusive.

3.4 Wesleyan Methodism and Ghanaian Charismatic Renewal

Contemporary Ghanaian Methodist spirituality appears to bear semblance with the Pentecostal Charismatic wave just as it bears semblance with the historical Wesleyan revival. Whilst discovering the form and content of today's current GMS, we hope also to examine the peculiar role of SSV in the GMS. Sharing his views on the MCG's involvement with SSV, the former Presiding bishop of the Church intimated that contemporary Christianity is on a path of ecumenism and being in an ecumenical relation suggests that the church is opened up for new ideas.¹⁹³

It is of interest therefore to determine how these new ideas for instance, SSV, have and continue to influence the Methodist spirituality. It is important also to state that the observation of semblance between the Ghanaian Pentecostal and Charismatic waves and the contemporary Ghanaian Methodist Spirituality is true to some extent. There are some commonalities, and it is as if they are one and the same thing.

Thus in this section, the two religious patterns are analysed to see whether Ghanaian Methodism emerged out of the Ghanaian Pentecostal Charismatic movement or the Wesleyan tradition, or whether Wesleyanism and Charismatism have merged at some points in Ghanaian Methodism or that each of them emerged independent of each other and operates separately with no overlaps. Davies' assertion that Methodism is a '... form of Christianity which is sometimes contained within the frontiers of the Church, ... (and)

¹⁹³ Among other things, the former first clergy said: "We can't sit down and pretend that nothing is going on." Interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

drives itself, is in line with John Wesley's claim that Methodism was part of an unbroken chain of true religion.¹⁹⁴

Both maybe are describing the Pentecostal phenomenon which is truly recurrent. It was present in the Wesleyan Methodism, and it has been revived in the contemporary Methodist Church. The concept goes beyond the Wesleys; it meant that a number of movements and Churches had espoused the 'Methodist' approach to Christianity in the past and perhaps continue to do so today. What were these movements and what were entailed in their pattern of religious expression? The religious waves which are classified as Pentecostalism and Charismatic in today's worship pattern in Ghana were strains recognized in the Wesleyan-holiness groups at the time of the Wesleyan evangelistic revival. In their form of religious expression believers received the gifts of the Holy Spirit and had ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing, and prophesying among many others. To avoid confusion in terms of nomenclature, it will be worthwhile to define Pentecostalism, and Charismaticism.

Pentecostalism or Charismatic Christianity is often bandied together as Pentecostalism. But Charismaticism is a cluster term for diverse forms of worship patterns. In Ghana, for instance, independent or new Pentecostal Churches refer to themselves as charismatic Churches. Adherents usually describe themselves as having been 'renewed in the Spirit' and experiencing the Spirit's supernatural, miraculous and energizing power. Some have remained within and formed organized renewal groups in their older mainline non-Pentecostal denominations. Theirs is about the experience of God and not about abstract religious ideas. They express belief in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and

¹⁹⁴ Wesley, *The Works of Wesley*, 18: 212.

they possess a key to a transformed lifestyle; the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁵ They manifest spiritual gifts in their worship, some of which are, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, performing miracles prophecy, discernment of spirits, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues. Many emphasize healing, deliverance, and various strands of prosperity gospel. There are four main forms: Classical Pentecostal Churches, the Renewal Charismatic Movement, the Neo-Charismatic Independent Churches and Ministries, the non-denominational Evangelistic Christian fellowships, which from 1970 attracted Charismatics from different Christian denominations.

Pentecostalism, on the other hand, is an experience which is traced back to the Holy Ghost baptism experience in the post-Easter Church. It was exhibited among the holiness movements of the 18th and the 19th centuries. The term Pentecostalism in its modern use was not applied to the members of the holiness movements. The full use of the term Pentecostalism was not until the 1906 the Azusa Street experience. Credit for this Christian Spirituality is due Charles Fox Parham, a Holiness preacher who made it central to his teaching from 1900. William Seymour, an African American itinerant holiness preacher from Louisiana, was one of Parham's students. After a brief period of study, Seymour moved to Los Angeles in 1906, where he eventually opened a ministry in an abandoned African Methodist Episcopal Church on Azusa Street. The revival his Azusa Street preaching initiated is widely recognized as the foundation of Pentecostalism.¹⁹⁶ When Agnes Osman received the baptism in the Holy Spirit at Bethel Bible School and Healing Home, in Topeka, Kansas, on January 1, 1901, she was the first to have had

¹⁹⁵ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), 4-5

¹⁹⁶ J. T. Flynn and W. Tjong, "Fanning the Flames: How the Renewal Movement Has Shaped American," *Theological Education*, 28, no. 1 (2006): 9; see also Glenn O'Brien, "Joining the Evangelical Club: The Movement of the Wesleyan-Holiness Churches in Australia along the Church-Sect Continuum," *Journal of Religious History* 32, no. 3 (2008): 320-344.

that experience. Seymour and his team of evangelists promoted a model of ecstatic Christian life based on the experience of the Apostles during the original Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. So ‘the form of Christianity in which believers receive the charismata *Pneumatika* (gifts of the Holy Spirit) and have ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, healing and prophesying is Pentecostalism’.¹⁹⁷

The distinction between the holiness movement and the modern day Pentecostalism is the element of tongues speaking. Since the membership of the holiness movements were not called Pentecostals at the time, the real Pentecostals for our purpose are all modern day Christians who are in a personal relationship with Christ and are baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongue speaking. These accept all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Again, concerning close affinities between Pentecostalism and the holiness movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, they are both experiential religions.¹⁹⁸ Members of the two traditions live transformed lives and serve God’s purposes in this world even as the Holy Spirit empowers them and manifests himself in their lives. They believe that through Christ they are not only saved but also empowered for Christian mission. Both movements share the Arminian position.

Regarding who superseded the other, the following scholars, Bernie L. Gillespie, Bonjour Bay, J. T. Flynn W. Tjong and Glenn O’Brien attest to the fact that the Wesleyan-holiness movement birthed Pentecostalism.¹⁹⁹ But other scholars believe that the

¹⁹⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, 15thed., s.v. “Pentecostalism.”

¹⁹⁸ Bonjour Bay, “The current Tendencies of the Wesleyan Holiness Movement,” *AJPS* 7, no. 2(2004): 261.

¹⁹⁹ Bay, “The current Tendencies,” 255-264; Flynn and Tjong, “Fanning the Flames,” 9; O’Brien, “Joining the Evangelical Club,” 330.

expansion of Methodism moved members away from the Wesleyan convictions of perfectionism and entire sanctification, hence the coming in of the holiness movements to restore the original Wesleyan tradition. O'Brien is rather of the view that this precursor of Pentecostalism (the Holiness Movement) was a radical wing of Methodism. With their views 'considered very extreme', or 'at least a dangerous novelty by many Methodist bishops', they were opposed. Their rejection led to the formation in 1867 of the National Camp-Meeting Association for Holiness enthusiasts (an outgrowth of the ecumenical camp meetings where holiness believers gathered).²⁰⁰ Again their opposition made them to operate effectively outside mainstream Methodism, while at the same time 'continuing to exert an internal influence on Methodism'²⁰¹.

To some other scholars, Pentecostalism was born out of the holiness movement's agitation regarding the second blessing and a desire to crystallize the concept in an appropriate scriptural context. Other schools maintain that though most of the early Pentecostals were members of the holiness movement and as such imbibed some of the holiness doctrines and practices, 'the Holiness movement took on a life of its own beyond the borders of the mother Church and resulted in the formation of 'a plethora of Holiness associations, prayer leagues, and missions'.²⁰² All of these within the one and the same tradition went by the title of Evangelical Protestants. Most of them amalgamated into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as Pentecostal movements.

The global perspectives of the Pentecostal and the Charismatic movements raise fundamental questions regarding their distinctiveness. Questions of growth patterns are

²⁰⁰ J. Stockard, S. C. Stanley and B. Johnson, "Moving from Sect to Church: Among Wesleyan/Holiness Clergy," *Review of Religious Research*, 43, no. 1 (2001): 22.

²⁰¹ O'Brien, "Joining the Evangelical Club," 332.

²⁰² Ibidem.

not considered here, but it is of interest to note that as the Pentecostal impulse travelled beyond the borders of Azusa through evangelism, many cultures imbibing this fervour spawned their own variations of the Pentecostal theme. Paul Gifford labelled the waves as a radical change amidst the new developments in Africa.

In the foregoing, it has become obvious that Pentecostal phenomenon was born out of the holiness ferment; the following emerge as the immediate point of convergence for the two movements; Salvation through Christ, baptism in the Holy Spirit, a spirit filled-life and a disciplined moral lifestyle, love for God and neighbour, imminent return of Christ and eternal life with him.

The main thrust of this discussion is the identifiable Pentecostalism in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Ghana. Early studies on African Pentecostalism by scholars such as Walter J. Hollenweger portrayed the African Initiated Churches (AICs) as the early Pentecostals. Allan Anderson also intimates that they bear a family resemblance. Ogbu Kalu opined that Pentecostalism was not exported to Africa from Azusa Street.²⁰³ Some scholars purport that this is the result of responding to the gospel from within a charismatic indigenous worldview. It has a certain uniqueness which could best be understood from its own African primal world view sourced from the interior of African spirituality. But the insider perspectives by practitioners pay attention to differences which are peculiar to each divide.

How peculiar is the MCG's experience? There may be some semblance with contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic waves. But essentially it is unique. There is a

²⁰³ Ogbu Kalu, *A Discursive Interpretation of African Pentecostalism*, The Free Library, Humanities, Philosophy and Religion FidesetHistoria. <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/22138>. (Accessed January 1, 2009).

perfect blend of the traditional Wesleyanism but the other elements can be said to be the Church's own variation of the Pentecostal theme.

In essence, the contemporary Ghanaian Methodist Spirituality must be seen as an internally brewed spirituality, but also dictated by the interactions of ecumenical relations. For some time, the Pentecostal dimension was conspicuously missing until it was revisited.²⁰⁴ Whilst this dimension was lost, Methodism in Ghana maintained allegiance to its patriarchal systems and it has still remained true to that tradition. But at the same time, major changes have occurred with time to reflect the African distinctiveness of the church.

3.5 Evangelism Mission and Renewal Division and MPRP

The Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Division of the General Directorate for Ministry has very broad and multifarious functions.²⁰⁵ These have been limited in their outlook for the purpose of this discussion. The functions cover the organization, training of personnel and supervision of the Methodist Church's evangelism, training and pastoral care of its members, training and work of evangelists, celebration of Bible Week, Evangelism and Mission, worship and preaching, administration of the sacraments, celebration of special days and seasons of the Church year. In relation to the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP), the EMRAT organizes and oversees the running of training programmes under the MPRP, prayer and Counselling Centres, healing and deliverance, preaching and teaching and social services, among others.

In the MCG, the numerous prayer bands and fellowships associated with the Charismatic Renewal of the 1980s and operated outside the Church's institutional fellowships

²⁰⁴ Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 157, 158.

²⁰⁵ See an organogram on the relationship between the EMRAT and the MPRP in Appendix D.

in most of the regional capitals were subsumed under what is currently running as the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP). Even though there is a stipulated programme, MPRP is supposed to run at any given time at the various church strata, the programme of activities that were previously run within the prayer bands and centres like the Centre for Counselling and Faith Development in Kumasi organized by the Ampahs²⁰⁶ at these centres have been carried over into the MPRP. There were the Wednesday bible study, healing and deliverance sessions. Fridays were mostly an extension of the Wednesday activities, since some societies organized half night or all night prayer sessions. Either once a month or every three months. These sessions were repeated as weeklong activities which almost always culminated in all-night or half-night prayer vigils. In some Dioceses these were held in the mornings, but more often they were organized in the evenings. In the current scheme of things, the weeklong revival activities take place during the Church's Evangelism week celebration.

3.5.1 Beginnings of the Methodist Prayer and Renewal programme

In the view of the researcher, Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP) is Wesleyanism and Charismatism merged in Ghanaian Methodism. Before its inception, the majority of the Church members were concerned about the lack of religious zeal in the Church. Though the general perception of the Church from the 1967 upwards, was that of stagnation, there were pockets of revivals especially in Kumasi.²⁰⁷ 1993 saw the formation of an ad-hoc committee to look into a proposal regarding the formation of prayer bands or prayer fellowships in some Methodist Churches in the connexion. Apparently, the prayer bands were in operation and needed official recognition. The ad-hoc

²⁰⁶ Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 260

²⁰⁷ Ibidem, 24, 157-158.

committee suggested a prayer festival. Following discussions in the Church around the period the Methodist Conference in 1994 accepted the committee's report and endorsed the formation of the MPRP which would bring about revival to the entire Church membership. It was to run under the Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Division of the Methodist General Directorate for Ministry, along five main tracks as mentioned earlier. All members of the Church were encouraged to participate and give freely of their time and money for its support.²⁰⁸

Going by its mandate, all strata of the Church, at each of the Dioceses should run MPRP programmes; quarterly or monthly revivals, midweek prayer meetings, monthly or bi-monthly all night prayer vigil among others. The exigencies of the times do not encourage the traditional camp meetings to feature effectively. Hence in the view of the Presiding Bishop, the camps are now repackaged to suit modern trends.²⁰⁹

3.5.2 MPRP and its Impact on the Methodist Spirituality

Summarizing all its elements, the first Director of the Evangelism Mission and Renewal at the first connexional convention of the MPRP, intimated that MPRP exists, firstly, to promote prayer and worship which is the key to Church growth, and committed ministers need to mobilize their members to pray. He further declared 'the cost of Church growth is the filling of the Spirit in our lives'. The Church could not verbally witness about its faith unless it involved itself in an effective prayer session.²¹⁰ It is in view of these remarks that the connexional pilgrimages have been perceived by some Church members to have lost their intended purpose, namely, prayer support for evangelism.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Methodist Church Ghana, *Handbook on 1st Prayer and Renewal Convention* (Accra: Resource and Development and Training Unit of the Methodist Church Ghana, 1995), 2

²⁰⁹ The Presiding Bishop, interview granted researcher, February 24, 2012.

²¹⁰ First Director, *1st Prayer and Renewal. Convention* (Accra: Resource and Development and Training Unit of the Methodist Church Ghana, 1995), 5.

²¹¹ V. Rev. Forson, interview granted researcher, March 25, 2013

On Wesleyan history and SSV, the founding fathers' position on SSV was quite ambivalent. 'For Wesley and other leading Methodists, Catholic pilgrimage culture, with its enshrining of images and petitioning of intercessors, was misguided.'²¹² Another school of thought believes that even though Wesleyans did not sanctify sites or invoke saints for healing among others they maintained historic sites.²¹³ At Leaders meeting, a normal administrative procedure at the society level, show concern among other things about tracking of archival materials and historic sites.²¹⁴ Hence one of the Bishops interviewed in this study referred to some of the Church's prayer centres as historic sites which need to be preserved.

To establish SSV's unique place in the Wesleyan Methodist liturgical expression one may say that 'SSV' was initially unknown, but it is an innovation thriving within the Church's pattern of spirituality, namely, contemporary Ghanaian Methodist spirituality, a religious style that blends Wesleyan Methodism and contemporary Ghanaian spirituality. It has become obvious, that the Church's peculiar situation as African charismatics, affords us the privilege to be innovative... A prominent son of the Church once said:

It is natural to love the traditional life of the Church to which we belong and treasure what has been handed down to us by our fathers in the faith. We owe a debt to them and to our Lord himself to preserve what is of lasting value in our tradition. At the same time we ought to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to examine our Church life in the light of the age and circumstance.²¹⁵

²¹² David Butler, *Methodists and Baptists: John Wesley and the Catholic*, p. xiii

²¹³ Tweed, "John Wesley Slept Here," 3

²¹⁴ The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Constitution and Standing Orders of the Methodist Church Ghana* (Accra: Methodist Book Depot, 2000), 176.

²¹⁵ The first president of the MCG, Rev. F.C.F. Grant, "Introduction" in The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Constitution*, 6.

The prevailing circumstances in Ghana make it imperative for such an innovation. Wesleyan theology tolerates unique cultural innovations; hence this is a perfect explanation for the reason of ‘SSV’ in contemporary Ghanaian Methodism. In the view of the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church, it is not enough to identify with such a trend but it also speaks to our context. He further added that western views cannot always serve as paradigms for us as Africans, Ghanaians, for that matter. He surmises that ‘Wesley’s views have to be explained contextually’. Africans want a concrete expression of their faith, not abstract. Therefore, interpreting the Bible, in light of the African context, certain Old Testament practices have more meaning for us as Ghanaians. Kwesi Dickson, a former Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Ghana would not be contradicted here when he claimed that ‘if we are Methodists we are either shaped by our Wesleyan roots and heritage, or we may have no shape at all. It is important for us to be familiar with that heritage...’ Wesley spoke against Roman Catholic pilgrimage system. Does that heritage speak with relevance to our cultural context as Ghanaians or not? This could be anybody’s guess.

Discussing the links between the two patterns of spirituality took us into their historical developments and basic doctrinal positions. The finding so far suggests that Methodism in today’s Ghana and Ghanaian spirituality are two sides of the same coin. As indicated above, Methodism, maybe the usual description. But Pentecostalism and Charismatism are the usual fresh names that add up to the list of Christian types. It is a pattern which has always repeated itself; the same old wine but in new bottles. And to define

contemporary Ghanaian Methodist spirituality, one can say it is a spirituality greatly inclined towards its Wesleyan roots, but largely tempered and influenced by certain ecumenical ideals as well as Ghanaian cultural elements.²¹⁶

3.6 Development of Sacred Sites in the Ghanaian Methodist Context

There is a predilection for the visitation of sacred sites in contemporary Ghanaian society today.²¹⁷ This has resulted in large numbers of people both Methodists and non-Methodists thronging the Abasua Prayer Centre. The place has consistently shown a growth pattern of 18,557 visitors in 2005 to 35,780 visitors in 2013. Since the Methodist Church itself is now inclined towards the phenomenon, there are a corresponding number of prayer centres evolving in many Dioceses within the connexion. Yet these structured mass visitations to sacred sites had not been part of the MCG's tradition during its first hundred years of existence. Some scholars think that the phenomenon of SSV had its beginnings in the prayer/healing camps of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)²¹⁸ the earlier beginnings of which lie with the founders of the Christ Apostolic Church.²¹⁹

Referring to the case of the Methodists, Omenyo asserts that the camps existed first among the Methodists in the late 1980s.²²⁰ But there was yet another one operating in Cape Coast, Rev. Arhin's prayer centre in Cape Coast in the early 1980s. Prior to these instances was the Atwea Mountains prayer camp already mentioned above. This centre

²¹⁶ See Casely B. Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian. A History of the Methodist Church Ghana, 1961-2000.2010* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press), 18.

²¹⁷ Turner, "The Centre out There," 195.

²¹⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu, "On the Mountain of the Lord," 65-86.

²¹⁹ Emmanuel Gyasi, "The Effect of Spirituality of Apostle Peter Newman Enim's Healing." (MPhil Thesis, Central University College, Dansoman, 2015). The study revealed that the very first prayer camp, called Unity Prayer Camp was started by some of the founding members of the Church.

²²⁰ In 1935 an incident of Holy Ghost baptism was experienced when Stephen Owiredu prayed for his sick daughter at Kwao Yeboah's residence at Brekumanso near Asamankese. People met there subsequently to pray but it was not until 2002 that the Christ Apostolic Church in Ghana adopted the place and officially declared it as a prayer camp. See, Omenyo, *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism*, 258-260. He refers to the pacesetters as the classical Pentecostals.

which is now referred to as the Abasua Prayer Centre was founded by the Rev. Abraham Osei-Assibey in 1965. This camp was mainly patronized by the founder's Charismatic group, Kristomu Anigyie Kuo in Old Tafo, Kumasi. It also witnessed (unofficially) ecumenical retreats which involved both Presbyterians and Methodists, usually from the period between February and August.²²¹ Undisputedly, these camps though in existence did not assume any connexional recognition. The ecumenical retreats, however, in the view of the researcher became the watershed for the officially popularized mass visitations which is taking place now in the Ghanaian Methodist circles.²²² In 2005 the very first connexional retreat of the Methodist Evangelists held at the Kumasi Diocese, organized part of their programme at the Abasua centre and later engineered the subsequent annual connexional prayer conferences there.²²³

With interest in the practice now heightened, visiting Abasua has become almost a mark of spirituality in some Dioceses. Moreover, the Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Division²²⁴ has encouraged renewal activities at the other diocesan prayer centres. Even though renewal programmes are held at other diocesan prayer centres the Church's annual 'pilgrimages'/prayer conference is organized only at Abasua.

Methodism in both Great Britain and America maintain and visit specific memorable sites.²²⁵ These places bridge the Methodist church's denominational past. It is crucial to know whether the prayer/pilgrimage sites of the Methodist Church in Ghana share

²²¹ Joseph Boateng Fordjour, interview granted the researcher, August 7, 2012. See also, B. Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea, The Mountain of God's Presence* (Accra: Modern Dynamics Printing and Telecom Services, 2010), 6.

²²² Boateng Fordjour (Secretary at Abasua), telephone conversation with the researcher, August 17, 2014. He asserted that the Methodist Church now realizes that the Presbyterians have taken advantage of a place that is supposed to have been revealed to the Methodists, so they have now become serious.

²²³ Mrs. M.P. Sackey (Evangelist and wife of the immediate past Director of EMR Directorate of the Methodist Church Ghana), interview granted the researcher July 17, 2014.

²²⁴ A body in charge of the spiritual matters of the Church

²²⁵ Tweed, "John Wesley Slept Here," 52-53.

similar insights? Some of the clergy perceive the prayer centres in Ghana as commemorative sites, others think they are rather miraculous sites. So what efforts are being put in place for the entire membership of the Methodist Church to understand the essence of the visitation to the Church's sites? The presiding bishop thinks that the whole idea of maintaining and visiting sites stems from the traditional African cultural milieu and the impact of ecumenism.²²⁶ The Most Rev. F. C. F. Grant, the first President of the MCG Conference in a preamble to the Methodist Church's Constitution and Standing Orders says among other things that '...we ought to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and to examine our Church life in the light of the age and circumstance. Then as we are being called to think of entering into Union with other Churches, we must not be so obsessed with our own tradition that we refrain to take into the system what is of precious value in the traditions of the other Churches...'²²⁷ What is gathered from these views is that beyond their rich tradition as Methodists, the prevailing cultures may have something in addition to add.

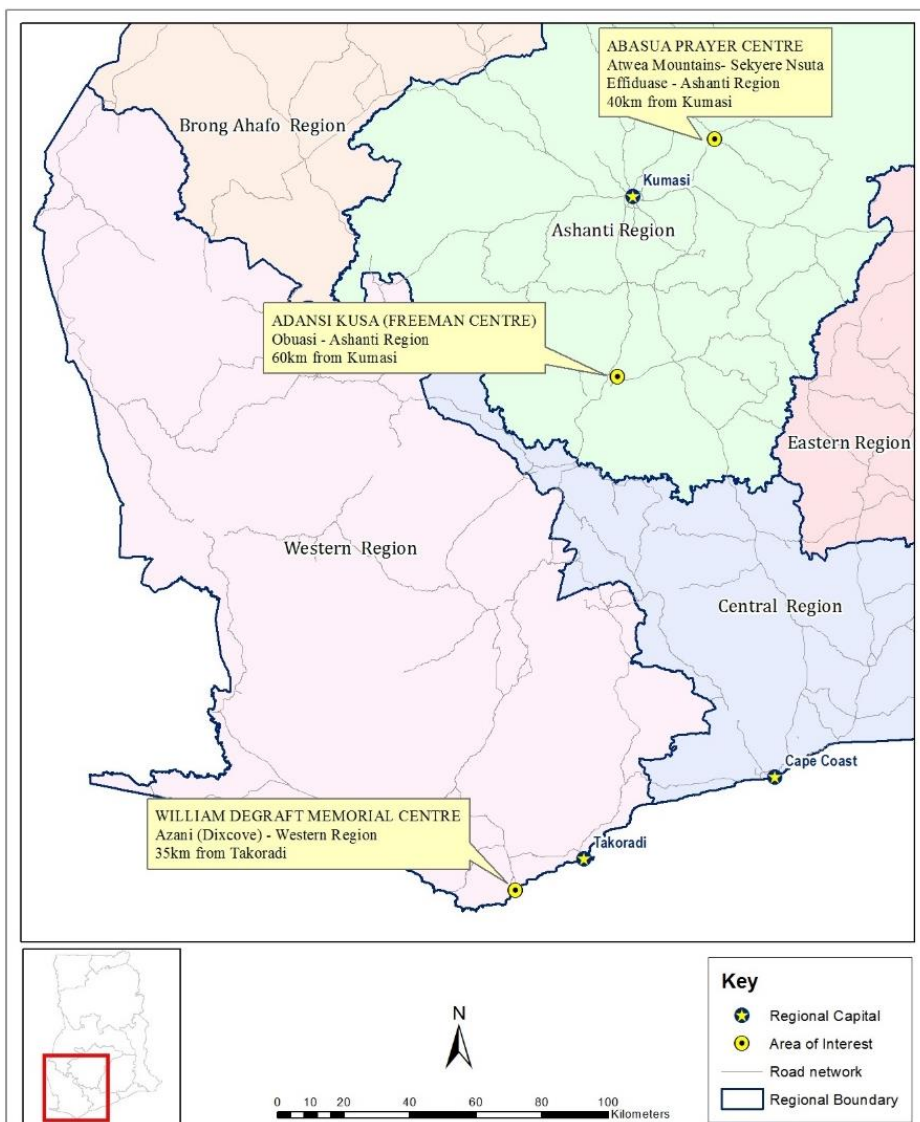
Further, the Church's History and Archives outfit does not only maintain a library but holds title to and preserves objects and sites owned by the Methodist Church or bear marks of its history. But it is obvious that the Church is not involved in this present practice just to preserve its commemorative sites. Thus to reiterate our research aims, the desire is to determine how visiting these sites in the manner as it is conducted now, inform and impact our renewal system and contribute to the Church's mission for growth qualitatively.

²²⁶ The Presiding Bishop, interview granted the researcher, February 24, 2013.

²²⁷ The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Constitution*, 6

Visiting prayer centres for renewal programmes by Dioceses, circuits or societies of the MCG constitutes a major part of the general spirituality of the MCG; a system which operates under the ambit of the Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Division of the Church. Focusing on the trend of our discussion, some of the sites are gaining popularity and are being used as ‘pilgrimage’ centres. Hence, we retain the expression Prayer Centres together with ‘Sacred Sites’.

3.7 Three selected Sacred Sites of the Methodist Church Ghana.



Picture 1: Study Sites Locations.

Among the many existing prayer Centres²²⁸ the following were selected for the study: the William de-Graft in the Sekondi Diocese, Thomas Birch Freeman in the Obuasi Diocese and the aforementioned Abasua prayer centre in the Effiduase Diocese. These were chosen because of their worth in their respective communities and in the reckoning of the Church. One of the three sites was popularized as a result of a myth regarding a theophanic experience of its founder. Of the other two, one was by vision/audition of God and the other is preserved as a historic site because of its association with the first Negro or half-caste Methodist missionary.

Jeanne Kormina observes that it is such meanings ascribed to local sacred sites constructed and transmitted by the indigenes of the place, institutions etc. which establish and confirm a site. It is evident that Caretakers of the Church try to unify worship by representing the Church's image. But how successful are they, especially in regard to unorthodox practices? Kormina further notes that if, for some reason, the Church's control over a site is weak, other people attach meanings of their own to it.²²⁹ Without intent at criticism, a similar view is expressed by Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman in a discussion on the pilgrimage centres. They observe that history, as well as nature shape the power of the sacred site.²³⁰

People in the past received visions or auditions from God/gods about places which eventually became sacred sites. Most of these places as noted in the discussion on origins were either of the following features, forests, groves, mountains, tombs of some important

²²⁸ Other prayer centres include the following: Eyisam in the Winneba Diocese, Ankramoano in the Sefwi-Bekwai Diocese, Mount Sinai Prayer Centre in the Obuasi Diocese, Mepotirim in the Wenchi Diocese, Abasua in the Effiduasi Diocese, Nteferewaso in the Cape Coast Diocese, and Martha Yeboah's prayer centre (Gethsemane) in the Kumasi Diocese.

²²⁹ Jeanne Kormina, "Pilgrims, Priest and Religion in Contemporary Russia: Contested Religious Discourses," *Folklore* 28 (2004). doi: 10.7592/IGJF2004.pilgrims.

²³⁰ Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman (eds.), *Pilgrimage and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 168; Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, 24.

people²³¹ and incidentally the three study sites share similar features; a mountain, a hill, and a level field bordered by a thick oil palm plantation and a cemetery.

3.7.1 William De Graft Prayer Centre

Azani community is situated between Agona-Nkwanta and Dixcove/Busua main road. It is 6 km from Agona Nkwanta, the district capital of the Ahanta West District. The town is about 20 km from Takoradi in the Western Region. The distance from Dixcove to Accra is 255km. The land stretches about 2.5 km in radius.

Picture 12 shows the front and side views of the chapel at the Azani prayer centre, where revivals and prayers for healing and deliverance are held. Picture 13 presents the chapel together with the hostel behind it. People who visit the place for prayers and spend some days, enjoy the hostel facilities. Finally, picture 14 shows the chapel, the hostel and another hostel under construction²³². The MCG anticipates the need to provide more hostels for pilgrims who visit the place.

a) Historical beginnings of Azani community

The account narrated below was provided by a royal of the Azani community. The community he said had been in existence since the sixteenth century. The community came into existence through some large tracts of land released to Yenzu Ackah from the Royal Household of Beyin in the Eastern Nzema District of Western Region, a gold dealer who plied his trade between Nzema and Ahanta areas.

Through these trading activities, he became, a trusted friend of the chief of Ahanta. Because of the kindness and love shown to him by the chief, his formal request for a land to settle on, with some of his immediate relations from Beyin, led to the early settlement

²³¹ Egya Duku (corroborated by the traditional linguist of the Yenzu Ackah family), interview granted the researcher, March 20, 2013.

²³² See Appendix F, 239.

at the site presently known as the Azani community. Yenzu Ackah and his dependants cultivated foodstuffs and also availed themselves to the service of the Ahanta chief any time the need arose. The mutual trust developed between the Ahanta chief and Yenzu Ackah made the chief create a stool title for him (Yenzu Ackah) and his descendants as the Gyaasehene of the whole of Ahanta with the capital being Busua.

Azani got its name from the reddish maize of high nutritional value which the first ancestor, Yenzu Ackah introduced into the place. This crop was mainly cultivated at Azani before it later spread all over Ahanta and beyond. The red maize became known as 'Abele Azani': Abele is maize, Azani is red. The community became famous. With an evergreen forest, farming was the major occupation. And the major crops cultivated were oil palm, maize and cassava.

Data compiled on the town gave the following details. The community has a population of about 400 people (male, female, and children). The town is famous for its vast tract of manganese ore deposits which were officially mined during the Second World War with a greater part still untouched. And there are traces of Gold and Lime stone deposits which have never been mined. Asking why the site has become a prayer centre/ sacred site yielded several answers, some very evasive.

b) Origins of the Azani Prayer Centre

The prayer centre/sacred site is a 23 acre farmland bounded by a plantation, river and a cemetery. Earlier informants answering why that particular site was given to the Church said it was an abandoned gravesite ²³³which was released to the Sekondi Diocese of the Methodist Church in 2002 when Cecil Williamson's outreach group from Canada visited Sekondi. In the opinion of the researcher if by natural design sacred sites feature

²³³ Personal conversation with some elderly people in the Methodist Church in the town, January 20, 2012.

as groves, tombs of heroic figures among others then they are believed to serve as thresholds to the super sensible world and there could have been some reason behind the release of that land by the traditional rulers. Apart from the earlier response of abandoned grave site, some of the royals responded that the chief at the time wanted the townsfolk to accept Christianity.²³⁴ Nothing much could be inferred except that once a traditional grove and a cemetery which accommodated all manner of ritual practices is turned over to the Church. Definitely, the townsfolk would believe there are still some ‘powers’ there. In the hands of the Methodist Diocese the land was earmarked for a Methodist village. This plan did not materialize but in 2005 the chapel building on the site was converted into a retreat centre. Before the place became a prayer centre, the Sekondi Diocese had expressed the need for a retreat centre to divert attention from Abasua in Kumasi. The Very Rev. Solomon Eshun the Evangelism Co-ordinator, also then a superintendent Minister at Takoradi, was tasked to locate a place in the Diocese for a retreat centre, with a suitable location. He had been in waiting for days; and God laid it upon his heart to use Azani for that purpose.²³⁵

Discussing this with the then Bishop, it was deemed necessary to place the oversight of the place in the hands of a lay person, because of the clergy’s itinerant ministry. Since then Evangelist Oppong has had pastoral oversight of the place.

The site enjoys patronage of people from all over Ghana, for example, Kumasi, Accra, Dunkwa, Tarkwa and Bogoso. The larger crowd is usually pulled from the envi-

²³⁴ Mr. Duku, Brother Howard Yankey, John Nyarkoh, Monica Essien, interviews granted the researcher, March 20, 2013, corroborated by the traditional linguist of the YenzuAckah family. See Appendix H for Ahanta West D District Assemby report

²³⁵ The Very Rev. Solomon Eshun, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2012.

rons of Sekondi, Takoradi, Effiakuma, Half Assini and Lagos Town. The year 2008 witnessed a sod cutting ceremony for the beginning of infrastructural work at the centre. A multi-purpose hostel which was started at the time is now at a standstill. The retreat centre's record of its yearly activities is reported in the Representative Agenda of the Sekondi Synod. But statistical data to determine the rate of progression in attendance was not available at the time of the interview.

Significant achievements have been the cure of HIV/AIDS patients, cure of a mad person, healing of one who was declared medically hopeless and at the point of death, among many others. Other general activities at the place are recorded under routine programme for the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme.

3.7.2 Abasua Prayer Centre

Abasua Prayer Centre's continuing attraction for many Christians in Ghana and beyond is the myth that the founder was transfigured on that mountain and the guiding text given to him regarding the operations at the mountain was Isa 2:2-3.

The Abasua Prayer Centre is on the Abasua Mountain which is within the Atwea Range of Mountains. And the Atwea Mountains is found in the Sekyere Central District. The district capital is Nsuta. The whole terrain lies within longitude 0.05 and 1.30 W and latitudes 6.55 and 7.30 N. It covers a total land area of about 1,564sq.km and it has about 105 settlements with about 70% being rural. The district is generally low lying and gradually rising through rolling hills stretching southward towards the capital, Nsuta. The highest point is 2400m whilst the lowest is 135m above mean sea level. The district is fairly drained by several streams and rivers like Afram, Sene, Sasebonso, and Kyirimfa. The terrain lies within the wet semi-equatorial forest zone. Average annual rainfall is 1270 mm and fall within two seasons. The major one starts in March, with a major peak

in May. The Average temperature is 27C ranging between 22c and 30. By the 2010 census: the population was 71,232 of which the rural community is 63.7%. The main economic activity in the region is cultivation of Maize, Yam, Legumes, Cassava, Plantain, Groundnuts, and Vegetables with other emerging potential items being Pineapple, Black Pepper, Mangoes, Cashew, Snail farming, and bee keeping. The Atwea Mountains on which Abasua centre is located happens to be the main tourist attraction in the town. The APC is in the Effiduasi Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana and located in the Sekyere Central District of the Ashanti region. Its capital District is Nsuta. The distance from Effiduase to Accra is 248 Km.

a) Origins of the Abasua Prayer Centre

Between the periods 1959 to 1965 the site was a haven for wild animals and a tourist site.²³⁶ The founder was travelling along the Ashanti Mampong route when he felt drawn to the top of the hills. Rev Abraham Osei-Assibey sought permission from the chief to visit the top of the mountain. ‘Upon meeting with the chief and the elders of Abasua, some of whom were Opayin Kwasi Boɔ, Yaw Denteh and Kwame Kwayie; the Rev. Abraham Osei-Assibey was advised by the chief of the village, Nana Kwasi Marfo, to go back and prepare fully and come back to be led up to the top of the mountain another time. The chief indicated to the clergyman that it would be a very difficult task to embark on the journey to the top of the mountain. The pastor agreed and so in February 1965, the maiden trip was scheduled. The trip was led by two hunters of the village who were delegated by the chief.²³⁷ Rev. Abraham Osei-Assibey was accompanied from Effiduasi by two adult males. The journey took them 1 hour 45 minutes to complete. When they got to the top

²³⁶Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea. The Mountain of God's Presence*, 6.

²³⁷*Ibidem*, 6.

of the mountain and Rev Assibey stepped forward he was engulfed in a thick cloud'.²³⁸ Geographically the Atwea Mountains form a part of the massive long range of ridges from the Akuapim - Volta ranges, Kwahu Plateau, and the Ashanti Uplands. The average elevation of the plateau is about 750 meters, rising to a maximum of 982 meters above sea level. The Atwea Mountains is currently the famous mountain on which many Christians from all parts of Ghana and beyond lodge for prayers.

Almost every day, pilgrims are found praying there. On a daily basis, the smallest number of people at the camp would be fifty. The highest attendance is between December and February and between July-August which is about four thousand'.

Since opening up for major prayer conferences, the first major ecumenical retreat involving Presbyterians and Methodists was held between the period of February and August in 1963.

The MPRP got involved with the centre about one and half decades ago and the data from 2005 to 2013 has been as follows: in 2005 attendance at the site was 18,557, 2006 the number swelled to 20,105. In 2007 the number was 18,851. Out of this, the Methodists were 11,651 and Presbyterians were 7,200. In 2008, the number was 19,023 out of this were 10,402 Methodists and 8,601 Presbyterians. In 2009, the total was 26,254 with 10,121 Methodists and 16,133 Non Methodists. In 2010, the total was 28,121 with 14,431 Non Methodists and 13,741 Methodists. In 2011, the total number was 32,892 with 16,850 Non Methodists and 16,042 Methodists. The data without the non-Methodist is as follows;

²³⁸ Joseph Fordjour Boateng, interview granted the researcher, August, 7, 2012. It is a mythical account which has popularized the site.

Year	Attendance at the site
2005	18,557
2006	20,105
2007	18,870
2008	19,023
2009	16,133
2010	28,154
2011	32,892
2012	34,519
2013	35,780

Table 1: Data on Yearly Returns on Abasua Pilgrimage from 2005-2013

The prayer centre is situated on the Atwea Mountains in the Sekyere Central District. Between the periods 1959 to 1965 the site was a haven for wild animals and a tourist site.²³⁹ The founder was travelling along the Ashanti Mampong route when he felt drawn to the top of the hills. Rev Abraham Osei Assibey sought permission from the chief to visit the top of the mountain. In February 1965, the maiden trip was scheduled. The journey took them one (1) hour forty-five (45) minutes to complete. Today Atwea Mountains has become the famous site to which many Christians from all parts of Ghana and beyond

²³⁹Ampaw-Asiedu, *Atwea. The Mountain of God's Presence*, 10.

visit for prayers. There are eight prayer centres on top of the mountain. The Methodist prayer centre is the camp three, even though it happened to be the first to operate at the site.²⁴⁰

Camp Three is a gated community, but is hardly ever closed. At the entrance is the main official building which houses the office of the secretary with four other living rooms. At the opposite end of this building at about ten feet is located a Kumasi ventilated Improved pit for women. A little distance away at a further ten feet is the mission house for the caretaker, with four living rooms and a hall. A place which began with one chapel building, built by the Kristomu Anigyie Kuo now has seen several developments and can boast of 25 new structures. Out of these buildings 21 are living quarters, two chapel buildings; one, 32 ft. / 72ft and the other 72ft/ 36ft which seats 2000 people. All these buildings are located at the fringes of the camp with an open space serving as the main prayer centre. A cultic object, a cross, is located at the centre of the camp and it is believed to be the site where the founder experienced a hierophany. Besides the connexional, and other mass visits, individuals on a daily basis are found trooping in and out of the centre. The smallest number of people at the camp would be fifty. The highest attendance is between December and February and between July-August, which is about four thousand'. It is reported that the very first camp was of an ecumenical nature and it involved the Presbyterian and the Methodist Churches.

The MPRP got involved with the centre about fifteen years ago. From the history recorded about Abasua, within the inner perimeter of the site which is now regarded as camp three, (as a result of the proliferation of sites emerging over the period since the main camp was founded), can be found a cultic object, a cross. This is the place where

²⁴⁰ Fordjour Boateng, interview granted the researcher, July 8, 2012.

most pilgrims who arrive at the site will go and kneel after registering at the first residential quarters which also serve as reception situated close to the gate. As can be observed from snapshots from the sites²⁴¹ pilgrims surround the cross at the place of transfiguration of the founder with bottles of olive oil and water at the cross. There are testimonies that the olive oil and water become efficacious and the power of God is demonstrated through their application.

Within a period of three weeks or more, before the annual pilgrimage to Abasua takes place, a bulletin will be sent from the office of the Evangelism Mission Renewal (EMRAT) announcing the date and the fee for the journey. As these bulletin get to the various Diocesan headquarters, they are duplicated and sent to the various circuits within the Methodist connection. Even though the invitation is meant for the entire Church, announcements from the Church lecterns will specify 'interested persons'. These announcements prepare interested ones, physically, psychologically and spiritually. Physically with regard to the monies they would have to put by to pay for their transportation cost, psychologically preparing themselves emotionally for the journey, then, spiritually praying that all will go well. It is also the time regular visitors especially to the APC would appeal or impress upon others whom they know have peculiar needs for them to make time to join. Many would go further to recount miracles in the lives of people with similar or worse cases. Inspired by these stories many then make their way to the Church's prayer centres. These stories are intricately woven into the theology of the Church, a theology that offers an explanation of the centres making them a lived religious experience. It should be mentioned here that preparation towards the other Diocesan renewal pro-

²⁴¹ See Appendix F for pictures of the various cultus objects; A cross and a chapel building at the Abasua Centre

grammes take similar form, except that, these are locally arranged by the Diocesan evangelism Co-ordinators in conjunction with the Diocesan offices. An announcement is read within the Circuit or Diocesan bulletin, sometimes through the local airwaves. Unlike the annual programme that takes place at Abasua, these Diocesan programmes could be weekly, fortnightly or quarterly. Other details are given in the individual accounts on the centres.

On the day of the journey to Abasua, buses are released from the various circuits. Now that the whole connection has been divided into Northern and southern sectors, not many buses travel on the stipulated days. From the southern sector, where the researcher belongs, one can count 6-7 buses all ranging between 50-60 seater and they will be filled with Church members.

b) The Nature of the Journey

The journey has always been characterized by feelings of joy, excitement, and these will be expressed through songs of praise, thanksgiving and worship, perhaps, in the hope of receiving answers to their various needs. A journey which lasts for five (5) hours will usually begin at dawn, around 5:00 am. By 10 to 12 noon it is expected that all those coming from the southern part of the Methodist connexion would have arrived at the base of the mountain.

There is only one main road leading to the twin towns of Abasua and Atwea, with no exit point beyond it. The only major activity that brings robustness to the area takes place close to the base of the mountain and that is the presence of Church members and other people visiting the site from all over Ghana. Overlooking this area is the bus terminal where all the vehicles that bring pilgrims to the town also park. A contrived tollbooth is set up there and pilgrims are expected to pay a cedi each towards the development of the twin-towns.

At the bus terminal, as people bring down their luggage, the youth from the town (who make a livelihood out of these cargo trips) will be standing by to carry people's load up the mountain top. Their exorbitant charges have always been a deterrent to the pilgrims not to come along with a lot of items except a few necessities to last the 4-5 days retreat.

c) The Journey up the Mountain

Soon the euphoria with which people greet the journey gives way to sobs and prayers amidst sighs of exhaustion. The climb up the top of the mountain is usually depicted as the most crucial part of the retreat. From this physical exercise many have testified getting their breakthroughs of healing from asthma, arthritis and other chronic chest, joint and lumbago cases. The journey up the mountain lasts about one and half hours but visitors spend not less than two hours especially the first timers. Up the flight of the partly meandering, partly steep and rocky mountain trail, many a pilgrim especially first timers would halt not less than four times to catch their breath before continuing, but not those who frequently or constantly ply the route and make it a daily business to carry luggage for the pilgrims.

At the entrance of the camp, all visitors are expected to register according to their number and gender from the particular Dioceses, circuits, or societies as the case may be. Many will be assigned to dormitories that will be available. The men will have their own apartment likewise the females. The clergy too will have their own apartment, likewise their spouses. This is the sense of structuralism and hierarchichalism that defies the Turner's model of *communitas*. Though they are supposed to be one, the sleeping places for the senior members likewise their seating order are all separate from the ordinary members.

d) Life on Top of the Hill

With pilgrims now settled, all exhaustion will be over and people's faces will brighten up as they go about buying food from the vendor's who would have lined up their wares anxiously waiting for the arrival of the visitors. After eating, many will rest until the evening program. The day will end with a mass gathering at the park and prayers will be said amidst praise and worship. It is always a joy to see the first part which is a mixed feeling of devotion, celebration and socialization. This session lasts 1 and 2 hours. At the close of the session, various announcements and instructions will be issued by the caretaker or the presiding evangelists. Inside the dormitories one will find human bodies sprawled all over on the bare floor, on cloths, mats or mattresses.

There is always serious congestion; people will be found sleeping in the chapel which was built by the founder. Around this chapel, around the dormitories and in various corners of the camp and even in the middle of the inner periphery, people will be found sprawled. Some will be sleeping on benches with some on bare cloths. In the dead of the night between 12 midnight and 2:00 am, one would hear people in groups singing, shouting, clapping and some individuals also will be mumbling their prayers. This is what characterizes the main pilgrimage site during the three or four days' stay. Below in appendix F, picture 1 is the main cultic object that attracts visitors, located at the site of the founder's transfiguration. The picture 2 also in the appendix F is the first (refurbished) chapel building the founder built.

3.7.3 Origins of the T. B. Freeman Memorial Prayer Centre

The beginnings of the prayer centre in the Adansi district are tied in with the story of the Methodist Church in the Ashanti region. The centre happens to be the exact location Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman based his transitory quarters whilst en-route to the Ashanti state on a mission tour in the nineteenth century. Freeman, the son of an African father

and an English woman worked in Ghana from 1838 to 1890. Though the genesis of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Gold Coast is rooted in the Fante Bible Band with its leadership, Joseph Smith and William de Graft,²⁴² Freeman has often won the accolade as the ‘founder of Ghana Methodism’.²⁴³ The MCG is now planning to create a monument in his (Rev. T.B. Freeman) honour. The retreat centre would also receive a face lift to befit its international status.²⁴⁴

The Adansi community is a suburb of Adansi Fomena, Traditional capital of the Adansi State and administrative capital of Adansi North District. The community has a current population of about three thousand people. Their main occupation is farming. There are a few who are in the formal sector and others in artisanship. The community is surrounded by a thick forest and a river called ‘Berman’ which flows from a mountain popularly known by the people as ‘Kusabepo’ (Kusa Mountain). The people are predominantly Christians, but there are quite a few Muslims and traditionalists.

Fridays are special days for the people; no farming activities take place, and if someone dies, it cannot be announced until six o’clock in the evening and mourning clothes such as black and red are not worn. Because of this, Fridays are regarded as some kind of holiday and some religious groups have taken advantage of the occasion to hold special prayer sessions, especially healing and deliverance service after attending communal labour early in the morning.

Before the introduction of Methodism, the people of Adansi did not know any god except a god called ‘Patakrobonsam’ who made it known to the people of Adansi state

²⁴² Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian*, (2010), 6, 7.

²⁴³ *Ibidem*, 11.

²⁴⁴ The Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013. Corroborated by the Caretaker, Rockson Odoom

that he was the only mediator between them and ‘Twediampon Kwame’ (the Twi rendering for the Supreme Being) and Asaase Yaa (earth goddess). This was because when anyone committed any offense in the whole of the community, the person was brought to the abode of Patakro, to pacify the god through the chief priest.

This was the trend until the year 1892 when an old man, Agya Sobin, on his way to his farm one morning, chanced upon Freeman. As Freeman advanced towards him, Agya Sobin had not seen a white man before so he thought he had seen either a ghost or a god. He fearfully shouted ‘Oh Twediampon Kwame (Supreme Being) help me’, this being the Twi rendering of the ‘Dependable Saturday male born’, the appellation for the supreme god. He continuously shouted and retreated his steps back towards the direction he had come from. Though old, he threw all caution to the wind, and with renewed vim ran to the chief’s palace. He informed Nana Kwae Pinsah I, the chief of Adansi Kusa Adansi. The chief eventually met with Freeman. With Freeman’s mission spelt out, (unpalatable though to them) through a lady interpreter, he was welcomed and accommodated in the community for forty days. The chief was not enthused yet he allowed Freeman to preach to the people. Freeman was thankful that the whole mission was not disclosed to the chief priest of Patakro Bonsam.

At the end of the forty days, the Paramount chief of Fomena, the traditional capital of the Adansi state Nana Kwantwi Barimah was also informed. He was however excited about Freeman’s mission. After keeping Freeman with him for a few weeks he sent him to the court of the Asantehene through some emissaries. Otumfuo Kwaku Duah I, the supreme ruler of the Asante confederacy was also not excited one bit about Freeman’s mission. He restrained Freeman’s efforts. Eventually he had to give in, thus officially making way for the beginnings of Methodism in Ashanti in the 18th Century.

b) Geographical Location of the Site

Fomena, the district capital is about three miles from the Obuasi roundabout, the first port of call when moving to Adansi Kusa Prayer Centre from the Accra-Kumasi road. Between Fomena and Adansi Kusa is just about one-minute drive. But from the Obuasi township to Adansi Kusa is two kilometres. Its choice as a sacred site by the Methodist Church stems from the historical fact narrated above. The site for the Methodist centre, starting ten years ago, spreads along almost a 40-acre stretch of land. It was originally a forest reserve in which hunters pursued their prey. Half of the land is reserved as a cocoa farm. Twenty acres of the land is used for palm fruit cultivation. This small portion of the land is boarded at the right side by a river. There are two rivers, Nnkasa Rivers, one on top of the highland and the other at the bottom of the highland. From the town, the contour height of the ridge is 750ft. The grid lines that show the location of the site in longitude is 58100 from the north and latitude 71500 from the east. The climatic condition in the mornings is 18-21 degrees Celsius. The whole terrain is part of the Fomena mountain range which links up with the Kumasi ridge.²⁴⁵

The site derives its acclaim from the potency of the leaves as well the bark of some mango trees that grow in the area. The mango trees are believed to cure all manner of diseases. There is a myth that purports that those mangoes were used by the missionary as his main diet during his sojourn there.²⁴⁶ And if a missionary used the mangoes alone and survived, then the mangoes could be very efficacious. The caretaker confirmed the myth and added that he often receives revelations about the healing power of some particular plants. He further added, that he uses these same mango trees to cure infertility in

²⁴⁵ History recorded by Mr. Joseph Appiah Donkor of Freeman Methodist Church, Fomena Circuit in collaboration with Nana Ofori Kuma I, Akwamuhene and Records of Fomena Town Planning Dept.

²⁴⁶ Rockson Odoom, the Caretaker at Kusa, interview granted the researcher, January 17, 2013.

women. This notwithstanding, without the clients' faith, he added, the plants will effect no cure. Lack of infrastructural development prevents a lot of people from visiting the site. The Methodist Church desires to develop the site to an appreciable standard.

c) The Nature of Activities at the Sites during the MPRPs

Routine activities at these sites follow similar patterns of deliverance, prayer sessions and Bible studies, mid-month prayers, special prayer festivals some of which are held for the general public. Sometimes in a given month Diocesan and Circuit organisations organise conferences and retreats at these places. Wednesdays and Fridays are for fasting and prayers. Mondays and Tuesdays are for counselling, Thursdays are for Bible studies, Fridays are all night and deliverance. At Azani, all nights are held in the first week of every month.

Retreats are organized three times in a given month. But it is important to note that these activities really vary and, more importantly, each centre takes pride in its own distinct programmes. For instance, at Adansi Kusa there is a mega healing and deliverance session every first week of December. This annual programme is opened to people from the whole town. This is what pulls the largest crowd; between 600 and 800 people attend. Furthermore, every circuit out of the 13 circuits visit the site. Two circuits are merged at a time each year. There is also a monthly as well as a quarterly programme, which are ran for two Dioceses at a time; sometimes for women's fellowship or the youth group.

Access to this site is not as difficult as that of Atwea Mountains. Buses and cars can travel up the hilly mound of the centre to about halfway up the hill, a stretch of about half of a mile. The rest of the journey up the hill has to be continued on foot. The total mileage from the main junction up to the site is about one and half miles approximately. The centre is under the pastoral oversight of caretaker, Mr. Rockson Odoom.

At Adansi Kusa, the programme of activities varies; the more prominent ones being; fertility, healing and deliverance, cure of breast cancer usually predominates the healing. A 16-year-old dumb person could speak after being prayed for.

As observed above, the creation of Sacred Sites come about either through audition, revelation,²⁴⁷ consultations between ritual practitioners and local deities or by the instrumentality of (a) founder(s) of a religious group.²⁴⁸ All of these are considered special creative works by Alexis Lidov, an Art historian. He holds the view that the permanent relation and interaction between ‘hierophany’ and ‘hierotopy,’ the created space, results in the creation of sacred spaces. This is a form of creativity. Not gainsaid, but undergirding this creativity is that special knack in man, ‘deeply rooted in (*his*) nature’ a process of self-identification as a spiritual being’.²⁴⁹ Man, first spontaneously and then deliberately, creates a concrete milieu of his connection with the transcendental world. Looking at the sites under review Azani and Abasua were previously a forest grove /cemetery and a hierophantic site respectively. In the African Primal worldview about sacred sites, these are thresholds to the transcendent. Eliade submits, they offer a break in the cosmic plane and hence allow a merger of the two realms; the terrestrial and the super-sensible.²⁵⁰

These experiences once took place in the past, yet be that as it may, Lidov surmises that the desire for interaction with the supernatural, (in the view of most of the clients who access the facilities), usually inspires this whole idea of a ‘spatial image’. This image

²⁴⁷ Livingston, *Anatomy of the Sacred*,60

²⁴⁸ Frank Rodriquez, “Defining what is Sacred and Profane,” <http://www.readbag.com/ou-cls-online-lstd2233-pdfs-definingwhatissacredandprofane>.

²⁴⁹ Alexei Lidov, “Hierotopy. The creation of sacred spaces as a form of creativity and subject of cultural history” in A. Lidov (ed.) *Hierotopy. Creation of sacred spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006).

²⁵⁰ Eliade, *The sacred and the Profane*, 35.

may not be observed physically but human creativity actualizes such an image within the spatial terrain, just as Jacob memorialized Bethel as an embodiment of divine revelation. To most of the visitors of Abasua, the aura of that divine revelation or Hierophany which the founder experienced still pervades the camp. Since then several noble men and women have gone there to commune with God. The camp has thus become a crucible where people, through prayers tap in for answers to their existential needs. And it works for them. The terrain is also believed to be 'fertile' so much that people collect sand, twigs and take them home so as to extend the sacredness of the site. Even the pockets of distilled dew found on the terrace of the mountain cover are collected for bathing.

The story at Azani might not be different. The traditional rulers who knew the story surrounding the forest grove and the adjoining cemetery, in giving up the site for religious activities could have meant perpetrating that super-sensible power prevalent there. It may be deemed subjective but clients who visit the Azani site also attest to the effectiveness of prayers offered there. At Azani too, people take home most of the herbs to cure a number of physical ailments. This comes to them through divine direction from the Caretaker himself.

A site may be humanly motivated, that is with no divine promptings as in the case of Freeman Centre. Harold Turner asserts that great pains may have been taken to invoke a sign from heaven as to where a sanctuary should be built.²⁵¹ What is crucial is 'the intrinsic value of the land in question'. At these humanly created sites, the first service usually invokes the presence of God, and an icon is pitched somewhere either in a building or at the precinct to remind worshippers of the presence of God. Adansi Kusa in this sense is a historic site. It is maintained to memorialize the first Black missionary to the

²⁵¹ Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 16.

Gold Coast who used the place whilst in transit to Kumasi on a missionary tour. With none of the recapitulation of the nature of the sacred to warrant an interaction between either a sacred appearance and a created space, the structure of the myth revolving around the site, and its profound symbolism, has however provided a principally different focus which allows this site to be considered as a hierotopical site. Here at the site, the traditional mentality that Freeman was a superior being sent by God has left such deep imprints on the minds of the indigenes that the land is sacred. Of course this is reminiscent of the medieval account that relics were not only organs of the body but mere mementoes; objects that had been in contact with the saint or his/her shrine.

Pilgrims took along pieces of cloth or papers to the shrine. These were retained as private relics of the saints. Cyril of Jerusalem commented that just as much as handkerchiefs and aprons had worked miracles in the time of Paul, in the same way relics of saintly people would work for believers.²⁵² Hence, before the Methodist Church decided to move in the people took from the site some of the water from the spring, leaves of the crops Freeman ate, particularly the mangoes. If we should push aside the question of the propriety of these ritual practices, the myth that Birch Freeman could have been a divine figure to have survived in that thicket really reflect the experience of the sacred and can likewise be used in hierotopical reconstructions.²⁵³

The typical programme for each occasion begins with praise and worship; this features throughout all the activities amidst instrumentals and dancing. Fasting and prayer are really the prominent features except on grounds of health. But more often this practice is abused. Abasua for instance witnesses a varied degree of fasting. More often, people

²⁵² Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 24.

²⁵³ Lidov, "Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces," 2.

on the site undertake protracted fasts based on certain beliefs they hold. It is a common phenomenon to hear such quips as ‘I did seven days last year, this time I am doing so and so days. At other times one will hear I’m going dry so I will use honey, etc. Wesley encouraged moderation in fasting and thankfully, such extremes are gradually being corrected.²⁵⁴

Healing and deliverance is observed almost every evening and during all night prayer vigils. Teaching and general counselling are also observed but rarely the ‘one on one’ or the clinical type of counselling for the huge numbers. Offertory, appeal for funds are a regular feature; these proceeds are used to run the sites and also paid out as honoraria for guest speakers. Testimonies also feature but not on a daily basis. Often, every minister or evangelist in the course of ministration gives quite a number of testimonies, perhaps for people to believe that they really are God’s instruments.

3.8 The Role of SSV in the Religious Expression of the MCG

In our discussion on contemporary Ghanaian Methodist Spirituality, we attempted to understand the religious style that showed a blend of the Wesleyan tradition as well as current Ghanaian Charismatic Renewal patterns, establishing the Wesleyan background to perhaps understand why Methodists undergo certain practices. Looking at processes that birthed the earlier strain of Pentecostalism, a whole history of its beginnings with the holiness movement was defined. It was observed they were all of one and the same stock; to the extent that Parham’s school was observed to have embodied this holiness ideology.

Having understood that Methodism was one with Pentecostalism, it became conclusive that it is a question of semantics. Hence, the issue of the resemblance in today’s

²⁵⁴ The immediate past Caretaker of APC, interview granted the researcher, February 7, 2012.

MCG's spirituality and Charismatism in Ghana. But of course, this is not without the tinge of African cultural traits.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION OF VIEWS OF CLERGY, LAITY AND PILGRIMS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data elicited from the various participants in the study. It encompasses the reflections, thoughts, opinions, experiences or beliefs of the clergy, the laity, pilgrims and few other individuals deemed to be important or relevant to the study due to their experiences with sacred site activities. The work done in the chapter includes an orderly narrative of the SSV activities and tracing of the relationships between those activities and renewal as is perceived by the church. Perspectives regarding the church's renewal programme and the contribution of SSV towards same programme have been looked at.

Regarding the participants of the study, the senior clergy, that is, Bishops and Directors, and individuals who have played remarkable roles in the evolution of the institutionalized SSV have their names and designation provided in the appendix. Other respondents have been identified with a unique identifying code in the following format: Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, Respondent 'n', where n is the serial number of the respondent in question. Before giving their accounts, however, the participants' profile is presented to introduce those whose contributions to the study provided great insights. Themes were identified from data that shared internal consistency and the respective results were analysed to draw out findings.

Table 4.1: Profile of Respondents and data collection method

Category of respondents	Number of respondents	Data collection method
GHAMSU Executive Officers	11	FGD
Trinity College	7	FGD
Senior Clergy	11	Interview
Church members at the prayer sites	60	Interview
A cross section of Churches in Accra	35	Interview
Indigenes/royals of two towns of the prayer sites [none engaged at APC]	15	Interview
Caretakers	4	Interview

4.2 Participants' Profile

The respondents were categorized according to the field from which they were obtained. Thirteen [13] respondents were from the Ghana Methodist Students' Union [GHAMSU]. Seven [7] respondents were from Trinity College. In the Methodist Church Ghana, the senior Clergy were eleven [11] in number whilst Church members from a cross-section of the Church branches in Accra who participated in the study numbered thirty-five [35]. There were also sixty [60] Church members covered from the prayer sites and fifteen [15] indigenes and royals of two towns that had the prayer sites of interest in this study because a lot of historical facts on APC were already in circulation. The profile of respondents is shown in the composite tables.

Table 4.1 shows that the respondents were fairly older people aged over 25 years. The ages for majority of them was also pegged at 45 years and above. Respondents aged from 25 to 29 years [26.7%] were next in the order of domination. Respondents aged from 18 to 24 [17.5%], 35 to 44 [14.2%], or 30 to 44 [12.5%] were rather fewer.

Educational level among the respondents was moderately high with a larger percentage of them [81.7%] having a ‘Certificate’. Those holding First Degree constituted 10.8% while a few of the respondents, 1.7% had a PhD as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 3 shows that the respondents were fairly older people aged over 25 years. The ages for the majority of them were 45 years and above. Respondents aged from 25 to 29 years (26.7%) were next in the order of domination. Relatively few respondents were aged from 18 to 24 (17.5%), 35 to 44 (14.2%), or 30 to 44 (12.5%).

Age distribution (in years)	Frequency	Percentage %
18-24	21	17.5
25-29	32	26.7
30-34	15	12.5
35-44	17	14.2
45 and above	35	29.2

Table 3: Profile of Respondents (Age). Source: Field data, 2014

Educational level among the respondents was moderately high with a larger percentage of them (81.7%) having a ‘Certificate’. Those holding First Degree constituted 10.8% while a few of the respondents, 5.8% had a PhD as presented in Table 4.

Distribution of respondents by education		
Certificate	98	81.7
Degree	13	10.8
Masters	7	5.8
PhD	2	1.7

Table 4: Profile of Respondents (Education). Source: Field data, 2014

Being a typical case study data was obtained from field notes, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, journals, books, articles and other informative materials. Both

primary and secondary data were used. To meet the primary data need, three Methodist Church Prayer Centres were brought into focus. The selected centres were the William d-Graft Centre at Azani in the Sekondi Diocese in Western Region, Thomas Birch Freeman at Adansi Kusa in the Obuasi Diocese in the Ashanti Region, and Abasua Prayer Centre in the Effiduase Diocese at the Ashanti Region. Data was obtained from recorded interviews granted by participants selected from the sites. The purpose was to ensure that participants who were engaged had relevant experience or knowledge in connection with visitation to the prayer sites. However, the ‘after experience’, feelings, and other spiritual implications of the prayer centre visitation activity were explored from selected members of some Methodist Churches in the Accra Diocese.

References from journals, books and other published materials were used as sources of secondary data. The sample size reflects the total number of participants in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify the required members of the Church for this work. Based on the objectives of the study, only the members of the senior Clergy and the Laity were made to constitute the field study. The other members of the population apart from the Methodists were the indigenes from two of the study sites being Adansi Kusa and Azani. They were fifteen (15) in all. They were consulted for the historical data on the sites. In all, the sixteen (16) members of the leadership of the Methodist Church Ghana were composed of the former Presiding Bishop, whose views were believed to represent the authentic voice of the Church, four (4) superannuated Bishops selected by reason of their proximity to the researcher, six (6) other sitting Bishops and three (3) Directors (past and present) of the EMRAT division of the Church. A former Evangelism coordinator was included.

The laity category was made up of thirty-five (35) members of the Church with five (5) members each from Gethsemane in South Mamprobi, Bethel in Taifa, and Resurrection in Accra New Town, Kpehe circuit. Nursery society under South Mamprobi at Iron City, Kasoa, and J.R.O in Gbawe/McCarthy Hill Circuit, Sampa Valley and Mount Olivet of the MCG. Additionally, sixty (60) participants all Methodists were selected from the study sites. Ten (10) were from TBFC at Adansi Kusa in the Obuasi Diocese in the Ashanti Region, five (5) from WdGC, Azani in the Sekondi Diocese in Western Region, forty-five (45) from APC in the Effiduasi Diocese at the Ashanti Region.

There were four (4) Caretakers, two of whom were from Abasua. These were the immediate past caretaker at Abasua who was about to go on transfer during the researcher's first visit, and the current Caretaker. The other two were from the WdGC and TBFC respectively at the three Methodist prayer sites, namely, the WdGC, TBFC, and APC. The rest of the respondents were seven (7) Methodist pastoral students and seventeen (13) GHAMSU executives. These were believed to be well informed and articulate enough by virtue of their peculiar position as the next generation of Clergy and Lay leaders. They were mostly members of the Methodist Youth Fellowship.

Two different interview guides were designed for the Clergy and the laity who constituted this study. The interview guides consisted of open-ended questions or probing questions, the intention was to obtain insight from respondents on the subject of this study. The interviews were conducted with a tape recorder which captured the responses of each of the respondents. This ensured that everything the respondents said was recorded. The main advantage of this kind of instrument is that it helped to obtain subjective views and opinions which endowed the work with more detailed insights. Data collection among the residents in Accra was undertaken in three weeks (three consecutive Sundays were used). Using the participant observation approach, three visits were made to the

APC during the annual pilgrimage and a visit each to the TBFC and the WdGC. This was planned within the three-year study period granted the researcher. The time frame enabled the researcher to observe much of the activities carried out at these sites. By means of telephone conversations and by direct contact sufficient data was obtained.

The data was collected solely by the researcher to ensure that issues that needed in-depth discussion could be further probed into. All the data obtained was treated with confidentiality. Using the appropriate method, the data collected was analysed following the stipulated three interrelated steps. By means of logical reasoning and sound interpretation the various segments of the data were obtained. First, the recorded data was transcribed, sorted and organized into different themes in line with the objectives of the study. Data associated or logically connected with each theme was presented in the form of a report under the theme with their related discussions either preceding or following the report. Varying kinds of responses have been reported based on the additional insight they bring to a particular issue under consideration. The effect of this was that not all the responses obtained have been reported for any particular enquiry, but those responses that present additional value or insights to the analysis have been reported. The details helped to bring to the fore views that would have otherwise been unknown. The analysis of data collected explores the meaning, characteristics and practices of SSV or pilgrimage by the Methodist Church Ghana, and determines the contribution of SSV to the renewal programme of the Church.

4.3 Understanding Sacred Sites

The first objective of this study looks at understanding sacred sites in the Church's mind-set as holy sites. And this was from the perspectives of the Church. A careful study

of responses given by the participants in the study yielded several views to merit the understanding of the prayer centres as sacred sites.

The study posed the question as to what sacred sites were to the Christian, or at least, to the Methodist Church Ghana. The insight given by the Clergy provides some information generally. They basically depict a metaphysical understanding of the term sacred site on which to fix our knowledge of the physical structures to be regarded as sacred sites. A bishop, for example, stated that:

From an academic perspective, sacred sites can be regarded as objects and places which are used by God to manifest his power and presence and from the religious perspective sacred sites can be a chapel where people go to worship²⁵⁵.

In line with the exposition above, four (4) individual members of the Clergy showed that the presence of God at sacred sites is a significant factor that cannot be glossed over. Their statements emphasize this idea: ‘A solitary place where one can engage in a serious communion with God.’²⁵⁶

Any place which is believed the divine presence of God can be encountered.²⁵⁷

Places that serve as a source of inspiration and add to knowledge acquisition²⁵⁸

Places of inspiration and further commitment in faith.²⁵⁹

The third and fourth views above presuppose the existence of a place beyond the natural as exemplified by Balandier.²⁶⁰ From the third statement, for example, a place that

²⁵⁵ A senior most clergy, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

²⁵⁶ A supernumerary, interview granted the researcher, August 21, 2014.

²⁵⁷ A sitting bishop, interview granted the researcher, February 22, 2013.

²⁵⁸ A former bishop, interview granted the researcher, February 15, 2013.

²⁵⁹ The sitting Bishop of Accra, interview granted the researcher, February 22, 2013.

²⁶⁰ Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970).

is to serve as a source of inspiration and knowledge suggests that these virtues are diffused from this higher place onto individuals. Clearly, the supernatural dimension which is widely attributed to ‘God’ is implied in this thinking.²⁶¹

The senior most Clergy again remarked that sacred sites, as have been known, are characterized by primeval occurrences which are communicated by myths, and without which they lose essence as sacred sites. Myths, in the clergy’s view, constitute the substance of the belief of Christians in the existence of sacred sites. The clergy puts it this way:

Places where there have been a primeval experience like the beginning of the Sampson Oppong Village, Abasua and the Grottoes of the Catholic Church. At these sites there could have been a great numinous experience. There are myths about most of them to show they really exist. It is just like a nation, if there is no myth about it, it is no nation. Hence sacred sites need to be preserved.²⁶²

It did not come as a surprise when in the first Clergy asserted that in order for Thomas Birch Freeman Centre not to lose its significance as a historic site new mango trees should be planted to replace the original one which has been dead for some time.

The foregoing essentially means that for a place to be designated as sacred site, there should be something, a story (myth) about the place in which people would come to believe. On this the first Clergy of the Church opined that even a nation without a myth is a dead nation. Believing in the distinctiveness of the place, because of what has happened there, would cause people to accept the place as a sacred site. Jill Dubisch and Winkelman express similar sentiments; ‘Pilgrimage sites shape the pilgrimage and nature

²⁶¹ James, “Significance in Sacred Sites,” 18, 27.

²⁶² The first clergy, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

and history shape its power'. The cumulative view of the Clergy about sacred places suggest that the presence of God is felt there, one can receive inspiration from God and communicate with God and also acquire fresh knowledge to strengthen one's faith among others.

The Laity whose views are also outlined below, projected sacred sites as places set apart by God, and where God dwells so that humankind have to visit there to have an encounter with him. In these views sacred sites exist the way they are so that people from all walks of life, would have the chance to seek the face of the one true God. Visiting these places keeps one separated from the normal lifestyle and promotes deeper communion with God. This encounter with God is then said to provide varied shades of supernatural power people need to develop strong relations with their maker. The following were also expressed by the Lay:

Places that have been set apart by God Himself for His name to dwell there, giving people the opportunity to seek His face²⁶³.

A place set apart or chosen by reason of an encounter a founder had with God. Since great men have been there before, and engaged in fierce prayers the ground has become very fertile. This makes prayer requests answered promptly. The presence of other people praying makes such a place a serious battle field to encourage others also to be serious.²⁶⁴

It's a place for separation of oneself. Gifted persons found such places so God's power is there.²⁶⁵

A place of refuge – Jesus set us an example when he dissociated himself from the crowd to pray. When things are rough and one goes there one gets secured

²⁶³ Respondent 2, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 4, 2011.

²⁶⁴ Respondent 3, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 3, 2011.

²⁶⁵ Respondent 16, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 3, 2011.

and assured of breakthroughs. Especially where the mountain Atwea is concerned, Moses went on top of Sinai and he met God face to face. So it's a place to see the glory of God. It's a place for one to lift up one's faith. It's a place to learn the word and understand God better.²⁶⁶

A sacred site is a holy place. One gets to know about this through the testimonies of Christians who have visited the place. Anybody with a good heart receives answers to his or her prayers. It's a place every Christian should make time for, to get away from the crowd sometimes²⁶⁷

Places where every need is met²⁶⁸

Places where people with sincere hearts can seek God and receive answers²⁶⁹

Places where one can seek deliverance²⁷⁰

A solitary place where one can withdraw from the hustle and bustle of everyday life for a time alone with God²⁷¹

A place where one can have a miraculous encounter²⁷²

Places where God has entered into a covenant with the founder for particular needs to be met²⁷³

It is a serene environment that promotes deep concentration and reflection among others, where one denies oneself of luxuries²⁷⁴

²⁶⁶ Respondent 69, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 3, 2011.

²⁶⁷ Respondent 72, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 3, 2011.

²⁶⁸ Respondent 74, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 4, 2011.

²⁶⁹ Respondent 78, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 4, 2011.

²⁷⁰ Respondent 21, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 4, 2011.

²⁷¹ Respondent 13, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, November 4, 2011.

²⁷² Respondent 91, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, August 7, 2012.

²⁷³ Respondent 55, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, August 7, 2012.

²⁷⁴ Respondent 57, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, August 7, 2012.

A place where individuals receive anointing to do things they could not do before, like Bible reading²⁷⁵

What these responses seem to suggest is that sacred sites appear to be known in some sense. The fact that their origin is from God seems undisputed. The totality of these views about sacred site is that it can be said to be a place that has seen divine manifestations or hierophanies. They exude some powers, and God has deliberately set them apart for the sole purpose of communion with humankind. God is present there and offers opportunity for people to commune with him there.

4.4 Why are Prayer Centres Perceived as Sacred Places?

With specific connotations about sacred sites from literature respondents were briefed to enable them assess the prayer centres in similar fashion. These were a) the site must be found outside one's geographical and mental boundaries; b) visitors mostly but not always exhibit traits of being in solidarity or a communal state. c) there must be a cultic object like a relic, cross, or any form of monument; d) there must be a particular season or seasons that the place is opened for major religious activities. For instance the date of celebrating the primeval event; e) there should be knowledge of specific rules regarding behaviour or conduct of general activities and permitted rituals engaged in; and f) there should be a narrative (myth) confirming the sanctity of the site.

A Director of Evangelism of the Church (for purposes of this study categorized under the Clergy) stated that:

There is no point in referring to these places as sacred centres. The term pilgrimage is a misnomer²⁷⁶.

²⁷⁵ Respondent 56, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, August 7, 2012.

²⁷⁶ A former director of EMR, interview granted the researcher, March 25, 2013.

Similarly, another comment from a senior Clergy still betrayed a low regard for the Methodist prayer centres as sacred sites. The comment was put in these words:

These are not prayer centres; they do not qualify even as Retreat centres in the real sense of the word²⁷⁷.

The following however, may appear too extreme and far-fetched for the sites to be regarded as pilgrimage sites, except in the very superficial sense of the word. That is, when pilgrimage is explained to mean any religious journey undertaken for a religious cause like seeking the face of God.

In the respondent's words, there seem to be some facelift at the sites, which is gradually elevating them to the standard of sacred sites:

Our sites are gradually being raised to the level or standards as pertains in most centres. Though ours may not satisfy every criterion, plans are far advanced to upgrade them.²⁷⁸

In furtherance of the view that the Methodist Church sites are sacred sites, or close to sacred sites, another member of the Clergy also had this to say:

There is every good reason why the Church carries out this programme, though it does not seem like pilgrimages we know elsewhere, this is a pilgrimage on its own merit. It gives our members a certain sense of unity of purpose²⁷⁹.

In another response given by a member of the laity the concept of sacredness linked to 'sacred sites' is not mutually exclusive. This point stems from the fact that every individual has his/her own view of where to regard as sacred. It becomes uncertain to say exactly that the Methodist Church sites are everywhere sacred. One place could be sacred

²⁷⁷ Ibidem.

²⁷⁸ Respondent 101, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, February 25, 2013.

²⁷⁹ The director of the EMR, interview granted the researcher, July 7, 2013.

to one person and not to the other. The statement reflects some uncertainty that was expressed about the Methodist prayer centres:

I don't believe there is a particular place that can be called a sacred place. Even in my closet, it can be classified as a sacred place, where I can meet God. Atwea Mountains, Abasua, the Aburi youth camp and even Trinity College can be termed as a sacred place depending on one's view of a sacred place.²⁸⁰

As a matter of fact, the laity's position reflects three possibilities that one would expect following an attempt to determine whether or not a place is a sacred site. On the one hand, the total disbelief that the Methodist Church sites are sacred sites and on the other hand, the absolute belief that the sites are sacred sites constitute the two extremes. Between these extremes lie the third possibility – all the shades of ambivalence in the question. The following is a snapshot of carefully sorted out responses from the laity:

To me Abasua among all the rest I know satisfy these criteria. On rules and regulations, we have about twelve points which we instruct our members on when they come up here.²⁸¹

With the characteristics explained as to what makes a place a sacred site, I will consider all Methodist prayer centres as sacred sites.²⁸²

A sacred place to me is subjective. Where one sees as sacred will definitely differ from another's. Saying all Methodist prayer centres do meet the standards of a sacred place to me is subjective²⁸³

To say that pilgrimage exhibit collective elements like identity formation for me it is a personal journey, which is undertaken collectively; that is if we have to

²⁸⁰ Respondent 77, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁸¹ Respondent 55, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, August 7, 2012

²⁸² Respondent 15, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁸³ Respondent 15 /Respondent 20, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

call that journey a pilgrimage at all. Because at the end of the day, each person is accountable to God, not the group²⁸⁴

We are together but like life's journey, we are each on our own.²⁸⁵

We are one people, Methodists; it makes everybody aware that we share a common faith. If this makes it a pilgrimage then it is.²⁸⁶

Some responses like this one:

To me this is pilgrimage because it is a journey for religious a purpose. It is planned this way to save cost. Even we the 'warriors' don't pay any thing²⁸⁷

Coming from the laity, reveal the fact that pilgrimage is associated with long journeys which fit in with the Dutch Research Project in the Netherlands.²⁸⁸ This then raises the question, 'what is SSV?'

4. 5 Sacred Site Visitation or Pilgrimage?

The object of the study here is to obtain some information on the evolution of sacred sites visitation generally and in the Methodist Church and whether this is the same as pilgrimage.

The views on these issues were varied. The Clergy showed their depth of knowledge in terms of the quality of the historical information they gave. In a brief commentary on the evolution of SSV, one member of the Clergy states:

It should be understood that the Old Testament has much in common with the African Traditional Religion in terms of ritual practices. And in the whole Bible, references to passages about yearly visits of Jews journeying

²⁸⁴ Respondent 22, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁸⁵ Respondent 69, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁸⁶ Respondent 72, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁸⁷ Respondent 78, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, February 25, 2012

²⁸⁸ See Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimage*, 27-28.

to Jerusalem, Moses' and the disciples' mountain top experiences, performing of certain rituals connected with healing, moving into solitary locations etc., are all interpreted with African nuances. The African Christian believes in tangibles not abstract things and thus would always want to identify with practices that give concrete expressions to their faith. Hence these visits and all that are characterized with them. We don't rule out excesses though but they can all be corrected through education²⁸⁹.

The view above relates SSV to past occurrences in the Bible. The argument is that a lot of what happened in the Old Testament times have much in common with African practices. There are references to passages in the Bible where visits or journeys had to be made, some to solitary places. All these fall in perspective with the African religious experiences. African Christians believe in tangibles and would want to identify with practices that give concrete expressions to their faith. This sets the stage for SSV to gain acceptance like the way it has now in the MCG.

It is important to note that the response from a member of the Clergy above brings out the fact that SSV as is known today can be said to stem from biblical ideas. It brings out the idea that it may involve journeys, some to solitary places. This appears to be the model on which SSV is fashioned thus making the Bible an appropriate paradigm for this study.

Other responses connected with the origins of the sites were elicited from the members of the Laity. Three of the responses presented in the following clearly bring out a prevalent idea that the leaders of the Church were led or inspired (by God) to discover the sites:

²⁸⁹ Former 1st Clergy, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

The stories surrounding the sites, suggest that either God revealed the place or spoke to the founders about them.²⁹⁰

I know the story of Abasua. It was founded by Rev. Abraham Osei-Assibey.²⁹¹

The first Bishop of Obuasi Diocese, Rt. Rev. Adjei-Mensah originated the idea about making Adansi Kusa a prayer centre. Though he is dead and I can't ask but I think it is basically God's leading.²⁹²

A notable issue in the latter response above is the fact that the sites have originated from a prayer centre concept. And though that is the case, it is absolutely correct to consider them pilgrimage sites. The Evangelism, Mission and Renewal (EMRAT) Division has been instrumental in this regard. The outfit has contributed immensely to the practice of visiting the prayer centres periodically. With particular reference to the Abasua, the annual bulletin they send all over the connexion, as well as the banners and posters one always hears and reads '*once again the Abasua pilgrimage is here*'. This is evidenced by the response from the spouse of a clergy, who is connected to the EMRAT programme:

I don't know the date the whole connexional pilgrimage started but what I know is that at the first connexional Evangelists conference at Freeman Centre in Kumasi, on the 15th June we were made to visit the place and we were advised that once a while we should bring our Church members there.²⁹³

To drive this point home, a section of the youth of the Methodist Church Ghana believe that pilgrimage is divine and biblical. And pilgrimage to the prayer centres is God's direction. One of the youth clearly stated that:

²⁹⁰ Respondent 78, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁹¹ Respondent 69, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁹² Respondent 72, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

²⁹³ Spouse of the immediate Past Director of EMR, personal conversation at the Mount Olivet Church at annual FK, July 17, 2013.

Pilgrimage is usually by divine injunction; it is biblical. So for the Church to decide at a point in its history to take its members makes pilgrimage to prayer centres a divine injunction... To me, it is God's direction²⁹⁴

All that is evidenced above give credence to the fact that, whether prayer sites or sacred sites, pilgrimage have been made to the Methodist Church sites. The sites must be of some high significance to the people in order to attract the pilgrims. The contention surrounding the sacredness of the sites may, thus, be solved by consensus building. A claim that is supported by the data is that the prayer sites have one and the same meaning with pilgrimage sites to the members of the Methodist Church Ghana.

4.6 Why Sacred Site Visitation?

Admitting that the Methodist sites are sacred sites, why at all should pilgrimage be made to these places? The purpose for starting the pilgrimage practice can be said to be chiefly to unite members of the Church from the various branches far and near. In recent times when Church growth and soul winning have become a very serious and almost competitive issue, it appears to give a sound basis for Churches to outline very attractive programmes and activities that people can take part in. In a sense, the pilgrimage is purposely an evangelism campaign which is meant to bring together all and sundry to maintain the progress or growth of the Church. The response below given by a bishop, also a member of the Clergy affirms this idea:

The Methodist Church Ghana adopted this practice for Ecumenical reasons. Whilst other Churches visited pilgrimage sites, the Methodist Church could not stand aloof and pretend that nothing was happening. More importantly, it was

²⁹⁴ Respondent 101, FGD with the researcher MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

meant to stem the possible drift of membership of the Methodist Church to other Churches that organized such visits.²⁹⁵

The comment from another member of the Clergy, a Director of the EMRAT programme also reiterated that the original arrangement of moving to Abasua, one of the Methodist Church prayer sites, was to pray for the evangelism programme of the Church, hence, it was to be regarded as the prayer tower for evangelism. In plain words, the respondent said:

The whole programme of moving to Abasua was to serve as a prayer tower for evangelism. When the idea came up to pray, the presiding bishop was even happy. We all thought this will promote evangelism in the Church, but what do we see people go there with their own needs.²⁹⁶

The latter aspect of the view above is to draw awareness to the issue that some people visit the sites with very personal motives. The question that immediately comes to mind is whether Church members are aware of the Church's motive or not. Or it is a question of let us get there before we let them know the Church's position. Precisely, it shows that we cannot yet identify where the consensus is in terms of what the purpose of the pilgrimage is. For some, as follows shortly, the purpose is to 'meet God', to pray. Views from members of the Laity from the Abasua participants gave richer and varying dimensions which reflect all the views from members on the three sites.

This mountain is different ... because here is a prayer centre²⁹⁷

There is more of God's presence not just the natural terrain.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Former 1st Clergy, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

²⁹⁶ Former director of EMR, interview granted the researcher, March 25, 2013.

²⁹⁷ Respondent 69, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, 2013.

²⁹⁸ Respondent 72, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, 2013.

... with this visitation, it has to do with encountering God's presence²⁹⁹

We do come to this mountain to have an intimacy with Christ.³⁰⁰

I was curious when I heard about Atwea so I came here to see the place but of course to pray too.³⁰¹

A journey to Atwea is a journey of faith; to receive something from God.³⁰²

The journey was an opportunity for me to see places, and coming here truly I am amazed by the site.³⁰³

At best, what is supported by the data is that, there are four (4) views regarding the purpose for the pilgrimage for the members of the Church: a) the sites are meant to unite members of the Church for growth or be a prayer tower for evangelism to the Church. Therefore, the pilgrimage is to pray for growth and evangelism of the Church. This is also projected as the original purpose of the pilgrimage. b) the pilgrimage is to access God; be in the presence of God; have intimacy with Christ. c) The pilgrimage is to go and pray to God for solution to some need. d) the pilgrimage is to satisfy the pleasure of creation.

But above all, a dimension of African primal world view is clearly portrayed in the Church's stance. When the African has his/her needs met, he is emotionally and psychologically balanced. This is growth enough. The idea finds similar basis in the African concept of salvation. Larbi's view about the African and salvation is that salvation to the

²⁹⁹ Respondent 80, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, 2013.

³⁰⁰ Respondent 91, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, 2013.

³⁰¹ Respondent 53, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, 2013.

³⁰² Respondent 69, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, 2013.

³⁰³ Respondent 2, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, 2013.

African is here and now, a deliverance from a pressing need,³⁰⁴and one can add it is synonymous with safety, security, essence happiness. The by-product in all of this is growth.

4.7 Extent to which SSV impacts Renewal in the Church

A major question posed in this study is how the practice of SSV or pilgrimage relates or link with the renewal programme and the growth of the Methodist Church Ghana. Renewal of the Church is taken by the Church to mean a discipleship drive of the Church for the transformation of society. Ultimately, this implies the growth of the Church. This is also encapsulated in the vision of the Methodist Church Ghana.

4.7.1 What is Renewal?

A preliminary step was taken to find out what renewal means to the members of the Church. Two members of the Laity had suggested that renewal is synonymous with revival:

I think Renewal is a term for revival.³⁰⁵

For different types of renewal, I think it is the same whether for the individual or group, I see it as revival.³⁰⁶

In another breadth, a section of the youth of the Church shared similar idea that renewal is a time to deepen relationship with God. These words from a youth reflect this idea:

It is a time for the Methodists to make afresh their covenant with God.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ K.E. Larbi, *Pentecostalism: The Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra: Blessed Publications,2001), 407-408.

³⁰⁵ Respondent 101, FGD with the researcher at Azani, December 31, 2013.

³⁰⁶ Respondent 72, FGD with the researcher at Azani, December 31, 2013.

³⁰⁷ Respondent 99, FGD with the researcher at Azani, December 31, 2013.

Various members of the Methodist Church from the different categories also expressed the view that renewal is a time which involves deep soul searching to assess or deepen ones relationship with the Lord and seek restoration where the need arises. This view is in tandem with what a member of the Clergy stated:

Renewal is a moment for people to do serious soul searching to see where they stand in the Lord and seek restoration when they see the need.³⁰⁸

There seem to be the suggestion that quite apart from the meaning of revival in a collective sense, there is also individual revival. This approach involves the individual, on his own, to fast and pray. The converse is group renewal where members of the Church collectively go through some religious experience at prayer centres like Abasua. In plain words connected to this view, this is what a member of the Laity had to say:

Individual renewal is there, like when you are on your own and you fast and pray. Group renewal is the type we experience at Abasua for instance.³⁰⁹

Whatever the understanding of renewal, expressions like ‘revival’, to the ‘Methodists means making a fresh covenant with God’³¹⁰. It suggests a collective idea which can easily be thought of to be centred on the Church. But the sense in which renewal is centred on the individual and his relationship with God also inures to the growth of the individual which equally affects the Church positively. Looking at these meanings in terms of the Church’s view that getting renewed must show in ‘a vibrant, spirit-filled Church’, and promoting the discipleship drive of the Church for the transformation of society, the concept of discipleship is not clearly captured in how the members understand

³⁰⁸ A former Bishop, interview granted the researcher, August 21 2014.

³⁰⁹ Respondent 62, FGD with the researcher, MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

³¹⁰ Methodist Pastoral Student, FGD with the researcher, Trinity Theological Seminary (TTS) Campus, May 30, 2013.

renewal. What is clear is that the expositions for renewal are all ultimately linked to growth of the Church.

4.7.2 Do visits to Prayer Sites Bring about Renewal?

In order to assess how the pilgrimage practice has impacted the renewal programme of the Church, the question was posed, ‘How does a visit to a prayer centre bring about renewal?’

Views to the effect that pilgrimage or visit to the prayer centres is necessary for renewal to take place were widespread. The import of these views is that, the place induces fasting and prayers, a move away from individual comfort zone to God to confront real problems. What was said by a member of the Laity reflects several of such views that were obtained:

Coming to places like this is the best way to revive ourselves, because everything about the place, fasting and prayer, harsh weather conditions, inadequate living accommodation, etc. contributes to our spiritual growth. You decide to leave your comfort zone and wrestle with God. For instance, when you climb Abasua Mountain and come and sleep on the bare floor in the cold and you decide that you will not seek God’s face and be serious, then I will say its sheer craziness.³¹¹

Another issue raised was the fact that the collective participation in the pilgrimage brings the realization of what is said in the dictum, ‘iron sharpens iron’. According to a member of the Laity:

Coming together as a Church and doing things together challenge those who are weak to renew their prayer life.³¹²

³¹¹ Respondent 69, FGD with the researcher, MUCG campus, May 31, 2013.

³¹² Respondent 2, Methodist Pastoral Student, FGD with the researcher at TTS, May 30, 2013.

Also the fact of the entire Church engages in the pilgrimage allows for intercession prayers to be made by the Church for individuals who may have problems in life. It is believed that the response to petitioning and supplication when supported by the whole Church is quicker. This comes out in the statement of another member of the Laity.

When you come with any problem and you get the support of the entire Church answers are prompt.³¹³

From the foregoing, renewal is accessed through fasting and prayers, wrestling with God, evolving a strong prayer life, and seeking solutions to life's hardships. However, a contrary view from one of the youth in GHAMSU shows that there are some who do not think this kind of pilgrimage is the way to seek renewal, at least not the only way. This view was presented this way:

As for me I don't think visiting places like this is the only source of renewal. And of course people should not wait to get to a prayer site before they can seek renewal. Praying and fasting alone in one's home can also bring renewal. Jesus advocated the latter even though his lifestyle suggested the former. Well it's a matter of choice.³¹⁴

4.7.3 Practices at the Prayer Sites

In furtherance of how renewal is accessed, a step is taken to find out any relationship between the practices at the prayer sites and renewal.

A significant issue that emerged from the responses verifies that the practice where people use organic and inorganic substances originating from the prayer sites is manifest. Members of the Laity particularly had this to say:

³¹³ Respondent 20, FGD with the researcher at Azani, December 31, 2013.

³¹⁴ Respondent 77, Methodist Pastoral Student, FGD with the researcher at TTS Campus, May 30, 2013.

I take the sand because this place is a holy ground.³¹⁵

I take the sand and go and sprinkle it in my store. It will always remind me of the powers of the place.³¹⁶

Comments from one Caretaker in this study held the view that there is strong belief among participants of the sites that the organic or inorganic matter at the sites possesses some powers too.

Over the years, people have used the mango here in Freeman; its bark and leaves. Also, water from the river here because they believe that having been used by the white man, T. B. Freeman, there is potency in them.

A lot of people believe that the mango leaves cure infertility and this works for them.

Curing breast cancer with herbs is my specialty at this centre.³¹⁷

These views give strength to the idea that the prayer sites are holy grounds. Other members of the Laity from the prayer centres had strong conviction that the practices at the prayer sites are purely a matter of faith. That is, whatever one does at these prayer centres is in accordance with the faith of the individual. Consequently, according to their faiths, there are varied ways in which different people would approach practices at the prayer sites. The other significant practices obtained from members of the Laity at the prayer sites reflect this:

People have faith that when they take the sand or leaves from Abasua and they are in need of anything they can pray to it for answers.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Respondent 3, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, December 12, 2012.

³¹⁶ Respondent 9, FGD with the researcher at Azani, December 12, 2013.

³¹⁷ Respondent 95 (a caretaker of one of the sites), interview granted the researcher, February 16, 2013.

³¹⁸ Respondent 103, focus group discussion with the researcher, Abasua, 2013

I believe it is in one's faith that makes things work for people.³¹⁹

I normally take the anointing oil because evangelists have prayed on it.³²⁰

It is insightful to point out that apart from the view that collectively embarking on pilgrimage encourages members of the Church to become strong and enrich their prayer life, the people go to the prayer centres in search of answers to their problems. The problems normally comprise individual hardships in life. It is quite difficult to relate the practices to the concept of renewal as espoused by the Church.

4.7.4 Relationship between Practices at the Prayer sites and Renewal

To find out views on how the practices at the prayer sites relate with the renewal programme of the Methodist Church, the study posed the question to members of the Laity at the sites: 'Do you think what is done here (at the prayer centres) fulfils the vision of M.P.R.P.?'

There were two things entailed in this question. First, whether the practices at the sites positively relate to the renewal programme and second, whether the practices do not fulfil the core mandate of the programme. In terms of the first issue, respondents show that as much as prayer is the core activity at the prayer centres and it is also central to the renewal programme, the very substance of renewal is being achieved by the practices at the prayer sites. This is captured by a comment from one of the female evangelists, thirty-five years at the APC:

M.P.R.P. is prayer so if we come here to Abasua to pray that is enough. Besides it is only once a year that we come up here.³²¹

³¹⁹ Respondent 107, focus group discussion with the researcher, Azani, December 31, 2013.

³²⁰ Respondent 76, focus group discussion with the researcher, Azani, December 31, 2013.

³²¹ Respondent 59 (Female evangelists, 35 years), personal conversation with the researcher, Abasua, February 25, 2012.

Another lay member at Abasua indicated that apart from the prayers, members have been engaged in discussions at Bible studies and other teachings. This, the view states, is in line with the M.P.R.P.

As for me since the beginning of the program I have never missed a visit. I see that each year the emphasis change. In the past we had talks and prayed. This time we do teachings and Bible studies. The studies are based on these teachings. So to me this fulfils M.P.R.P. vision.³²²

The views of respondents who thought that the practices at the prayer sites could not fulfil the renewal programme in part expressed this by showing that the standard of practices should be revised in some form. This is reflected in the following comments:

For me I think that we should not only come here to pray. Many people from the surrounding villages come here to work for us but they don't know Christ. So we should organize crusades for them down the mountain sometimes.³²³

We don't always have to climb up and pray for ourselves. I think we can even collect used clothes from amongst ourselves and supply them to people in the town.³²⁴

Another section however, showed the extreme side of how the practices could not fulfil the renewal programme of the Church. The Directors and Bishops who constituted the Senior Clergy in this study showed that the practice of taking along organic or inorganic substances from the prayer centres is fetishism. A comment from one of the Clergy vividly affirms this view:

³²² Respondent 63 (Evangelist male, 40 years), personal conversation with the researcher, Abasua, February 25, 2012.

³²³ Respondent 71 (Class Leader, male 50), FGD with the researcher at Abasua, February 25, 2012.

³²⁴ Respondent 43, FGD with the researcher at Abasua, February 25, 2012.

That practice of picking memorabilia (taking organic or inorganic substances) to use for purposes other than remembrance is fetishism and it should be totally discouraged.³²⁵

Also, there is the view among the Clergy that there is an increase in healing and deliverance at the sites. This overshadows the core objectives of the MPRP thus tilts the balance of activities of the renewal programme. The comment that follows, for example, expresses some level of disillusionment with the way activities are being handled at the prayer sites:

The whole idea of praying at the sites is not wrong but the ‘witch hunting’, healing and deliverance overshadows the whole program.³²⁶

4.8 Impact of SSV on the Spirituality of the Church

Quite apart from how the pilgrimage to sacred sites affects renewal of the Church, the study sought to know the impact of pilgrimage on the spirituality of the Church.

The views reported are exclusively from three members of the Senior Clergy. The position in their views is in agreement with the expectation that so far as the pilgrimage is geared towards prayers, it is enough for any serious minded Christian to be fulfilled spiritually.

People pray with dynamism. Obviously this will be carried over to their Churches.³²⁷

When people have answers to their personal needs it makes them committed to the Church.³²⁸

³²⁵ Former Director of EMR, interview granted the researcher, May 7, 2014.

³²⁶ Supernumerary, personal conversation with the researcher, February 15, 2013.

³²⁷ A former Bishop, interview with the researcher, February 22, 2013.

³²⁸ A Bishop, interview with the researcher, Methodist Headquarters Accra, August 24, 2014.

Spirituality cannot be measured nor quantified. But there is always the enthusiastic and zealous approach to worship after such trips and many evangelists attest to this.³²⁹

4.9 General Observation and Summary of Views on the Practice

The researcher, through her numerous visits, intermittent stay, critical observation, and informal conversations with Church members, visitors and Caretakers of the APC, TBF and WdGC, coupled with discretionary in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the senior Clergy of the Church and youth groups has arrived at the conclusion below.

4.9.1 Pilgrimage Centres /Prayer Centres/Retreat Centres

Essentially, all the study sites though prayer centres, do not measure up to classical standardized pilgrimage centres, nor even retreat centres in their full capacities as we know exist elsewhere like the St Mary's sanctuary in Kumasi, or any of the Catholic grottoes but they are truly sacred sites. They all enjoy a certain measure of recognition; their distinctive worth in the eyes of the community and the visitors who access the facilities and the beliefs and spiritual meanings associated with them are quite noteworthy. Though a number of scholarly arguments forbid comparisons³³⁰ of such nature the beliefs associated with these centres, however, are largely personal and subjective. They exist at an informal level among the indigenous members of the community and the Church laity at the grassroots. Certainly, at the heart of all these beliefs are the stories or myths traded

³²⁹ Director of EMR, telephone conversation with the researcher, February 02, 2014.

³³⁰ Coleman and Elsner, *World Religions*, 2-6.

about the landscape features. It is such meanings ascribed to them which gain control and shape the potency of these centres.³³¹

This is shown in the use of the mementoes or memorabilia from the sites and the crowd the sites pull. All the uses these mementoes are put to purportedly work for them. But these beliefs on the contrary are different from the Church authorities' perception about the sites. Speaking as an African, the presiding Bishop reckons with their sacredness and with myths too. He does not make it a rule of thumb for all to espouse, hence, his emphasis on demystifying Abasua, for instance, through more education.

4.9.2 Relationship between Sacred Sites and Renewal

Embarking on a religious journey like the Abasua visits can best be described as pilgrimages yet in another sense as retreat. Probably the common usage of the term 'retreat' in the Church (namely any convocation outside the Church premises) called for the use of pilgrimage. T. A. Hudson thinks retreat is a term that tends to be loosely used; often referring to almost any event on the Church's calendar that takes place away from familiar surroundings, though pilgrimage may be a misnomer to some.³³² Therefore based on an earlier discussion that there must be a sacred site for a pilgrimage to take place the argument is sealed for pilgrimage.³³³ All the selected Church centres fit the criteria for pilgrimage as well as retreat centres. Their activities also conform to the laid down activities that are ran at these two types of centres.

³³¹ Jeanne Kormina, "Pilgrims, Priest and Religion in Contemporary Russia: Contested Religious Discourses." www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol28/pilgrims.pdf. (Accessed, 16/9/2011). See also Margry, *Shrines and pilgrimages*, 221.

³³² First Director of the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme, interview granted the researcher, May 7, 2014.

³³³ Hudson, "Introduction Spiritual Retreats," 156.

Hence, travelling outside one's normal geographical circles, and to a place as conducive as Abasua, prepares one to receive more from God if only with a ready and willing hearts.

In the writings of J.N. Ward, silence is a sine qua non in retreats:

When people are persuaded to leave the environment of life and go some distance into a completely new spiritual situation (especially if it is in beautiful surroundings where there is a tradition of community prayer) they find that they are able to receive in this isolation and concentration much more of God than they apparently receive in their familiar pattern of regular weekly meetings of worship or instruction in the life of the local Church. It is more likely that this more concentrated and prepared method of spiritual rehabilitation is going to replace some of the traditional weekly programmes of the average Church.³³⁴

This author is of the opinion that silence is an integral component of retreat because the true self can hear itself speak in silence, instead of the false.³³⁵R. Foster and K. Yanni contend that 'The only reason for a retreat is to be available to God. Everything else is wholly secondary. You are seeking to create an open, empty space in your life where God can work.'³³⁶ If the Church purposes that its membership should have such an encounter with God, then choosing Abasua for that purpose allow such a realization. But above all, such retreats will be fruitful when people who embark on such spiritual exercises get actively involved personally in the spiritual activities planned out for the group. Most times, time allowed for 'alone with God' is conversation time for many. But this is a crucial part of the Renewal activities as they run through the mandated programmes at the various centres.

³³⁴ Ward, *The Use of Praying*, 125, 127.

³³² Ward, *The Use of Praying*, 127.

³³⁶ Foster and Yanni, *Celebrating the Disciplines*, 267.

4.9.3 Vision for Growth

Regarding growth and vision, information from the churches attests to the fact that there has been tremendous improvement in the spiritual life of Church members as a result of Renewal programmes carried out, the individual Churches' programmes included. Churches are therefore encouraged to patronize the programmes held both at 'home' and at these prayer centres. The Church plans to raise these sites to some appreciable levels to befit international status. Regarding the Thomas Birch Freeman Centre, the Presiding Bishop says the Church intends to develop the site to befit a real historical site since it was the first port for Methodism in the whole of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. He also said he has instructed that more mango trees should be planted at the site.³³⁷ Currently there is a site for accommodation initiated by a philanthropist but abandoned for lack of funds; the centre is appealing for similar support. Plans have long begun with a multi-purpose complex hall at Azani to raise it to an appreciable standard. Abasua is also undergoing a facelift.³³⁸

Since it has already made a mark at the international level, plans are advanced to give Abasua that fitting status. Twenty-five building projects are initiated in addition to the existing ones. An auditorium to seat about 2000 people is being constructed. Additional accommodation facilities are being worked on by some Dioceses. Other logistics are also being considered. It is of interest to note that a lot of these projects, previous and on-going have been undertaken by individuals, both Methodists and non- Methodists, private co-operate bodies (like Miracle Films) as well as Churches.³³⁹ There is a long -

³³⁷ The Presiding Bishop, interview granted the researcher, February 25, 2013.

³³⁸ See appendix F for some constructional works at Abasua as at 2015.

³³⁹ The Secretary (Abasua), interview granted the researcher, August, 172014.

term plan to make the road leading to the camp more accessible and also improve upon sanitation.

4.10 Challenge of Lay Leadership

In the view of the researcher, though, there seem to be no serious challenge with the present crop of Evangelists who are at the forefront of the MCG's renewal activities. The laity have a lot of misgivings about the low turnout of most Clergy during renewal activities whether at the prayer centres or in the various Churches. They think most of the Lay assume too much airs. The researcher thinks the Church hierarchy has done their best in giving adequate theological education. Perhaps after a certain number of years in the field those who can should be given top-up training again for them to be given the white collar and the title of Reverend Ministers.

4.11 Challenge of Unorthodox Practices

The issue on the use of relics, memorabilia from the prayer centres is a very challenging one. How the practice evolved is traced to biblical times as well as Church historical times and probably the people's cultural background³⁴⁰.

The biblical story of Naaman after he was healed is an example of this. (2 Kings 5:7). In medieval Church history, dust from tombs especially from the Holy Sepulchre (terra sanctum) was venerated from the earliest times and miracles were wrought by them.³⁴¹ Tanner in the Sub-Saharan Pilgrimage says it originated with pastoralists or migrant tribesmen of the pre-industrialized period. The Nuer of Sudan at Mbesa shrine keep a 'packet of earth' which they brought with them from their travels. In the earlier history

³⁴⁰ Tanner, "Pilgrimage in Sub-Saharan Africa," 127.

³⁴¹ Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 25.

of APC, after a section of the thick forest cover at the fringes of the site (before the place evolved as a prayer centre), was grazed down,

Very Rev. Boamah submits that the Founder Rev. Assibey instructed his followers (members of the Kristomu Anigyie Kuo) to take whatever they found and use it for whatever purposes they choose. He prayed over these items which were mainly leaves, twigs, stones, sand etc., for them. In subsequent times, members themselves brought, anointing oil and water for him to pray over. He never instructed the members to do so.³⁴² Why would not these be instructive for the current practices? Sometimes the Caretakers and the evangelists maintain they receive divine direction in the use of these relics. This definitely determines the politics about the sites. Whose views should prevail in this?

The resource person for Abasua pilgrimage 2013 did not mince words when he declared that ‘memorabilia do not contain any spiritual powers’.³⁴³ This suggests that whether there are biblical or historical paradigms, they do not necessarily authenticate the practice. His emphasis was on our traditional past, that they rather take us back to those traditional ritual observances sanctioned by the lesser deities. Interviewees engaged in after the session at the Abasua Centre would still want to take some relics like anointing oil, holy water (Vortic), twigs and leaves with them.

Perhaps this affirms the position of the Presiding Bishop that Africans believe in tangibles and concrete expression of their faith. Broadening this view he opined that our intense spirituality as Africans is partly based on this element of tangibles and that is part of our psychological disposition. The Bishop was however swift to caution against idolatry; that is, not turning these relics into Idols. One wonders whether, the former Presiding

³⁴² V. Rev. Isaac Boamah, interview granted the researcher, August 6, 2014.

³⁴³ Rev. Dr. Abedu Quarshie, Lecturer, Trinity Theological Seminary and Resource Person for both, Northern and Southern Sector, Pilgrimages 2013.

Bishop's view on the above could be taken by the Church as a legitimate sanction of the practice. That being the case, extending the sacrality of the sites to places of worship in order to empower some lukewarm pastors should perhaps be seen as legitimate too?³⁴⁴

4.11 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter looked at the diverse perspectives of the members of the MCG on the issue of SSV as well as renewal. The analysis has thus far provided informative insight on the different views of members of the church on SSV and renewal. First, the issue of the three prayer centres considered in this study as paradigmatic cannot be disputed. The issue of encountering God raises concern for some individuals as to whether the same encounters could not be experienced at any other place other than sacred sites. For this reason, the sacredness of a place would depend on the individual. Be that as it may, the practice of SSV has come to stay. As to how this practice impacts the renewal programme of the Church, there have been some expressed inadequacies.

Even though the renewal brings with it an edification of one's spirit, just visiting sacred sites alone does not guarantee authentic renewal. Church members are known to visit sacred sites with expectation that there will be some interventions for existential needs. The psychological and emotional balance that come with answered prayers become the source of renewal to most people. Moving on the emergent themes for the foregoing discussions have been as follows: explaining SSV and related concepts, historical and current state of SSV, views and perceptions of the renewal programme of the Methodist Church. These are discussed in the chapter five, where we also offer our assessment.

³⁴⁴ At the close of 2013 retreat at Abasua, prayer Warriors was given sand from the place to be sprinkled in pulpits so as to empower the 'non-charismatic' preachers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings emanating from the analysis of the views of the participants of the study. From the previous chapter, the understanding of sacred site and visitation to such places was obtained. The motive or the reason behind sacred site visitation was also noted. The meaning of renewal to members of the Methodist Church Ghana was explored, and most importantly, the interconnectedness between sacred site visitation and the renewal programme of the Methodist Church Ghana was explored. The findings have been discussed in relation to literary works on the concept and practice of SSV. The discussion then sought to clarify the interconnectedness between SSV and the renewal programme of the church in order to grasp the contribution of the SSV to the renewal of the church.

5.2 Sacred Site Visitation and Related Conception

Findings from the study have revealed respondents understanding about sacred site visitation. First, sacred site as a place was well understood by the respondents. In a more abstract sense, sacred site was explained as a place that God inhabits or as a place that is associated with God. In connection with that, sacred site was noted to be a place where knowledge and inspiration from God diffuses to mankind. Sacred site was also found to obtain its being from the belief that God inhabits this sacred place.

Besides that, myths also informed the beliefs of the people about the sacredness of the places they in fact regarded as sacred places. Some respondents really attested to the numerous divine encounters and miracles at the places they regarded as sacred site which were also the sacred sites considered in this study. Perceiving the imagery of God's

miraculous power at work at these places attracted the admiration and reverence of the respondents as a sacred place. This finding does not deviate any widely from the observation that diverse forms of sacred spaces and special iconic images have been the beginnings and the development of major Christian centres as attested by Lidov³⁴⁵ and Bitton-Ashkelony³⁴⁶. To these scholars, sacred sites are places where memorial Churches had sprung the due to the, miracles that occurred there.

Yet, another understanding of sacred site is observed from the primal world-view of sacred site. From the primal world-view, sacred sites are regarded as pilgrimage centres. These pilgrimage centres are places for renewal and vitality,³⁴⁷ places to receive revitalization or get refreshed,³⁴⁸ places to acquire ancient wisdom and supernatural directions for various aspects of life. According to Deloria Vine Jr.³⁴⁹ they are places for the search of self-hood.³⁵⁰ In the analysis, several views of the laity disclosed that mountainous places are traditionally typical of the abodes of divine beings. The Atwea Mountains is an example. This mountainous landscape attracts the reverence of the people who consequently regard the place no less a sacred site. Tsuji Shegebuni describes such places as privileged places to meet with the divine or the Supreme Being. He adds that ‘our ancestors believed, and many still believe today, that a spirit hides itself in a gigantic rock

³⁴⁵ Lidov, *Hierotopy. Spatial Icons*. See also A Lidov “Image Paradigms as a Notion of Mediterranean Visual Culture: a Hiertopic Approach to Art History. Crossing Cultures.” Papers presented at the International Congress of Art History. CIHA 2008 (Melbourne: CIHA 2009), 177-183.

³⁴⁶ Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the sacred*.

³⁴⁷ Rountree, “Performing the Divine,” 7.

³⁴⁸ Mary T. Cordren, “Sacred Spaces and what makes them Sacred,” <http://instituteforfeminismandreligion.org/SacredSpaces.pdf> accessed 2/6/12

³⁴⁹ Vine Deloria, “Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom,” <http://www.sacredland.org/PDFs>.

³⁵⁰ John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow (eds), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–29.

or a century's old camphor tree'. Mountains are nothing but the dwellings of the deities',³⁵¹.

Among the Cameroonians it is not only the mountains but also the valleys. Pascal Fassouo declares, 'the summits and the plains are for the Ndouongue-Manengouba of Douala in Cameroun divine arenas'.³⁵²

5.3 Historical and Current State of SSV

The state of SSV is looked at, first, in the contemporary terms, and second, in historical terms according to Judeo-Christian tradition, Church-historical tradition and Wesleyan tradition.

5.3.1 Contemporary State of SSV

In contemporary literature, the concept of sacred site cannot be divorced from pilgrimage. Alphonse Dupront asserts that there is no pilgrimage without a sacred place.³⁵³ Again, literature on the subject regard pilgrimage either as secular or religious; thus pilgrimage should be seen as an all-embracing term. In this sense, there cannot be any dichotomy between tourism and pilgrimage.³⁵⁴

In *Pilgrimage, Politics and Place-Making in Eastern Europe*, some chapters consider pilgrimage as a journey to a shrine. The studies by Gregorič Bon, Tsimouris, Giakoumis and Tšerkassova portray pilgrimage as being both religious and secular processes for migrant workers.³⁵⁵ These views are similar to those gleaned from some respondents

³⁵¹ Shigebumi Tsuji, "The transformation of narrative landscape, 'spatial Icon and its Performativity in Moscow", *Bulletin of British Byzantine Studies* 32, 2006; Research Centre for Eastern Christian Culture, Moscow. See, Cordren, "Sacred Spaces;" Deloria, "Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom."

³⁵² Pascal Fassouo, "Primal Religion and the Cosmos," *Journal of African Theology* 2 (2008): 49-52.

³⁵³ Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, 23.

³⁵⁴ L. Tomasi, "Homo Viator," 21; Magry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, 29.

³⁵⁵ John Eade and Mario Katić (eds.), *Pilgrimage Politics and Place-Making in Eastern Europe. Crossing the Borders* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2014). E-book Edition.

on their purposes for visiting the Church's main sites. These Church members accompanied the troupe so as to see, or bask in the effulgence of the sacred³⁵⁶ and there will continue to be such sight-seers in subsequent trips.

Dubisch and Winkelman assert that 'pilgrimage sites shape the pilgrimage and nature and history shape its power'. The view is also shared by Jeanne Kormina, and, K, Asamoah-Gyadu.³⁵⁷ But apart from the people's views, the history and the geographical location contribute to the potency of a site. There are other views that suggest that sacred sites are sited on very significant geographical planes or ley lines as in the case of Glastonbury in the Southwest of England. A place which is noted to be the spiritual hub of England. The same view is expressed about the Churches in Positano in Italy, regarding their geographical location or siting on very special latitudes.³⁵⁸ The significance here is that at all these strategic locations, access to the divine presence become easy. One only has to be conscious of their location.

Visiting a sacred site is seen as an innate quality in humans. There is the desire to crystallize the memory of a divine revelation and subsequently engage in a constant communion with the supernatural. Consequently, diverse forms of sacred spaces and special iconic images have been the beginnings and the development of major Christian centres.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁶ Corrine Lathrop, Simon Coleman and John Elsner, *World Religions* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press 1995), 148.

³⁵⁷ Dubisch and Winkelman, *Pilgrimage and Healing*, 59; Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, 24. See also, Jeanne Kormina, "Pilgrims, Priest and Religion in Contemporary Russia: Contested Religious Discourses." www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol28/pilgrims.pdf. (Accessed, 16/9/2011) and Asamoah-Gyadu 'On the 'Mountain' of the Lord,' 65-86.

³⁵⁸ Magry, *Shrines and Pilgrimages*, 248. See also James, "Significance in Sacred Sites," 27.

³⁵⁹ Lidov, *Hierotpy. Spatial Icons*. See also Lidov, "Image Paradigms," 177-183.

5.3.2 The Judeo-Christian Tradition

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, which reflects views from the Bible, the phenomenon is not new. People travelled far to meet with God at specific places. The cosmic mountain motif in the primal worldview is also prevalent as well. Josephus says that Sinai is ‘the highest of all the mountains thereabout,’ and again is the highest of all the mountains that are in that country, and is not only very difficult to be ascended by men, on account of its vast altitude but because of the sharpness of its precipices. Indeed, it cannot be looked at without pain of the eyes, and besides this it was terrible and inaccessible, on account of the rumour that passed about, that God dwelt there.³⁶⁰ This symbolism is particularly shared even in Christianity that one must wrestle in prayer to receive from God.

Two other instances of sacred sites visitation from the Bible show that Abraham was asked to offer a sacrifice at Mt. Moriah (Gen 22:2). Moses also went to Mt. Sinai. Josephus mentions the place as a sacred site. Jesus’ attitude towards sacred sites is gleaned from his discussion with the Samaritan woman in John 4:23 ff. The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery suggests that Jesus saw sacred spaces being ‘spiritualized and universalized, supplanting the Old Testament emphases on particular holy places like the Jerusalem temple’. This is to say that, the concept should be perceived as spiritual, perhaps in the heart of everybody who worships God in truth and in spirit. To that end, wherever a Christian may be, he or she can worship without necessarily looking for a special mountain or sacred site. This is quite instructive and could serve as the paradigm for the Christian understanding, apart from inferences that can be made in Jesus’ own life time as seeking out solitary places to commune with God.

³⁶⁰ Josephus Flavius, Ant, II, xii, 1; III, v, 1.

5.3.3 Church Historical Tradition

Two instances from Church History are cited because of the deep theological concerns they contribute towards the practice of visiting holy sites. It is also informative to learn that from an earlier attitude of devotion, Jerome's position changed and was rather instructive. He said one could not enclose 'the omnipotence of God within close confines. He further explained to one of his disciples, Paulinus, echoing Cicero on the fact that one does not automatically become holy when living in the holy city, but 'rather living there well, which is worthy of praise'. Jerome had in mind those saints who did not ever step in the Holy Land and also did not attempt to tie God down to an obscure corner of the Earth and yet were regarded as quite pious.³⁶¹

Regarding relics of saints, Jerome said: we do not worship their (saint) relics any more than we do the sun or the moon, the angels, or seraphim. 'We honour them in honour of Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) whose faith they witnessed'. 'We honour the master by means of the servants'.³⁶² Jerome was averse to the pilgrims who openly demonstrated their piety but did not live according to the biblical standards. He pointed out that their souls would not benefit by the mere fact of their being in Jerusalem. Jerome lived in Jerusalem for years yet he eventually came to reject the sanctity of Jerusalem, referring to it as the 'sin city'.³⁶³ Why would Jerome issue these cautions? One obvious answer is abuse and of course distortions of biblical precepts.

The second Church father is Augustine of Hippo. He is cited in connection with ancient relics. Bitton-Ashkelony asserts that Augustine of Hippo clearly accepted as real the miracles associated with a martyr's tomb. This was someone who had been reticence

³⁶¹ Cotter, *The Interplay between Religion, Politics and Piety*, 18.

³⁶² Sumption, *Pilgrimage*, 53.

³⁶³ Walker, *Holy City, Holy Places?* 19.

in his sermons and homilies about visiting holy sites. But with reference to relics Augustine is quoted as saying that ‘the (power of the) dust is hidden,’...’the merciful gifts bestowed through it are manifest.’ This expresses his belief in the power of God demonstrated through relics. In line with this, a long list of miracles in the last section of *The City of God* (22.8) is referred to. Of particular mention were miracles that occurred through the relics of the proto martyr of the Christian Church, Stephen. His relics were transferred by Orosius from Jerusalem and reinterred in Hippo, Augustine’s See. Augustine, himself was involved in building a memorial Church in honour of Stephen.³⁶⁴

5.3.4 The Wesleyan Methodist tradition

In the Wesleyan history, we have a great number of memorial sites that the early Methodist visited. According to David Butler John Wesley did not endorse pilgrimage, but today Methodists everywhere commemorate historic sites. Butler said, ‘for Wesley and other leading Methodists, Catholic pilgrimage culture, with its enshrining of images and petitioning of intercessors, were misguided.’³⁶⁵ Thomas Tweed is among those scholars who contend that though Wesleyans did not sanctify sites nor invoke saints for healing among others they maintain historic sites.³⁶⁶ Commemorative shrines such as Gwennapit, Epworth, Cockspur Island and a great number of places associated with the founding fathers are preserved and visited. This projects the current practice in the Ghanaian context as being in line with tradition.

³⁶⁴ Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 125

³⁶⁵ David Butler, *Methodists and Papists: John Wesley and the Catholic* (London: Darton, Longman - Todd, 1995), xiii.

³⁶⁶ Tweed, “John Wesley Slept Here,” 3.

5.4 The Renewal Programme of the of the Methodist Church

Here, the concept of renewal from the perspective of the members of the Methodist Church Ghana is discussed. Later, SSV is discussed in view of the renewal programme of the Church.

5.4.1 The Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme

As exemplified in the views below, respondents believe that visiting sacred sites and going through hardships bring renewal:

Coming to places like this is the best way to revive ourselves, because everything about the place; fasting and prayer, harsh weather conditions, inadequate living accommodation, etc. contributes to our spiritual growth. You decide to leave your comfort zone and wrestle with God. For instance, when you climb Abasua Mountain and come and sleep on the bare floor in the cold and you decide that you will not seek God's face and be serious, then I will say its sheer craziness.

Coming together as a Church and doing things together challenge those who are weak to renew their prayer life.³⁶⁷

The renewed zeal to do things one could not do before is explained to mean renewal. The Bible attests to this. This in effect suggests that the visitation makes people develop spiritually. It promotes dynamism in prayer life such that those who do not know how to pray at all are able to learn to do so (as in iron sharpens iron, Prov 27:17). It has also instilled in Church members the need to appreciate withdrawal as a necessary part of spiritual development. That is, to see the need to leave one's comfort zone sometimes.

³⁶⁷ A female respondent (27 years), GHAMSU executive, in a Focus Group discussion, with the Researcher, May 31, 2013.

In the researcher's attempt to inquire from the respondents the rationale behind the Church's high regard for renewal at 'sacred sites' and individual zealotry towards same especially at Abasua, the consensus view was that these are very special places set apart by God himself for prayers. Renewal plays a fundamental role in keeping Christians on fire for Christian service, hence respondents interpreted people's zeal for prayer and the very robust nature of prayer activities carried out at the sites as real renewal. Beyond this a number of reports show that Churches in the Connexion are now transformed and revived. Notwithstanding, these changes have no lasting effect. The fervour wanes with time; just within six months. A minority view rather is that their Churches do not feel any impact after such visitations. But the Church leadership believes there is growth in the Church.

The study noted one common strand running throughout all the programmes at the study sites as observed earlier. Whether during the weekly, monthly, quarterly, programmes organized under the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme none seem to be operating within the MPRP's prescribed mandate. No single site is able to run a full course of the five tracks of Praise and Worship, Evangelism and Preaching, Teaching and Discipleship, Healing and Counselling, Welfare and Social Action. With the previous submission that the pilgrimage activities are performing below the belt as far as the Methodist Prayer and Renewal activities are concerned, the researcher sought the views of the current Director on it.

The current Director is rather of the view that Rev. Assibey's vision regarding the Abasua site is exactly what is being pursued. In his view, during Abasua pilgrimage, for instance, the Church leads her people from the length and breadth of the country with well-structured activities to be carried out by seasoned Ministers. This serves as a pastoral

tool to disseminate the Church's ethos and other Christian dogmas and it also brings about institutional renewal.

Taking the argument further, in the Methodist Church, prayer is synonymous to renewal. As such many Church members do not seem to be aware of the other tracks of the MPRP especially members at the grassroots. The view has been counteracted by the current Director that even though people call the Visitation programme a Renewal programme, it has nothing to do with MPRP. It is a programme initiated by the EMR first and foremost to carry out the purposes outlined by the founder, as intimated above. Among other things to revive individuals and ultimately the entire Church. Individuals could patronize the sites especially Abasua for their personal spiritual development and longer retreats since the environment is conducive for solitary moments with God, but to imprint upon Church members the Methodist pattern of operation especially in experiential religion, the Director added it has become necessary to organize these mass visitations.

The programme is also of peculiar interest to the youth who like adventure and as such turn out in their numbers. Besides, the trekking to the mountain-top is enough physical exercise to bring healing to those individuals who engage in it. In the Director's view the particular emphasis on healing and deliverance is in the right direction because it gives Church members all the benefit they deserve. This ultimately sustains the Church.

The views are laudable, except that it is a known fact that Rev. Assibey and his team were able to plant four Churches during their regular activities at the Abasua site.

These are Anwangya, Atwea, Asuafo and Abasua societies,³⁶⁸ and they serve as very important milestones in the history of the Church in that area. The Church today can do same.

Methodists, consecrate two main sites, commemorative fields which mark a connection with some important persons or events in history. Like the TBFC. (Tweed: 2000). Then there are the energy fields which in the primal religious context are seen as magico-religious places. The APC could be seen as commemorative in the sense that a Methodist founded the place. It could also be an energy field basing our evidence on visitors and clients testimonies about the potency of the place. In both places people undergo various forms of religious experiences.

There is no one standardized form or system of SSV in the Methodist Church Ghana. Apart from the annual connexional visits to Abasua, the Church does not place any restriction on anyone who wishes to patronize other sites. Many prefer the group visits because of transport subsidies offered by the Church. The mass visits, however, are for identity formation as Methodists and as a medium of instruction. This will be revisited.

5.4.2 Views and Perceptions of the Senior Clergy

Regarding the views of the senior Clergy from the field, it was observed that the real motive of the Church for organizing annual trips to Abasua for instance is lost, and that instead of prayer conference to support the Church's Evangelism it is now an occasion to meet personal needs. This view however is contested. Further to the above, others were not in favour of the trend whereby annual visitations are concentrated at one particular site. In response to this latter view some senior Clergy as well as some laity attributed

³⁶⁸ Very Rev. Isaac Boamah, interview granted the researcher, August 8, 2014.

this particular predilection to history. The case is that the place was revealed by God for the Methodists that is why they visit Abasua annually. To most of the senior Clergy however, visiting the Church's prayer centres for renewal activities generally promote the drive for ecumenism, it provides the necessary ambience for meditation and reflection, acquiring spiritual inspiration. It also helps strengthen a people's faith through intensive prayers. At the same time, it serves as a platform or as a kind of Church instrument to educate on unorthodox practices and most importantly, it has helped stem the drift of the youth to other Churches which have such activities in place.

5.4.3 Views and Perceptions of the Laity

The laity had multi-varied views about SSV. Some of these were that sacred sites are repositories of great miracles which people visit to tap into for prompt answers to their needs, for healing, for spiritual transformation, for spiritual gifts, to strengthen relations with God, even physical fitness as in the case of the Abasua mountaineering experience. The benefits of the visitation for the Church were also enumerated as promoting dynamism in people's prayer lives, bonding in relation to a people's common fraternity; *communitas* in the Turners' theory. Some respondents just like the Clergy, saw the practice as an avenue for exposure into certain Church ethos. A crucial observation that was made concerns the laity's perception and views on certain practices which were seen as contradictory to the Church hierarchy's. For example, the issue of unorthodox practices carried out at the Church's sites is a prominent case in point.

As exemplified in the following responses, the respondents would take with them sand, leaves, herbs, oil as in: 'I take the sand, because this place is a holy ground'. (A fifty-five-year-old male, a caretaker from Tarkwa Diocese). 'I normally take the anointing oil because the evangelists pray on it' (A 35-year-old artisan from Sekondi). These entrenched positions are instances of what has given rise to the discussions on politics of

religion.³⁶⁹ There have always been arguments as to whose opinions hold in situations of such nature. Maybe to assess the importance of SSV to the Church laity we need to interpret their views within their own existing subculture. Religious activities within subcultures are more often in opposition to the dominant institution's. Such activities though carried on within the framework of institutionalized religion contradict certain fundamental views.³⁷⁰ Asamoah-Gyadu buttresses this view with his assertion that 'Official pronouncements, attitudes, opinions, and declarations are important, but what gives religion its public character are the responses, interpretations, appropriations, and apprehensions of religious phenomena by grassroots practitioners.'³⁷¹ These views in other words, imply that the language of the subculture within any institutionalized religion has much weight.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study bearing in mind theoretical and literary underpinnings of sacred sites and visitation practices. The understanding of sacred site and visitation practices was consistent with the literature. The remarkable aspect of the understanding of sacred site is the God-factor. Sacred site is essentially a place where God is present and permits an encounter with him. Sacred site visitation is therefore the vehicle by which people encounter God. Members of the Methodist Church Ghana have bought into the practice of visiting sacred sites with the motive of having a physical or spiritual or supernatural encounter with God during which time God's intervention in various aspects of life is expected. In this sense, visitation to sacred sites was perceived to cause the renewal of the members who participate. However, this was against another

³⁶⁹ Eade and Katic (eds.), *Pilgrimage, Politics and Place-Making*, 234-237.

³⁷⁰ Peon Arceo, "New Modes of expressing pilgrimage," 95.

³⁷¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, "On the mountain of the Lord," 79-80.

school of thought that is of the view that sacredness of a place is subjective and depends very much on the individual. Journeying to certain specific places could not completely account for the renewal of the soul of a person.

In the context of the discussions, the Methodist Church hierarchy's perspective of renewal is spiritual revival, both institutional and individual. The lay perspective of renewal is getting their existential needs met. In the process of acquiring those needs, they get themselves sharpened prayerfully, become developed in their faith. However, as far as the church's revival is concerned, visiting the sacred site to partake in the activities there could not guarantee renewal. Though, it presents some spiritual value to the lay, it does not meet the renewal programme of the church and this calls for rethinking if the practice needs to be situated in the churches renewal programme.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings from this study, draws conclusions from the study, and makes recommendations based on the findings. The chapter is thus organized into three sections. The findings are summarized in relation to the objectives of the study and the conclusions reflect the lessons and implications of the study. The recommendations show what can be done or the way to approach SSV, particularly, as far as the Methodist Church Ghana is concerned.

6.2 Summary of Findings

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, visitation practices that are undertaken at three sacred sites known to belong to the Methodist Church Ghana were the main focus of the study. The main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between SSV and the renewal programme of the Methodist Church Ghana. This in effect meant assessing the contribution of the practice by the Methodist Church's standards of renewal. The study attempted to explain SSV and related concepts from the Church's perspective. It discussed the history and current state of SSV in the Methodist Church Ghana, discussed the renewal programme of the EMR of the Church and the views and perceptions of the Church, both the senior clergy and Lay, on SSV with regard to the contribution the practice has made or is making towards the renewal programme of the Church.

The study used a purely qualitative approach: focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Respondents in the study included the Clergy, laity, and co-ordinators of evangelism, all of whom are members of the Methodist Church Ghana. The members of

the Church were covered from the sacred sites and at their Church branches or colleges of training, etc. The respondents also included caretakers at the three sites and some indigenes and royals of the towns where the sacred sites are located. The key findings were as follows:

6.2.1 The meaning of SSV and Related Concepts

The findings of this study reveal that the entire connexional MCG is aware of the upsurge of SSV which was expressed in the ability of the laity to explain the practice. Sacred site was regarded as a sacred and holy place where one can encounter God. Visitation and pilgrimage journey as well as retreat were found to be conceptually synonymous with the act of moving away from a place of normal activity to a different environment where there is serenity, and perfect environment for filial bonding, renewed zeal to pray, and new identity construction as true Methodists among other experiences, all of which occur in a state of *communitas*. The practice of sacred site visitation involved a collective journey or movement to the sacred site. The pilgrims or visitors basically share a common motive which is to have an encounter with God. Whereas in specific terms, individual motives may vary, renewal or revitalization, whether through healing, deliverance, or even requests for worldly object and the likes, stands out undisputed. The SSV was viewed as a means to access the creative principles in life and the earth's ability to give life and vitality to mankind.

The Methodist Church sites exhibited some characteristics that allowed them to be called sacred sites. However, in the Methodist Church Ghana, there is no standardized form of system of sacred site visitation. Apart from the structured mass visits, individuals, church organizations, etc. could visit any of the sites for personal reasons. Normally, the sacred site visitation is a period during which collective identity is constructed and inter-personal bonds are created. This leads to the negotiation of social status for a search for

self-hood. In spite of all these co-operative activity, it is meant to be individualistic. There are yet some who admire the beauty and experience of visiting a new environment or seeing natures awe. To that end, such pilgrims are would be regarded half tourists.

6.2.2 Primal Worldview of SSV

The sites in the primal mentality are magico-religious fields, portals that open up into the transcendence. They are energy fields. People go to these places to understand their place in the larger cosmos, to carve an identity for themselves, for purpose, for knowledge acquisition, for fruitfulness and revitalization, and also to maintain balance and harmony in life.

6.2.3 Biblical Perspective

The Jewish patriarchs encountered God at the sacred sites. It was an ordinance, an opportunity for renewal of vows between Yahweh and the Jews. It transcended to the early Church. But the teaching of Jesus in John 4:23, 24 suggests that sacred sites are in the process of being spiritualized and universalized. This state supplants the Old Testament emphases on particular holy sites. It is a spiritual concept; perhaps the holy site is present in the heart of every true believer. And wherever a Christian may be, he or she can worship without necessarily looking for a sacred site.

6.2.4 Historical and Contemporary Understanding of SSV

The early Church fathers were not united in their views about sacred site visitation. Their views vacillated between reservation and support. With these two representative figures, Origen and Augustine we can form an opinion. Augustine did not ever go on pilgrimage. He never taught nor preached about the visits to the holy city. He believed Christians lived according to the spirit not flesh. He emphasized Christian identity, the new man, who is heaven-bound. In later years as he observed miracles performed at the local shrines, he records in his Classic work, *The City of God* that such miracles should

be catalogued and published to bolster the Christian faith in general: the new convert to construct a Christian identity, the unbeliever to come to faith in Christ. Origen held a view not quite different from that of Augustine.

The currents of the times revealed attitudes dictated by an intellectual debate on the propriety and impropriety of the popular religious phenomenon of visiting holy sites; tombs of saints among others. The phenomenon was considered a practice for the simple and ordinary folks. Origen did not dispute the existence of the so called popular religious phenomenon. He reckoned with the intellectual deficits of the faith of the simple. Even with this recognition he did not see Christianity as divided into two distinct classes. Being a teacher he however desired to teach the simple in order to raise them to a higher level of understanding of the Christian doctrine. The ordinary people were believed to be in the state of ascending to God'.³⁷²

6.2.5 Meaning of the Renewal Programme of the MCG

Renewal considered within the context of a religious institution plays a fundamental role in keeping Christians on fire; a sense of continuity with what has gone on before in the history of a church. It usually occurs as a reversal of trends in an established status *quo*; revisiting the past or returning to the sources to establish original inspiration from Christian institutional structures. Sometimes in the Christian context it does not only bring change but also helps to maintain the level of spirituality. These renewal activities in the MCG include all the Church's liturgical activities, evangelistic and missionary works run under the auspices of the EMRAT.³⁷³ Some of these activities are run through the MPRP but also transcend most of the MPRP's intermittent programmes to the actual

³⁷² Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred*, 22

³⁷³ The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Constitution*, 304-305.

sustainable development of Church members. Renewal in the MCG is therefore not just the five tracks of the MPRP but the impact of the five tracks on the church as a corporate body and the individual members.

Talking about the meaning and essence of the renewal programme, it simply implies EMRAT using all the resources at its disposal to promote spiritual development of church members for them to be effective witnesses.

The visitation to the Church's prayer centres can be said to be some innovative activities at reviving individuals and ultimately the entire Church. In the case of the Abasua prayer centre for instance, some allege it was meant to carry out the concerns of the founder, the late Rev. Abraham Osei-Assibey for the MCG to seek God's face on the mountain.

6.2.6 Contribution of SSV to the Renewal Programme of the MCG

Sacred site visitation has become a platform for the realisation of some of the church's commitment to build a vibrant Christian community. It has contributed to emotional and psychological balance of church members, an expression of our distinctive nature as African Christians. It has helped to promote dynamism in the prayer life of many, just as iron sharpens iron. With its unrestricted nature, the environment enhances a search for the mutual contact or communication with God. It has helped the church to construct a corporate identity, an effective tool for church growth.

It is essentially a tool to raise the spiritual level of its membership. It enhances the corporate identity of the church. In the process, existential needs are met. Church members are emotionally balanced. There is dynamism in prayer. Local Churches are revived, leading to spiritual growth. Similarly, the withdrawal from a place of normal activity to a different environment where there is filial bonding, renewed zeal to pray, and new identity as a true Methodist among other experiences provides a state of *communitas*.

However, the real motive of the Methodist Church for organizing annual trips to Abasua seems lost. Instead of meeting Evangelism needs through prayer, it is now an arena to, for instance, meet personal needs. The church's predilection for Abasua, for example, is rather in favour of the founder's vision for Methodists to use it as a retreat site. This also contributes to the finding wherein the laity's position on certain views contradicts the church hierarchy's position. For example, on the issue of unorthodox practices at the sites, the church hierarchy resents it while the laity are carried into believing the reliefs they could obtain from those practices.

6.3 Conclusion

Sacred site visitation is an innovative phenomenon in the MCG. It operates within the sacramental means of Grace as prescribed by the founding fathers of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and this is quite essential. This notwithstanding, it is observed that MCG recognizes two main forms of sites, namely, a hierophanic (apparitional) site and a hierotopical (commemorative) site. As matters stand, the Church cannot boast of a standardized form or practices pertaining at the various church-owned prayer centres. The practices at the various sites are highly influenced by the contemporary Ghanaian Charismatic renewal system and with a tinge of African cultural models. Furthermore, the members at the grassroots give this religious experience its dynamism, and since their aspirations and desires could override the church hierarchy's position, the Church leadership needs to adopt certain strategic measures other than what is being used now to shape and influence activities at the site for the benefit of all. The phenomenon might have lost its intended purpose, according to one executive view, but since at the same time the phenomenon is contributing to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of Church members it has to be harnessed to enhance the Church's vision for growth.

Understanding growth in terms of dynamism, the consensus view from most of the societies the researcher visited attest to the fact that there is growth. But there are others who do not see any change at all when members visit. To such individuals the practice has become monotonous. And such monotony needs to be checked. As such the Church's vision for evangelism can work effectively at such places. The EMRAT should then diversify its programmes to meet this need. It is very crucial for the membership of the Methodist Church Ghana to know why the Church embarks on this programme of activities and what it hopes to achieve. This should be clear in the minds of every member of the Church including the senior Clergy.

Summarizing the foregoing, we attempted to premise the discussion on SSV in the Wesleyan tradition elsewhere, to prove that the Church in Ghana is not alone in this. We also presented the layout of the study sites and the general activities run there. Further to this, the sampled responses of the interview which were carried out to gather opinions for the research objectives and questions were presented in their raw state according to the emergent themes. This has been followed up yet further with a discussion on the most salient of these views.

Finally, we can say that our objectives are met and the research questions are also answered. Deep insights have been gained as the researcher engaged with the Church hierarchy. As a historical study we have reviewed past experiences to show how the current practice of SSV evolved in the Methodist Church Ghana and all the ramifications that tended to cloud the intended purposes.

6.4 Recommendations

Though some of the forthcoming recommendations may not seem really new, it is the hope of the researcher that these views would facilitate the speed of change.

The first recommendation speaks to the issue of the overemphasis or slant towards some aspects of the five tracks of the MPRP (Prayer and Worship, Healing & Deliverance (with counselling), to the neglect or little emphasis on discipleship, welfare and social action. It may be argued that the purpose for the visit is prayer, yet the strong emphasis on healing and deliverance, amidst prayer and worship every night, and a daily dose of Teaching & Preaching throughout the four-day visit will make anyone who is conscious of the demands of the MPRP observe that there is imbalance. It is imperative that balance is observed.

The practice is not only about the transcendent alone but also certain activities through which people may find some sense of comfort, support, safety and healing. In contrast to what many are suggesting that the visit to Abasua becomes a regular feature, the researcher believes the essence will be lost if it is used as a place of regular devotion. Going there as a connexion twice in a year is ideal, and probably Church groups could also plan their annual retreats at these place, especially Abasua. Nevertheless, like any form of revival there's the need to rekindle it and expect to see fruits. Therefore, when people come from such prayer conferences, they should be helped to maintain their vigour. This calls for the need to make the diocesan centres run their normal programmes effectively to maintain the level of spirituality at the local levels. In just the way as it is being done at the societal levels, revival programmes should continue. Interest should be whipped up in the camp meetings which are still acknowledged as part of the religious expression of the Ghanaian Methodism but seems to be dying out in some Circuits. The Church's vision to upgrade some of the prayer centres to international standards is laudable. The infrastructural development at Abasua too should continue but not in a way as to let the site lose its main essence.

Current developments like dividing up the whole connection into the northern and southern sections to visit the Abasua site in turns for ease on logistics are also laudable. The planting of new mango trees at Adansi Kusa, the creation of new sites within each Diocese, which at the time of this study has yielded eleven are all intended to maintain and sustain interest in the Church's practice of visiting sites. In connection with the creation of new sites, among other reasons, will support the aged and the sick who cannot travel that long distance to Abasua. It will also boost renewal activities within the Dioceses to make them all year round programmes, these centres should be contrasted from pilgrimage centres which do not lend themselves to daily visits like Church attendance. Various stakeholders can be brought on board to develop the sacred sites or centres to very appreciable world class standards comparable to the grottoes, yet with a tinge of Wesleyanism.

Furthermore, to appreciate the fact that the practice of SSV is first and foremost a tool for renewal, with the ultimate aim of promoting qualitative growth, the researcher believes this renewal agenda ought to reflect the ultimate aim of the Church. The aims of the Church encapsulated in the vision statement of the Church can be summed up as building a vibrant and spirit-filled Church to be at the forefront of evangelization and societal transformation.

In that regard, the Evangelism Mission and Renewal Division under the auspices of the General Directorate for Ministry should develop a holistic approach to SSV. It should consider it a moral duty, among other things, to focus on evangelizing people especially within the localities the sacred sites are situated in. They could print tracts to be used by the youth. The youth, according to Ineke Albers³⁷⁴, 'are particularly interested

³⁷⁴ Margry, *Shrines and Pilgrimage*, 27.

in the group experience and the physical benefits of the pilgrimage journey'. Margry adds such 'journeys are successful because, as a rule, young people are much less interested in cult objects and the associated healing aspects than in the great questions of life and the meaning of religion'. In the current research the youth were in the majority. A few joined for the first time to visit Abasua because of what has been told them. This means that, they were there first and foremost to satisfy their curiosity, and this reasonably affirms Albers and Margry's claims about them. All these efforts could be backed with welfare and social action.

Though counselling sessions are a part of the routine visits and should not be seen as a new trend, it must not be set up only when the Church visits the sites. For Abasua in particular, the Church could set up a permanent counselling centre to be jointly manned by a clinical psychologist and a prayer team who would offer themselves to pray all year round for clients with very peculiar cases. This can operate anytime there is a connexional prayer conference to take up the cases of those who constantly visit for forty days, and several days running within a year. Further at Abasua, the beauty and the sublimity of the place should be maintained. But overgrown edges of the forest could be trimmed and about three small chalets could be provided along the mountain trail for those who so wish to stop by and drink water and engage in some meditation before continuing their journey. All these should be done without making the journey lose its essence.

In view of the Church's need for individual transformation, Emmaus Walk which is another internationally acclaimed pilgrimage experience and already featured on the Church's almanac could be restructured for all class levels not only the elites and students to replace the large and noise - associated yearly journeys. Nevertheless, a visit to such prayer centres for a time alone with God when devoid of huge numbers and other distractions will be a real life changing experience, and must be encouraged once a while.

Education should be offered about the following; how to prepare oneself to approach the divine, how to maintain sanctity at the sites.

It is observed that as African Christians our primal background informs our religious expression to the extent that the majority of Church members visit sacred sites for answers to their existential needs. Asamoah Gyadu amply attests to this by declaring that ‘ordinary African Christians appropriate resources of supernatural succour to serve their own everyday practical concerns and aspirations’. He further adds that, Africans believe that getting connected with the divine at these places, the ultimate will be ‘healing’; physical, emotional, spiritual, and communal. In effect the worldview of the African makes such a practice as visiting sacred sites very meaningful.³⁷⁵

With the SSV becoming popular in contemporary Methodism, amidst all the challenges bedevilling the exercise, it is important also to reconsider the objections raised against pilgrimages at the Reformation and post reformation eras in order not to fall victim to the same errors.

Last but by no means the least, to academia the researcher wishes to recommend that there should evolve a discipline, Hierotopy or Hierotopical Studies under the Humanities. Hierotopy has been adopted in East Europe as an innovative approach, which transcends the methodological and terminological limitations imposed by traditional humanistic disciplines. As a course of study it would include all objects, rituals, and the social mechanisms at play within the spatial environment.

The Church’s response to all the apprehensions expressed about the practice could be meaningfully mitigated with the Wesleyan quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason

³⁷⁵Asamoah-Gyadu, “On the ‘Mountain’ of the Lord,” 65-86.

and experience. The phenomenon of SSV, judging from the views from all the sections of the population has come to stay. But of crucial concern to all are those who have joined the Methodist fold especially the lay leaders not from the scratch but midstream. Their mentality, outlook reflect the background they are coming from. It will be difficult to re-orient such leaders to get them conformed to the Methodist standards. More so, it has been observed that activities at the centres are skewed or do not reflect totally renewal ideals in the Methodist understanding or that Methodist ideals go further than what we are seeing. Above everything else, the activities run currently must be subjected to the Church's reflective thinking. That is the major player or stakeholder's reasoned understanding and the lived out questions and ramifications concerning experiential religion in a way that will not compromise the Wesleyan mode of doing theology.

Furthermore, the Church's policies that will be evolved on these issues need to be formulated and transmitted from the top to the grassroots since even Bishops hold varying opinions on the concept of SSV. It must be put on record that one may participate actively in SSV and still not have any encounter with God therefore the church must intensify teaching about spirituality. Biblical themes should be incorporated in these teachings and should dwell on life after the renewal of an individual and sustaining one's spiritual fervour.

The practice of SSV should also make room for the teaching of Jesus in the Chapter four of John's gospel with the understanding that the worship of God cannot be localized; rather that the centres should offer the necessary ambience for developing effective prayer lives. There should also be teachings on treating the chapels as sacred sites to enhance the sanctity of the local devotional sites as well. This should not be intended to discourage SSV but to demystify the sites for them to be maintained and used for their real purposes.

Objects used in worship at the sacred sites, like olive oil, the cross, etc, should not be treated as cultic objects. The memorabilia should not extend the sacrality of the sites to the pilgrim's homes but may also be kept as memorials.

Further to the recommendations above, infrastructural development going on at the site should continue. This should be directed towards promoting a welcoming atmosphere and increasing convenience at the site. The suggestion to plant new mango trees in Adansi Kusa for instance, is laudable. But such developments should be seen as memorial and not cultic objects.

It is observed through SSV that people may have religious experiences, by becoming spiritually gifted, building spiritual fortitude and being dynamic in prayer. But in some areas, this spirituality is not sustained. In most cases, they fall into desuetude. There must be structures in all the churches aimed at sustaining these levels of spirituality developed at the sites both at the diocesan and connexional levels, so that when people begin to wax cold, they would not have to wait for months or a year to renew or rebuild their spiritual momentum.

Not being oblivious of the fact that this study alone could not have exhausted all dimensions of study in SSV in Ghana, not even in the MCG, the researcher recommends that the meaning of SSV for the spiritual development of Christians, the issue of the relationship between SSV and Church renewal should be further researched into. Further studies should undertake a quantitative approach to study for instance, the motivations, impact on individuals and Churches. Researchers must find a way round the reticence on the part of some Church leadership and the elitist group on the subject of SSV. The study could consider sampling several sacred sites within the country and a larger population of Christians not limiting it to a single Church. This will help to unravel the differences in what SSV mean to various Christian groups. The results from the study should provide

facts that can be juxtaposed to a qualitative review of Christian literature to underscore the flaws or value of the Christian approach to SSV.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Clergy

Rt. Rev. A. Y. Adubah, Former Bishop of Tarkwa, His Office, structured, 11/02/2013,
11:00-11:30am

Rt. Rev. Emmanuel K. Asante, Presiding Bishop, His residence, Interview (structured),
25/02/2013, 4:00-6:00pm.

Rt. Rev. Francis Andoh, Deputy Bishop of Northern Ghana, Accra hqts Structured Inter-
view, 21/08/2014, 1:00-1:10am

Rt. Rev. K. Awotwi Pratt, Sitting Bishop of Accra, His office, (structured) Interview,
22/02/2013, 4:00 -4:30pm

Rt. Rev. Nnuro, Former Bishop of Koforidua, Office (MUCG),Inter-view, 15/02/2013,
10:00-10:10am

Rt. Rev. William Blankson, Former Bishop of Somanya, His residence,Inter-view,
21/08/2014, 1:00-1:15pm.

Very Rev. AduBoateng, Current Director of EMRAT, 7/02/201306/02/2014, 10:00-
10:15am

Very Rev. Isaac Boamah, A Contemporary of the founder of Abasua Prayer Centre, Struc-
tured interview, 25/03/201327/03/2013, 10:3011:00am 10:00am- 11:00Am

Abraham Osei Assibey, Partly telephone and partly face to face contact, 19/03/2011,
4:00pm

Very Rev. Mathias Forson, Past Director of EMRAT, His Residence

Very Rev. Michael P. Sackey, Immediate Past Director of EMRAT, In Accra, brief Inter-
view, 17/07/2014, 12:00:12:30pm.10:30am-11:00am,

Very Rev. Solomon Eshun, Former Minister, Bethel Methodist Church Takoradi. / Former Diocesan Evangelism Coordinator, Sekondi., Part Telephone' part personal conversation, 11/02/2013, 10:00am

Laity

Boateng Fordjour, Secretary in-charge of Records/Logistics Abasua, Telephone and personal contact, 08/07/2012, 17/08/2014, 19/08/2014, 11:00-11:20am, 4:00-5:00pm, 9:00-11:00am

Bro. Howard Yankey, Society Steward Azani Methodist Church, Telephone and personal contact, 20/01/2012, 3:00-4:00pm

Bro. John Nyarkoh, Azani Methodist Church, Telephone and personal contact, 20/01/2012, 1:30-3:30pm

Evang. Asiamah, Former Caretaker of Abasua Prayer Centre, His residence at Atwea and through phone, 18/03/2011, 11:00-11:30am

Evang. Oppong, Caretaker of William deGraft Centre, Telephone and personal contact, 13/02/2013, 5:00pm

Evang. Rockson Odoom, Caretaker of T.B. Freeman Centre, Telephone and personal contact 17/01/2012, 11:00am, 3:00-5:00pm

Monica Eshun, Azani Methodist Church, Telephone and personal contact, 20/01/2012, 3:40-5:40pm

Mr. Appiah Donkor, Freeman Methodist Church Fomena, Telephone and personal contact, 17/01/2012, 3:00-5:00pm,

Mr. Emmanuel Eshun, Headmaster Azani D/A JHS, Telephone and personal contact, 18/01/2012, 3:30-4:00pm

Nana Ofori Kuma I, Royal, Fomena, Telephone and personal contact, 10/01/2012

Focus Groups

GHAMSU Executives, Students of Methodist University College, School premises,

31/05/2013, 6:00-8:00pm

Methodist Pastoral Students, Students of Trinity Theological Seminary, School premises,

30/05/2013, 3:00-4:30pm

Society Stewards/Bible Class Leaders/Other Members.

J.R. Owusu Memorial Methodist Church, 02/06/2013, 1:00pm,

Olivet Meth.Dansman,09/06/2013, 1:00pm,

Kpehe (Resurrection Meth.),16/06/2013, 1:00pm -2:00pm,

Gethsemane Meth.23/06/2013, 1:00pm-2:00pm

Taifa Bethel Meth.30/06/2013, 1:00pm-2:00pm,

Sampa Valley Meth.7/07/2013, 1:00pm-2:00pm, Church premises, after church on Sunday. Others were contacted on Phone.

Churches Members at Abasua, Tarkwa (Asankragua) Diocese, Kumasi Diocese, Sekondi/Takoradi Diocese, Accra Diocese (Dansoman), Winneba Diocese, Sunyani Diocese (Berekum), Wenchi Diocese, Cape Coast Diocese (Kasoa), Koforidua Diocese, Northern Ghana Diocese, Akyem Oda Diocese, Effiduase Diocese, Obuasi Diocese, Tema Diocese, Somanya Diocese, Sefwi Diocese, Abasua centre, 2011 – 2013.

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide for the Senior Clergy (MCG)

1. What is your opinion on sacred site visitation from the Christian perspective?
2. Is the phenomenon a part of the Methodist church's beliefs?
3. Why has the phenomenon being introduced into the Church's spirituality?
4. Does it replace the Methodist Church's tradition of Camp Meetings?
5. Does the church have only one sacred site?
6. Is there an explanation for the preference for Abasua prayer centre?
7. If yes what could possibly be the reason?
8. Have you ever visited Abasua prayer camp before or any other sacred site?
9. If yes, was the visit made with a group?
10. Was your visit motivated by the church's annual programme?
11. Does the Methodist church wish to declare sacred site visitation an annual affair?
12. Do you think going on such visits answers fully the quest for renewal in the church?
13. Apart from renewal, what other benefits does the church hope to achieve by organizing such yearly trips?

APPENDIX C: Interview Guide for Laity

Interview Guide for Laity on Post Pilgrimage Experience by the Laity

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Educational background
4. Career/Profession
5. How long have you been a Christian?
6. Have you been to Abasua before?
7. If yes, how many times?
8. How many days did you spend on your visit?
9. Did you go alone or in a group?
10. When you go do you bring home with you any memorabilia (water, sand, oil etc.)?
Have you invited anyone to the place before?
11. What were your need/needs when you visited?
12. Have you received answers to these need/needs?
13. State some of these answers.
14. Do you hope to visit the site anytime soon?
15. What are/is your needs/need this time around?
16. What do you expect the church to do as you travel up and down the site?
17. Have you visited any other site(s) apart from Abasua?
18. If yes how distinct is Abasua compared with the others
19. Do you see any spiritual change in the life of your church when warriors visit
Abasua?
20. If there is a change how long does this change last?
21. Do you think church members should continue going to Abasua?

22. Would you like the church to relocate the prayer centre to another place?
23. If going to Abasua is renewal, what in your responses suggest that one has gone through renewal?
24. What activities at the Abasua prayer centre indicate renewal activities and which ones do not?
25. Any other comments about the practice?

Interview Guide for the WdGC (Azani) and TBFC (Adansi Kusa)

1. Are you a Methodist?
2. Is it your first time here?
3. Can you state briefly what brought you here?
4. And what do you hope to achieve by coming specifically to this place and not any other?
5. Do you know any story associated with this place that you think influences people's preference for this place?
6. Can you narrate about two testimonies?
7. How do activities organized here impact renewal?

APPENDIX D: Organograms

Figure 1: An Organogram showing the position of the Evangelism Mission and Renewal Advisory Team (EMRAT) in the administrative sphere of the General Directorate for Ministry and its relationship with MPRP.

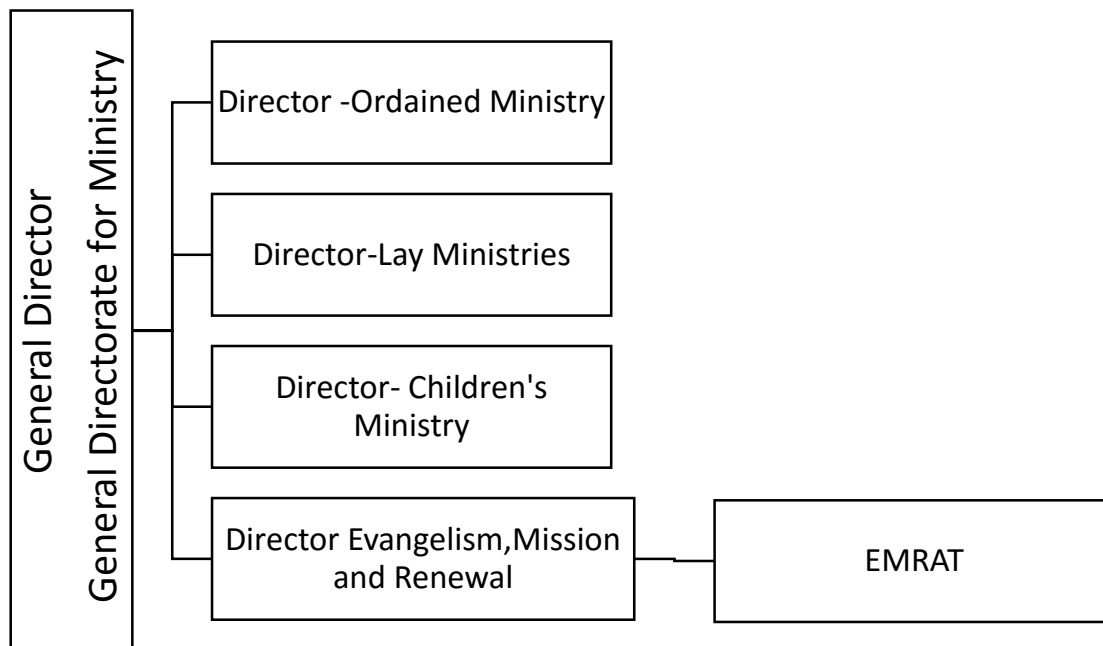
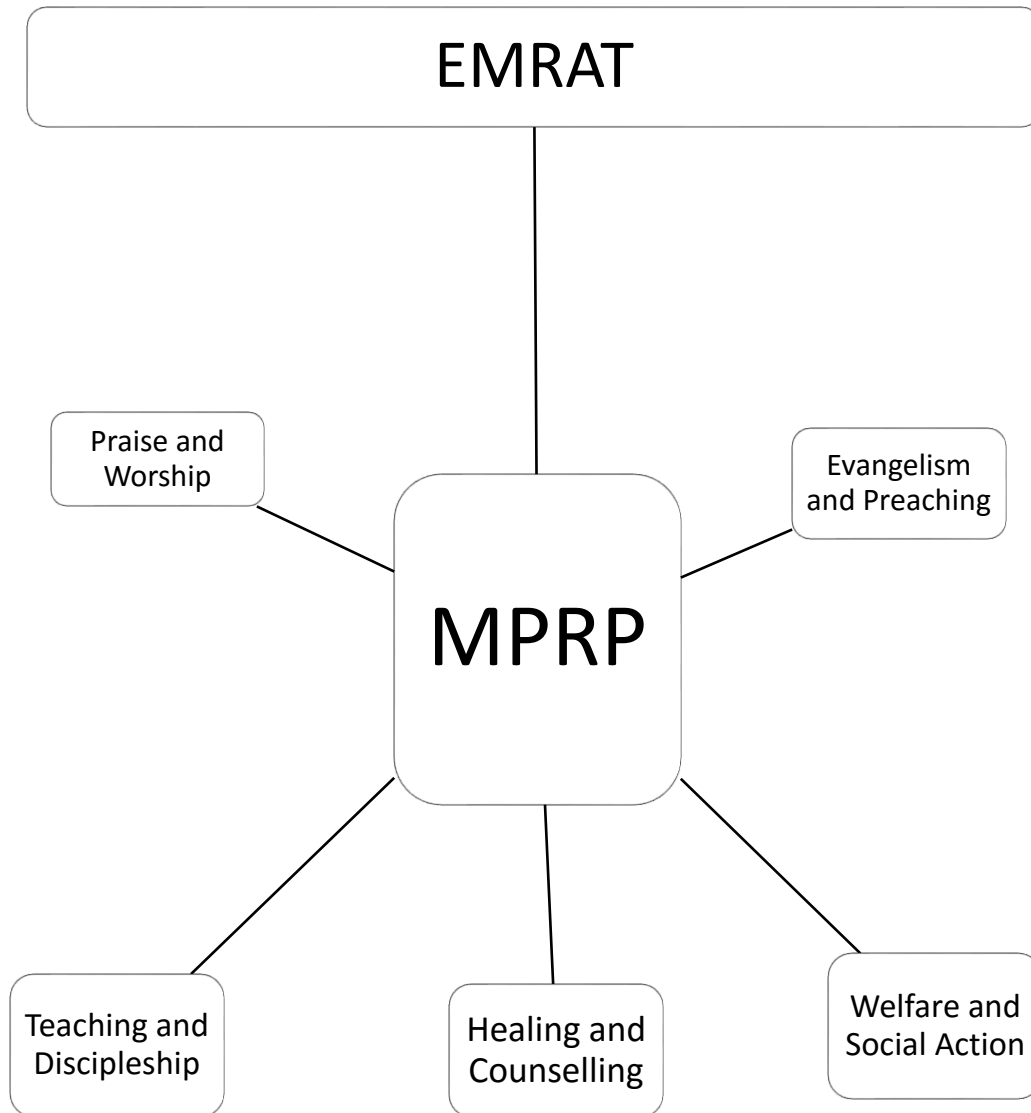


Figure 2: An organography showing the relationship between the Evangelical, Mission and Renewal Advisory Team (EMRAT) and the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP)



APPENDIX E: Distinction between EMRAT and MPRP

The Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Advisory Team of the General Directorate of Ministries.³⁷⁶

Functions:

1. It shall lead and assist our Societies in their efforts to win persons as disciples of Jesus Christ, to build up the Christian Community, and to celebrate and communicate the redeeming and reconciling love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ to persons of all ages, ethnic background and social conditions.
2. It shall plan and promote an effective programme of comprehensive evangelism throughout the Connexion, and shall monitor the work of the Church in its mission areas.
3. It shall be responsible for the concerns of worship in the Church, including music, liturgy and the devotional life.
4. It shall also be responsible for the Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP).

The Methodist Prayer and Renewal Programme (MPRP)³⁷⁷

Functions:

1. The Methodist Prayer and the Renewal Programme shall be a programme aimed at helping to revitalize the individual and cooperate lives of the entire membership of the Methodist Church Ghana. It shall be a programme of the Evangelism, Mission and

³⁷⁶The Methodist Church Ghana, *The Constitution*, 304.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 305.

Renewal Advisory Team of the General Directorate for Ministry and shall run on five main tracks in its activities, namely,

- a) Prayer and Worship
- b) Teaching and Discipleship
- c) Healing and Counselling
- d) Evangelism and Preaching
- e) Welfare and Social Action

In each of these tracks the programme shall plan and execute activities in collaboration with other Divisions or Sub-Committees, using the most highly motivated and spirit-filled, mature and capable members of the Church.

1. Organization

- a) The programme shall be organized under the evangelism, Mission and Renewal outfit of the Church at the Society, Circuit, Diocese and Connexional levels.
- b) It shall not operate as a distinct organization in the Church with membership, uniforms, payment of dues etc.
- c) All members of the Church shall be encouraged to participate and give freely of their time and money for its support.
- d) Other persons who are not Methodist who participate in any of these activities of the programme shall be considered as visitors and may not be given any leadership role(s) without the permission of the Minister-in-Charge.
- e) Participants in any activities of the programme may put on any attire of their choice including uniforms of organizations they belong to in the Church.

2. Budget: The programme shall be budgeted for by the Church, yearly, at each level.

3. Accounts: A special account for the programme shall be opened in each society and other levels. The Minister-in-Charge of the Society or his representative (e.g. The Society Steward) shall be a compulsory signatory to the accounts of the programme.
4. Reports: Periodic reports of the programme shall be made to the Leaders Meeting, Quarterly Meeting and the Synod at the Society, Circuit and Diocesan levels respectively by the Evangelism, Mission and Renewal Sub-Committees through Committees on Ministries, and to the Conference at the Connexional level by the EMRAT through the General Directorate for Ministry

APPENDIX F: Study Sites Pictures

a) Pictures from Abasua Prayer Centre



Picture 2: Pilgrims praying around the cross at Abasua Prayer Centre. The cross also serves as the anemometer. Around the cross, one can see bottled water and olive oil.



Picture 3: The chapel at Abasua Prayer Centre named after the founder of the site



Picture 4: A church auditorium at Abasua centre 250x120ft under construction construction (August 17, 2014)



Picture 5: Dormitories attached to the auditorium

b) Pictures from Adansi Kusa Prayer Centre



Picture 6: The Inside view of the T.B. Freeman Centre



Picture 7: Outside view of the prayer centre



Picture 8: The spring from which Rev. Birch Freeman drank



Picture 9: A prayer session showing Pilgrims at the Kusa prayer centre carrying water fetched from well believed to have been used by T.B Freeman.



Picture 10: The fruits of this Mango tree were believed to have been used by Thomas Birch Freeman. The tree is now destroyed from overuse



Picture 11: Church members on their way up to Kusa Centre

c) Pictures from William de Graft Centre at Azani



Picture 12: The Chapel at Azani Prayer Centre



Picture 13: The chapel at Azani with a hostel behind it.



Picture 14: William de Graft centre at Azani showing the main road from Agona Nkwanta

APPENDIX G: Growth of the Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana.

The Accra Diocese of the Methodist Ghana is growing by leaps and bounds, both spiritually and in numerically. The Church is doing everything it can to develop its members into a vibrant spirit- filled community.

Challenges: The Church does not have any effective means of data collecting at both the society and the circuit levels. There are no Professional Statisticians, only amateurs are assigned such responsibilities. The Diocese rather engages the expertise of some personnel from the Ghana Statistical Service on a part-time basis. At the time of collecting the data presented below, the Diocesan Statistician admitted to all these inefficiencies in the Accra Diocese's data collection. The desire was to get the returns of the entire Connexion for a ten-year period for the current research, but only a two-year period was available. Talking with the Very Rev. French, the Director of Statistics at the Accra Diocese on this issue of incompetent Statisticians, Rev French, intimated that the situation will be rectified.

Sources of Growth. It is realized that the MCG, has pulled in a lot of souls in its recent revival activities at both the Societal, Circuit and Diocesan levels. Some Circuits like Mount Olivet, Mamprobi, Gbawe McCarthy among others are doing well in this area. Of prominence is the contribution of growth from the prayer centres of the church. See below for the two-year growth pattern for Accra.

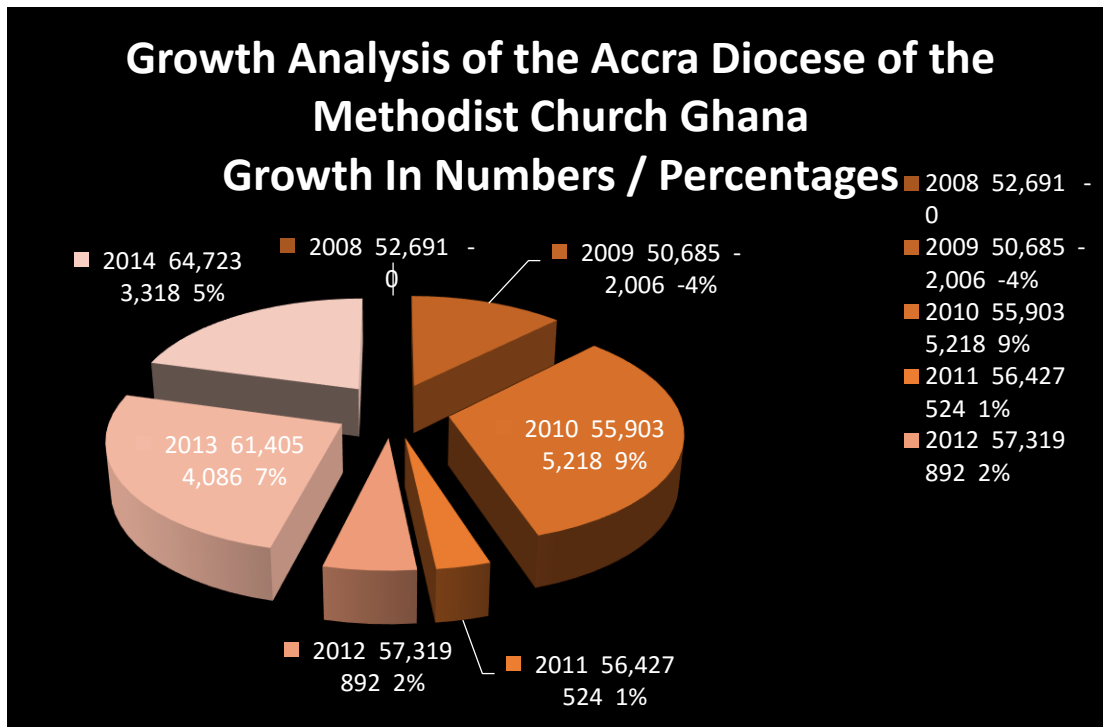


Figure 3: Growth Analysis of the Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana

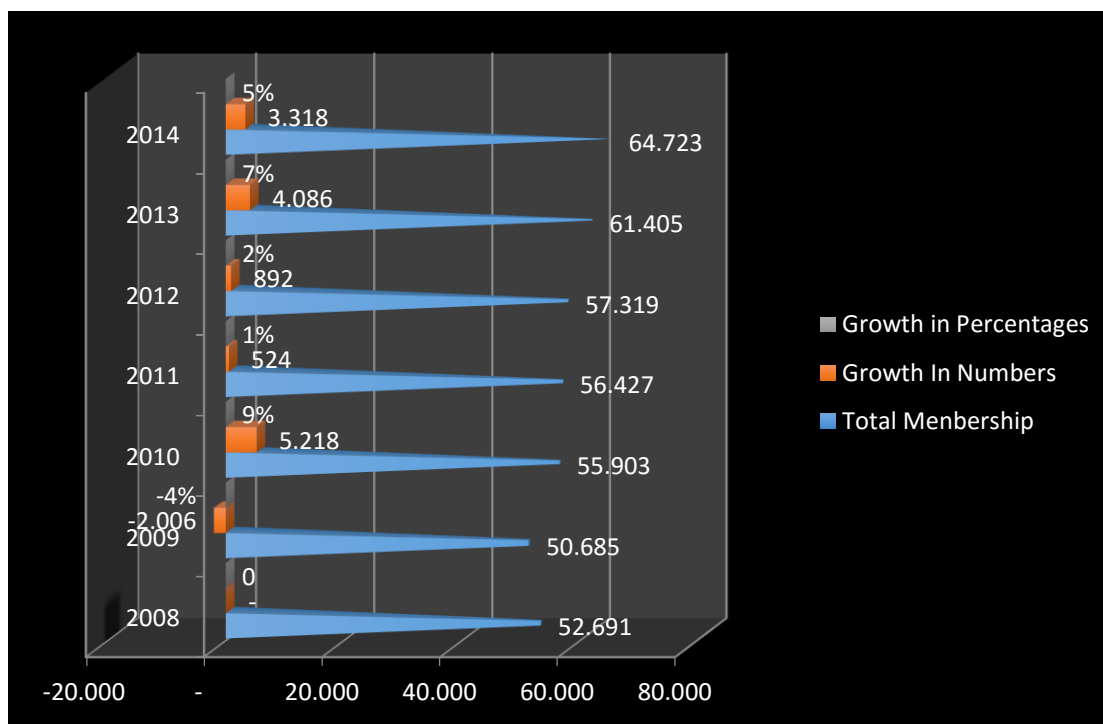


Figure 4: Growth Analysis of the Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana from 2008 to 2014

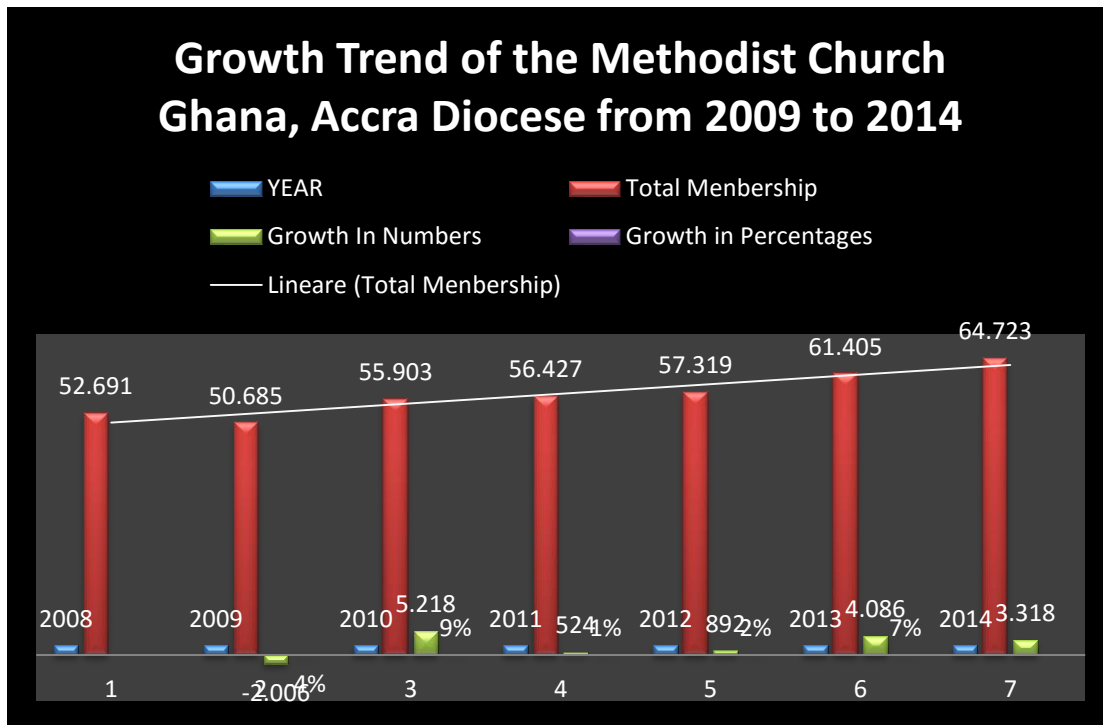



Figure 5: Growth Trend of the Accra Diocese of the Methodist Church Ghana from 2008 to 2014


APPENDIX H: Data from Ahanta West District Assembly authenticating the historical facts about

AHANTA WEST DISTRICT ASSEMBLY

TEL/FAX: 031-2093191

Bankers
Achantaman Rural Bank
Agona Nkwanta


REPUBLIC OF GHANA


AHANTA WEST DISTRICT ASSEMBLY
AGONA NKWANTA
WESTERN REGION

OUR REF: AWD/AEdu. 7

YOUR REF:

30th May, 2013


INFORMATION FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH

I refer to your letter dated 5th April, 2013 in relation with the above topic and wish to indicated the underlisted information you required.

- a) The Paramount Chief of Area is Nana Baidoo Bonsoe xv
- b) The People of Azani are Achantas
- c) The Major Occupation of the people are Farming
- d) The Distance from Agona Nkwanta to Azani is 6km
- e) The Azani Township is located before Busua junction from Agona Nkwanta-Dixcove Road

Frantic efforts is under way to furnish you the other information required very soon.

Counting on your co-operation.


KWABENA KESSIE
(PRINCIPAL EXECUTIVE OFFICER)
For: DISTRICT CHIEF EXECUTIVE

THE ACTING HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND ETHICS
DEPARTMENT
METHODIST UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
P. O. BOX DC 940
DANSOMAN

(Attention Very Rev. Ebenezer Yalley)

SACRED SITES

1. The stool family had an ancestral shrine called AMEBEYIN situated near the virgin forest at Azani Ahanta.
2. Also of worth mentioning is the "rock coffin" know in Ahanta language as "Boro Areeka"
3. There's also a vast track of manganese ore deposit which was first officially mined during the Second World War. Greater part still untouched.
4. Traces of Gold and Lime stone also known.

AZANI AS PART OF GLOBAL VILLAGE

5. Azani is 26km ride from Takoradi
6. There are students who have passed through their University Education successfully while others are also undergraduates at some of the best university Colleges in Ghana.

THE YOUTH AND CAREERS

7. Some J.S.S. graduates have passed out as Masons, -carpenters, electricians, seamstresses, caterers etc.

SHORT HISTORY OF AZANI COMMUNITY
AHANTA WEST DISTRICT WESTERN GHANA

Introduction,

Azani community is situated between Agona-Nkwanta and Dixcove/Busua main tarred motor able road, precisely 4 km from Agona Nkwanta and also about 6km to Dixcove and Busua, all within Ahantaland.

Azani community had been in existence since the sixteen century. The Azani community came –into existence through some large tracts of lands-released to our ANCIESTOR called YENZU ACKAH of blessed memory who migrated from the ROYAL HOUSEHOLD of BEYIN, in the Eastern Nzima District of the Western Region.

Our ancestor Yenzu Ackah, was a gold dealer who plied his trade between Nzima and Ahanta lands.

Through this trading activities, he became familiar, a trusted friend of the overlord of Ahantaland because of kindness and love shown to by-Ahantaland overlord, he later made a formal request to the Ahantahene to give to him some land to settle, with some of his immediate relation from Beyin, the Ahantahene, obliged and settle him at the presently now known as the Azani community.

Yenzu Akcah and some of his relations came from Beyin, settled and started to cultivate foodstuffs and also availed themselves to serve the Ahantahene any time the needs arise. This relationship did developed so wonderfully mutual trust that the Ahantahene created a stool for the Yenzu Ackah and his descendants and gave to them the title of Gyaasehene of the whole of the Ahanta state, the capital being Busua.

Borderline of Azani Stools Lands:

- (a) To The North:
Himakrom Stool Lands
- (B) To the West: Yakau, Boakrom
To the South & East: Ahuntumano
- (C) - Azaniland stretches about 2.5 km in radius
- (D) - Population - About 400 people (male, female, children
- (E) - Occupation -- farming

- CROPS
- (F) - Major group cultivation, - oil palm trees, maize, cassava
 - (G) - Educational facilities – Kindergarten, Primary, J.H.S.
 - (H) - Social amenities- good tarred road that passes thro' the community
Electricity supply, water/borehole tap-facility, community center.

To end, Azani community became famous throughout the length and breath of the Ahantaland, because of a maize, reddish in colour, of a very high nutritional value which our ancestors, Yenzu Ackah- descendants introduced to the Ahanta-land and mainly cultivated sorely at Azani which later spread all over Ahantaland and beyond.

The red maize, became known as "Abele Azani"- this incidentally gave to the community to be known and called as Azani due to this nutritional reddish maize.

Thank you.

From the royal household, azani
YENZU ACKAH-ANONA ROYAL STOOL FAMILY AZANI
(GYABENENE, AHANTA STATE, BUSUA)
AHANTA WEST B STRICT
WESTERN GHANA- WEST AFRICA
LATE 17/6/2013
Re-Bro. John Howard
(Stool Secretary/Caretaker
Azani Anona Royal Stool family)

The Yenzu Ackah stool family of Azani is also link to Nkroful and Nusaem stools also thro' migration of some of our ancestors to these areas.