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To cite this article: Edmond Akwasi Agyeman & Emmanuel Carsamer (2018): Pentecostalism and the spirit of entrepreneurship in Ghana: the case of Maame Sarah prayer camp in Ghana, Journal of Contemporary African Studies, DOI: [10.1080/02589001.2018.1502416](https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2018.1502416)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2018.1502416>



Published online: 24 Jul 2018.



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## Pentecostalism and the spirit of entrepreneurship in Ghana: the case of Maame Sarah prayer camp in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role that Pentecostalism plays in stimulating entrepreneurial spirit and innovation in Ghana. The study adopts an ethnographic approach, and focuses on the Goka Prayer Camp of the Church of Pentecost in the Jaman North District of the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. It is grounded in Weber's theory of religion as a catalyst for the development of capitalist societies and focuses of religious doctrines, leadership, and institutional networks. Key findings indicate that there is a nexus between Pentecostalism and entrepreneurship development in Ghana. The study showed that Pentecostalism encourages self-determination, self-reliance, and entrepreneurship initiatives among believers due to its prosperity doctrine which states that because believers share in the victory of Jesus Christ over sin, poverty and suffering, they are destined to prosper once they have embraced the faith, maintained strict moral discipline and paid tithes. In addition, Pentecostalism is seen to provide spiritual backing for entrepreneurship by freeing people from ancient superstitious beliefs, and fears that they will be accused of witchcraft, victimised, or die once they become successful. Moreover, the explicit engagement of Pentecostal leaders in the pursuit of material wellbeing sets the pace for members to follow. However, in spite of the role of this strand of Christianity in motivating individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activities, we found that they provide weak networks and institutional support, apart from those in the spiritual domain, to facilitate entrepreneurship development among members. It is rather members of the top hierarchy that appear to benefit from these social networks.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 19 October 2017

Accepted 13 July 2018

### KEYWORDS

Pentecostalism; prayer camps; entrepreneurship; Ghana

Since the 1970s Pentecostal Christianity,<sup>1</sup> which started in Ghana during the 1930s, has experienced rapid expansion and it is now one of the most dominant Christian denominations in the country (Wyllie 1974; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; Sackey 2006). This strand of Christianity developed as an option for the poor during a period of political instability, economic downturn, the subsequent adoption of harsh economic recovery programmes and mass migration from rural areas to urban centres (Okyerefo 2011). As Anderson (2013, xiii) observes, Ghana's Pentecostalism, like other strands of global Pentecostalism, enforces

a 'heady and spontaneous spirituality that refuses to separate 'spiritual' from 'physical' or 'sacred' from 'secular'. From its onset, converts were subjected to a process of regeneration and self-renewal through deliverance and direct experience with the Holy Spirit (Meyer 1998; Asamoah-Gyadu 2013), and the churches that were established were encouraged to be 'self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating'.

Regeneration and renewal in Pentecostalism means empowerment to be successful in worldly affairs. Therefore, as Asamoah-Gyadu (2013, 109) points out, 'the Pentecostal discourse usually dwells around words to do with victory, power, breakthrough and winning'. Themes related to the Cross such as suffering, poverty and sickness are dismissed as work of the devil or the fate of unbelievers. It is against this background that Ghana's Pentecostalism is associated with prosperity teachings (Gifford 2001, 2004).

Within Pentecostal spirituality, therefore, the life histories of people who have transformed from earlier life situations characterised by poverty and suffering, and social vices such as alcoholism, drugs, prostitution, and sexual promiscuity, to a prosperous and successful existence as, for example, born again pastors or businessmen and women, constitute important examples of true Pentecostal redemption. In Ghana therefore, rich and prosperous Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors like Duncan Williams, Mensa Otabil, Agyin Asare, and Dag Howard-Mills are iconic examples of people who have made breakthroughs in life as a result of their embracement of the Pentecostal faith.

Due to the emphasis on prosperity, Ghana's Pentecostalism encourages the pursuit of entrepreneurial ventures among its members (Meyer 1995). Church institutions, structures and practices such as prayer camps, retreat centres, deliverance, healing and all night services, as well as Jericho hours are instituted to facilitate the believer's quest to make breakthroughs in their life. It is against this background that prayer camps have become central in Pentecostal spirituality (Meyer 1995; Van Dijk 1997).

This paper focuses on the activities of a Pentecostal prayer camp and its founder, Sarah Donkor. The objective is to inform our understanding about the role that Pentecostal churches in Ghana play in building a spirit of entrepreneurship among their members through their prayer camps; determining whether or not there are institutional structures, administrative and governance systems within the outfit of these religious groups that facilitate innovation and entrepreneurship among their members; and discovering the manner in which Pentecostal leaders empower members to take up entrepreneurial initiatives. Our assumption is that Pentecostalism promotes innovation and entrepreneurial spirit among its members due to the emphasis on prosperity and success as a sign of God's blessing.

## Theoretical framework

Entrepreneurship is 'the ability of people continually to seek out and seize opportunities for profitable new activities in local and world markets', (Harper 2003, 1). The ability to discover a new business opportunity, creatively size up possible risks and expected benefits and take the necessary steps to set up a new business venture for profit is what constitutes the spirit of entrepreneurship. From the Schumpeterian perspective, an entrepreneur is an innovator who carries out 'new combinations' in order to initiate a discontinuous and revolutionary change to liberate the economy out of a static mode and set it on a dynamic path of growth and development (Harper 2003).

While individual characteristics account for why some people have greater entrepreneurial drive than others, literature dating back to Weber ([1904] 2001) has shown that peoples' religious values impact a great deal on their propensity to engage in entrepreneurship. Weber was amazed by the process of rationalisation which was taking place in the Western European economic system, causing a diametrical shift from the feudal system that relied on traditional production and consumption principles to a capitalist system that emphasised instrumental rationality. In looking for explanations, Weber traced 'this new and unique economic rationality' (Zalanga 2010, 44) to religious values, beliefs and practices by an ascetic Protestant (Calvinist) sect known as the Puritans. Weber ([1904] 2001) argued that the Puritans' belief in 'the calling', motivated them to practice 'this worldly asceticism', which involved wealth accumulation without consumption, leading to a culture of saving and business expansion, and thus giving birth to capitalism. Giddens explains that Weber's notion of 'the calling':

refers basically to the idea that the highest form of moral obligation of the individual is to fulfil his duty in worldly affairs. This projects religious behaviour into the day-to-day world, and stands in contrast to the Catholic ideal of the monastic life, whose object is to transcend the demands of mundane existence. (2001, xii)

The belief in 'the calling' was rooted in Calvin's doctrine of predestination, the tenets of which can be summarised in the following precepts:

- (a) You are either elected as a child of God or condemned as a sinner to eternal damnation.
- (b) You cannot know which you are.
- (c) The distinguishing feature of the elect is that they trust through faith and live the godly life.
- (d) The systematic and relentless practice of appropriate worldly activity therefore allows the individual to conclude that his or her faith is true and thus that he or she is 'elected' (Redding 1990, 10).

It is these religious precepts, therefore, that sparked off assiduous pursuit of worldly transactions by the Puritans to justify their faith, while at the same time maintaining an ascetic lifestyle. While Weber's approach should not be taken out of context, the merit of his argument is that people's religious beliefs and ethical values have direct effect on their conduct, which reflects as well in their pursuit of material goods (Redding 1990; Zalanga 2010). In light of this, a growing body of literature has shown that religious worldviews and ethics constitute an integral part of, and provide direction to, the processes of economic production and development in societies (Berger 1991; Sherman 1997; Maxwell 1998; Martin 2002; Spear 2010).

Following Weber's findings and recent studies connecting religion and economic enterprise, Spear (2010) argues that in addition to their doctrines or teachings, religious groups stimulate entrepreneurial spirit through institutional network and leadership style. Examining the entrepreneurial culture across different religious groups, he shows that some religious groups provide the necessary spiritual capital in the form of social networks and leadership in addition to teachings that constitute the bedrock of entrepreneurial drive among members.

In line with our objectives therefore, we analyze in this paper the role of Pentecostal doctrines, leadership style and institutional structures and networks in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship among members in Ghana. We do so by examining a Pentecost Prayer Camp at Goka and the activities of the woman who founded it.

## Methodology

Primary data for this paper was drawn from six months of field research between March and September 2016, at Goka in the Jaman North District in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana where the Maame Sarah Prayer Camp is located. This Prayer Camp was chosen for the field study because over the past forty years, until her demise in 2011, Prophetess Maame Sarah's activities at the Camp have contributed a great deal to the rapid growth of the Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana. The Goka Prayer Camp is a place of healing and deliverance where businessmen and women, travellers, farmers and politicians go for spiritual direction and prophecy. In 2011 Ghana's former president John Dramani Mahama, who was then the Vice President of Ghana, was himself a guest at the Camp.

Ethnographic techniques including interviews, focus group discussion and participant observation were adopted during the field work. In all, we conducted interviews with 25 selected business owners in Goka. Five key informant interviews were held with two religious leaders, a chief, a manager of a credit union, and the leader of the Prayer Camp. A focus group discussion was held with five members of the Prayer Team of the Goka Prayer Camp. In addition, in-depth information was sought from the leader of the Prayer Camp on three entrepreneurs who have built a house at the Camp for personal use during their visit. These three are owners of major companies in Ghana. In all, there were thirty-four participants in the research (the leader of the Prayer Camp also participated in the Focus Group Discussion – FGD). Participants were aged between 23 and 68 years. Eight of the 25 business owners interviewed were females and all the key informants were males. Participants of the FGD were all males. Two of the total number of participants had tertiary education, six, including the leader of the Prayer Camp had some form of professional education, while the rest had basic and high school education.

Moreover, several informal meetings were held with the Leader of Camp to seek clarification and additional information where necessary. In addition, we participated in religious services at the Church of Pentecost in Goka and healing and deliverance services at the Prayer Camp. We received from the Camp a video documentary of Maame Sarah and a newsletter reporting some of her healing and deliverance services and a brochure reporting the funeral ceremony and life history of Maame Sarah. Data collected was used to generate themes during the analysis process which was based on thematic analysis technique within the interpretivist paradigm.<sup>2</sup>

## Origins of pentecostal christianity and the prayer camp at Goka

According to verbal accounts from participants and documentary information drawn from the Camp,<sup>3</sup> the development of Pentecostal Christianity in Goka is attributed to Madam Ataa Comfort (alias Maame Soldier), an aunt of Maame Sarah, who first brought the Apostolic Church<sup>4</sup> to the town in the late 1950s. According to oral accounts, Ataa Comfort met the Apostolic Church by coincidence. She heard about the church while she was at a

hospital in Berekum where she had taken her niece for treatment. The girl was a student in a Teacher Training College and she used to fall ill frequently. This, Madam Ataa blamed on evil forces. Therefore, while she was at the Berekum Hospital, people told her about the healing activities of the Apostolic Church in Duayaw Nkwanta and she decided to take her niece there. After days of prayer, the girl got well and, amazed by the healing powers of the church, Madam Ataa Comfort decided to establish one in Goka. On her return to Goka, she immediately started the evangelical work with the support of four other women namely: Maame Martha Mansa, Cecelia Nsiah, Mary Tamia and Maame Akosua Esie, whom she had managed to convert. They engaged in street preaching at dawn, and also performed faith healing on the sick.

### ***Maame Sarah and establishment of the prayer camp***

The Goka Prayer Camp was established in 1972 by Madam Sarah Donkor, a niece of Madam Ataa Comfort's. Mama Sarah was born in 1921 as Yaa Donkor Ankamaa. Her parents were Kwaku Dabie and Yaa Mansa who were both farmers and followers of Traditional African Religion. At the time that Madam Ataa Comfort started her missionary work at Goka, Maame Sarah Donkor had taken ill and had been taken to a deity called Kwaku Firi at Nwoase near Wenchi for healing and deliverance. Sarah Donkor was suffering from paralysis and had been accused of witchcraft by a local deity after the untimely death of her brother. She was accused of being the (spiritual) cause of his death and was therefore sent away from Goka to seek deliverance at the Kwaku Firi shrine. At the time her sickness started, she was married and had three children and she was probably in her thirties. She was also doing well as a trader. Because of the witchcraft accusation, she was abandoned to her fate at the shrine by her husband and close family relatives. She fell under the total control of the fetish priest who, in addition to his claim to offering her healing, also used her for his sexual gratification and fathered a child with her.

Her aunt, Madam Comfort, brought her from the Kwaku Firi shrine to Goka to join her church. One day, while attending an Apostolic convention at Sampa with her aunt, Maame Sarah heard an inner voice telling her to get up and walk. She obeyed the voice, and lo and behold she was able to walk. After the event the women returned to Goka with greater energy and enthusiasm to continue the implantation of their Apostolic faith. In one prayer meeting, the Holy Spirit was said to have told Sarah Donkor to send for a woman in the town by the name of Naajoo who had suffered from lunacy for several decades. When the mad woman was brought to the group, Sarah Donkor prayed over her and she received deliverance and healing. This led to the establishment of a prayer camp, which was the beginning of a radical transformation of the socio-religious order prevailing at Goka. Due to initial resistance that the women had faced in the village, they started their healing and deliverance activities in the bush. Later they requested and were given an 'evil' forest called *Turom*, then seen as the place where the dead bodies of witches and criminals used to be thrown away for vultures to feed on them. Because Maame Sarah could not read or write, she engaged Mr. Joe Daah, a head teacher, who retired from teaching and became her secretary.

Today, the Camp is located on 200 hectares of land north east of Goka on the Goka-Sampa road through Buni. The camp has two residential clusters. The first cluster near Goka consists of Mama Sarah and her secretary's residences, and modern self-contained

apartments belonging to some of her affluent followers and her children. Here, there is a place of worship where public prayer and deliverance sections are organised every Friday. The second cluster is the settlement where clients reside. These are several semi-detached and self-contained apartments, some of which were put up by adherents. A psychiatric clinic and a basic model school belonging to the Camp are also located next to it.

The main activity of the Camp is deliverance and healing through fasting and prayer. Counselling sessions are also offered to discern people's problems. When a case is presented at the Camp, there is first a counselling session by a prayer team to diagnose the problem, after which fasting and prayer schedules are prescribed by Maame Sarah (now via Elder Joe Daah) based on the person's problems. Fasting schedules include 6am-9am; 6am-12noon; 6am-3pm; 6am-6pm; and 6am-6am. This last schedule which lasts twenty-four hours is known as dry fasting. The fasting schedules are spread over a three to seven-day period, depending on the problem diagnosed.

On the last Friday of February of each New Year, a grand durbar is held to commemorate the beginning of the year's prayer activities. The launch of the years' activities includes a grand liturgical service, fasting and prayers. On this occasion politicians, businessmen and women and other dignitaries are invited to experience what goes on at the Camp. During this occasion, that Camp attracts about 23,000 people from Ghana, neighbouring countries, as well as Europe and America each year. The Camp's activities close on 31st December each year, with a grand festival on 1st January. This festival also draws thousands of participants.

Unlike the practice in other prayer camps like Edumfa in the Central region (Sackey 2006; Novieto 2013), no register is kept for visitors at the Goka Prayer Camp. Mama Sarah did not commercialise religion. She did not collect any fees from people who visited the Camp. Accommodation facilities at the Camp are free of charge, and clients have the freedom to raise their own structures. In the following section, we examine the relationship between the Camp and entrepreneurial activities of people in and around Goka.

## **Pentecostalism and entrepreneurship development**

### ***The role of doctrines, prayer camps and church organization***

In the framework of Ghana's Pentecostal Christianity, prayer camps provide the space where believers can seek spiritual renewal, refuge, protection and power in order to purge themselves of any adverse spirits such as family curses, disease, demonic possession, envy, failure and all other factors that are deemed to pose a challenge to success. The camps, therefore, represent a source of spiritual energy within the political economy of prosperity theology (Gifford 1994; Van Dijk 1997). Deliverance and healing services offered at the camps are meant to transform lives and make the prosperity message bear fruits in the life of members (Sackey 2006).

In addition to providing space, the prayer camps are built around individuals who are believed to possess special gifts or charisma which they can use for the benefit of others. Because of the charisma that these divine actors possess, they command a lot of authority over the people who visit the camps. According to Yidana and Issahaku (2014), these spiritual leaders build their charisma and authority in two ways. First and foremost, they claim a

spiritual leadership which they prove by their privileged access to spiritual powers and gifts, and secondly, their authority and charisma is legitimised by the congregation that they minister. In the light of this, these divine actors have considerable influence over the people that patronise their services (Van Dijk 1997).

Therefore, in order to understand how religious activities at the prayer camp influence enterprise activities, it is important to understand the interaction that exists between entrepreneurship and certain themes at the heart of Pentecostalism such as its prosperity doctrine; leadership style; and institutional networks, that together constitute spiritual capital for religious entrepreneurs.

### ***Prosperity doctrines and the spirit of entrepreneurship***

Pentecostal Christianity developed in Goka, a non-urban community, as an option for the poor. It represented a grassroots, innovative and creative approach to improving people's socio-economic situation from both the spiritual and material points of view (Maxwell 2000). Gifford (2004, 48) argues that the emphasis on entrepreneurship and prosperity in Ghana's Pentecostalism has its origin in traditional African religious worldview 'according to which religion has to do with achieving material wellbeing.' Gifford (2001) further states that another aspect of traditional African religion theology which has had an incursion into African Pentecostalism is the emphasis on the existence of demons that can block human progress and which, for that matter, warrants spiritual deliverance for every Christian. In other words, every Christian has still to be delivered from the power of demons even after they have been born again and have received the gift of speaking in tongues (Gifford 2001). He asserts that it is this deliverance thinking which has led to the emergence of Pentecostal prayer camps institutions in Ghana (68).

Therefore, in order to address the challenges of modern society, Pentecostals craftily combine Christian theology and African ancient religious traditions to argue that every person is born to prosper because he has been created in the image of God. However, 'a Christian's progress and advance can be blocked by demons who maintain some power over the Christian, despite his or her coming to Christ' (Gifford 2001, 65). Considering this, evidence from our field data indicates an established dependence between business owners in and around Goka on the Prayer Camp. Many of our informants said they sought spiritual guidance from the Camp before they started their business. Some said fasting sessions were prescribed for them. The business owners receive deliverance, healing and spiritual direction from the Camp to insulate them from the risks of failure.

This kind of relationship is sustained by the prosperity theology of Pentecostalism which places stronger emphasis on the material wellbeing of their members while rejecting all forms of human suffering and destitution. Gifford (2001) argues that the African expression of prosperity theology is a complex mix of local and international religious worldviews that can be traced to African traditional culture and to developments in the United States within the Christian religion during the nineteenth century. This theology is articulated as follows:

God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, and every Christian should now share in the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has a right to the blessing of health and wealth won by Christ, and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith (62)

During interview sections at Goka, respondents strongly supported this doctrine and articulated it in support of their business initiatives. People interviewed refused to accept failure as their portion. In response to being asked whether every person was supposed to prosper in life, Afia, a 23 year old woman managing a family store said:

God created man in his own image. You see, nothing shows that God is struggling with anything and thus nothing shows that human beings should also struggle with anything but, possibly, the lifestyle of your parents can even have effect on you. (Goka, 6th June, 2016)

If in the Weberian context, the Puritans went about their businesses without knowing whether they were among the few who have been 'elected' or not, our respondents were very clear in their mind that they were born to succeed, and they used Biblical quotations to support these claims. They also believed failure, suffering and poverty are the work of the devil or the result of a curse that one has inherited from one's parents. The following conversation with Forkuo, who is owner of a drinking bar and had gone to the Camp for prayers at the time he was starting his business, better elucidates this point:

Interviewer: So what made you go there for prayers?

Forkuo: Okay, as a human being you need not to be there without guard. You need to submit yourself under some authority. You have to also know your destiny.

Interviewer: So is knowing your destiny the reason you went there?

Forkuo: Yes.

Interviewer: So what is?

Forkuo: Okay, it includes my business and my children. You see, if the business is thriving and your child is not there, you are also not there. If the business is thriving and I am sick, I am not there. So it was about all of those issues that I went there  
....

Interviewer: Do you believe God created everyone to make it in life?

Forkuo: Yes, I believe that God created everyone to make it in life, but those midwives can change your destiny. So when you find it difficult in life, it is not from God, it's from this very earth. God created everyone to make it.

Interviewer: Please, do you think there are any evil persons who want this business to collapse?

Forkuo: Yes, there are a whole lot. For example, when I started first this business was thriving but due to such challenges the business virtually collapsed. It is recently that it has started thriving (again) (Goka, 3rd September, 2016).

From this respondent's point of view, man's destiny is to make it in life. Therefore, once you submit yourself to a higher authority, no evil power can prevent you from achieving your goal. Collapse of businesses is also given a spiritual interpretation. This kind of belief is a powerful source of Pentecostal entrepreneurialism.

Those who resort to the Camp are not only the poor and uneducated. A head teacher in Goka with a second university degree – who also runs a provision store in a town close to Goka – told us that before he started his shop, he consulted Maame Sarah for deliverance and guidance and she prescribed for him three days of fasting, from 6 am to 12 noon each day.

In addition, many entrepreneurs who operate large scale businesses also resort to the Camp for support. Perhaps the striking example of three entrepreneurs who have built property at the Camp better elucidates this point. Out of the three, one owns what used to be one of the largest Sawmills in the region. He resorted to the Camp for help when he faced a legal suit from the Rawlings' military regime in the early 1980s. When

he was waiting for the final judgment, and knowing that he faced a serious risk of going to jail, he resorted to the Camp for deliverance. According to the Prayer Team, this man was made to undergo a whole month of prayer and fasting and eventually when he went to court for judgment, the military officer presiding acquitted him. After that, this entrepreneur became a close friend and financier of Maame Sarah. Workers at the Camp were paid from his company. He bought and fuelled her private car from the beginning of the 1980s and was the one who constructed a house for her around the same period. It was his company that cut and processed the teak trees that were used to extend electricity from Sampa to Goka. Another entrepreneur who has built and donated a Psychiatric Clinic and a school block to Maame Sarah also received healing from the Camp. The third entrepreneur, a woman who is a leader in the frozen meat distribution business in Ghana, (who also owns several other companies), resorted to the Camp when her son and his wife had difficulty conceiving a child. At the Camp, Maame Sarah prophesized that the woman's menses would return, after which she would have a child, and that this would continue till the arrival of a fourth child. Immediately, a house was built for the woman to stay at the Camp and the prophecy came to pass: the couple now have four children.<sup>5</sup>

Freeman (2015) has observed that in traditional African societies, people are reticent to becoming wealthier than their peers, lest they be accused of witchcraft and sorcery. In addition, the long history of political instability and violence which African societies have endured since independence, with the experience of the military and even elected governments victimising businessmen and women has created a lot of insecurity for some entrepreneurs. The Camp therefore represents a source of relief and safety where entrepreneurs can retire to seek protection, assurances and hope in times of difficulty. Moreover, from the cases just cited, it is very clear that the African concept of prosperity is not only about material possession, it is about wholeness of life, which includes having good health and having children. Once there is lack in any of these, then one's success or prosperity has not reached fullness. This also explains why successful businessmen and women resort to the Camp for help. The healing that people receive at the Camp must therefore be understood in a broader sense. According to Sackey (2006, 111) it is 'regarded as a conquest, victory over evil spirit or witches that are believed to obstruct people's progress'.

As Nwankwo and Gbadamosi (2013) have observed in relation to Afro-Caribbean religious entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom, the Pentecostal business ethics is constructed upon a strong moral fabric. In the case of Goka, this is made up of a set of moral principles and the theology of giving.<sup>6</sup> During the interview sessions, participants at Goka made references to moral principles and values as well as religious obligations which they felt were paramount to their business' success. These include keeping a nuclear family, honesty and truthfulness, avoiding promiscuity and alcoholism, and paying tithe:

The manner and way in which you express yourself, how truthful you are, and your behaviour determine the type of relationship and support you get from your business partners and customers. In your relationship with people, you must put God first. You ought to know Jesus Christ and rely on him. It is in this way that you can achieve your goal. I also believe that the habit of going to drinking spots to have fun can lead to womanizing, contraction of diseases that can reduce one's life span, and lead to waste of money. (Kwaku, 47 years old, owner of several hardware stores, Goka, 30th May, 2016)

As a human being, your strength depends on the tithes. It can even prevent bad things from happening to you. (Adwoa, 25 years, food seller, Goka, 6th June, 2016)

Believers are supposed to observe a strict moral discipline and 'give back to God' in the form of tithe. They are taught to show acts of honesty, and avoid social vices such as alcoholism and womanising that can all adversely affect the life of a business. These values feature prominently for the success of every entrepreneur.

## Leadership style

Spear (2010), has argued that church leaders over the years have taken an entrepreneurial stance which has helped unleash the entrepreneurial spirits of their communities. He cites several cases where religious leaders have inspired members and communities to embark on entrepreneurship. Citing, as example, the case of a Catholic priest who was stationed in the Spanish city of Mondragon in 1941, Spears wrote that Father Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta was the entrepreneur who laid the foundation and inspired several business activities in the town. In the case of Goka, we observed two key aspects of leadership styles by the founder of the Prayer Camp and her apostles which worked to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of followers. The first is 'spiritual' leadership focused on challenging traditional religious belief systems, while the second is the assiduous engagement in worldly transactions by the church leaders. These are analyzed in detail below.

### *Spiritual leadership and challenge to traditional African religious beliefs*

In Goka, the spiritual leadership provided at the Prayer Camp is meant or believed to counter evil forces that work against progress. In the Church of Pentecost, the titles 'maame' (mother), 'elder' and 'prophet' or 'prophetess' which are given to some members are meant to instate them as leaders of the community.

In Goka there used to be a common belief that if you become rich, or if you build a house while you are young, you would die. Kwasi, a religious leader, told us that it was because of such beliefs that young people who were entrepreneurial inclined used to abandon Goka to establish their businesses in Berekum or elsewhere. It was only after Maame Sarah started the Camp that the youth in Goka started to believe in their potential. When she was alive, people believed she had the power to protect the town and fight witches that did not want young people to succeed. Therefore, besides being called prophetess, she also earned the title *maame*, which means mother in Akan. Therefore, she was seen as mother of the community as in Akan social construct, mothers hold central position because lineage is traced through the mother (Amadiume 1997). Mensah, a 54 year old man who owns cocoa and cashew plantations had this to say of Maame Sarah:

Her presence has really helped this town. She supported the town with her prayer and for that reason, people have been able to build properties. At first, the witches will not have allowed you to set up any project or property in this town. (Goka, 15th June, 2016)

Moreover, unlike other religions, Pentecostalism places importance on the individual. Members are encouraged by their leaders to believe in themselves and the opportunities

that lie ahead of them. Owusu, a young businessman who is head of a cashew nut purchasing company in Goka said:

Maame Sarah used to tell me that I had something big to achieve in the near future. But I did not know where the success would come from. So when this job opportunity came through, it was like a dream to me. I just could not believe it. I believe everyone is created to make it in life. (Goka, 20th June, 2016)

Based on the above cases, we can argue that Pentecostals undergo a process of transfer of subjectivity which is exemplified in the level of success they are able to attain (Van Dijk 1997; Freeman 2015). According to Freeman (2015, 117), 'the ideal Pentecostal African is an individual (or a member of a small nuclear family), with no economic demands beyond his or her immediate household'. This contrasts with Gifford (2004) who has argued that Ghana's expressing of Pentecostalism teaches members to do nothing.

### ***Spiritual capital and assiduous pursuit of worldly transactions***

One of Maame Sarah's more important innovations was her ability to combine spirituality and the pursuit of economic activities with the introduction of new economic activities in the town of Goka. Before she commenced her activities in Goka, it was a taboo for certain economic activities to be undertaken in the town. For example, it was prohibited to rear a goat in the town or take cattle to the River Goka. There were also several sacred days in which farming activity was prohibited. However, Mama Sarah defied these customs and introduced cattle and goat rearing in the town. She also encouraged people to go to farm on the sacred days. At the time of her death in June 2011, she had a cattle ranch numbering about 300 cattle and a livestock farm of about 650 goats. She also built a dam at the Goka River in order to supply water to the town and to provide a source of drinking water for the cattle. She started fish farming in the river, though it was forbidden by custom to eat fish from the river. As a result of her initiatives, several people engaged in small scale livestock farming in the town.<sup>7</sup> She owned and managed other economic ventures including schools, a clinic, and large scale cocoa, cashew and food crop farms. In 1989, she won the Best Farmer Award offered by the state for the Brong Ahafo Region. After her death, the farms passed to her daughter while the Psychiatric Clinic and Basic Schools went to her son.

Recent development research has shown that cultural values and superstition, which are embedded in religious beliefs and practices, constitute some of the key factors that need to be taken into consideration in the pursuit of economic development in developing societies (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006; Ntibagirirwa 2009; Freeman 2015). Maame Sarah's courage and readiness to go counter to laid down social norms was an important entrepreneurial trait that enabled her to alter the economic activity within her community in a proactive, innovative and aggressive manner. She was not afraid to take risks and was always ready to challenge customs and tradition in order to achieve her goals.

### ***Institutional support and networks***

Some studies have shown that in the Church of Pentecost members find a new family which provides the necessary institutional support and social networks for individuals to start and run businesses (Sherman 1997; Spear 2010). The newly found family helps

members to raise the start-up capital, obtain contracts, business partners, customers, and training opportunities for their business activities (Nwankwo and Gbadamosi 2013).

In Ghana, the institution of major prayer camps such as Maame Sarah (Goka); Bethel (Sunyani); Macedonia (Accra); Canaan (Accra); Atwea Mountains (Ashanti) and many others provide avenues for people to seek direction, protection, assurances and hope to persevere in their business enterprises. These prayer camps are therefore part of the institutional structures within Ghana's Pentecostal set-up that provide spiritual capital for members who intend to engage in economic enterprise. Interviewees at Goka said they resort to the Camp for blessing, reassurance, counselling and deliverance before they start their businesses, or whenever they face any market-related challenges.

There is a sustained relationship that develops between the Camp and its clients. Those who go to the Camp for help become attached to it and they go there annually to renew their commitment, or make recourse to the Camp for answers anytime they face a challenge in their business which they believe to be beyond the material domain. This form of relationship is demonstrated by more than a dozen self-contained modern apartments that more affluent clients have built at the Camp for personal use during their visits. In one of our encounters with the resident Roman Catholic priest at Goka, he recalled a very prominent entrepreneur who came all the way from Kumasi to give testimony about how, through Maame Sarah's spiritual intervention, a ship bringing her goods from overseas was able to arrive in Ghana after several tribulations. The Camp is therefore seen by many to fulfil the spiritual needs of entrepreneurs.

However, during the field study, we observed that apart from spiritual support in the form of deliverance, prophesying, counselling, blessing, motivational speeches and reassurance for entrepreneurial activities, there were inexistent structures either within the Prayer Camp or within the Church of Pentecost at Goka that provided material support such as credit facilities or training to members. Moreover, there were no church based businesses, associations or cooperatives belonging to the Camp or the Church of Pentecost that facilitate entrepreneurship initiatives among members. The only church-based business institution which is supporting farmers and business owners at Goka is a credit union which is owned by the Catholic Church. When interviewees were asked about the source of the start-up capital for their businesses, responses we got indicated that funds were raised through personal savings and immediate family support. Serwaa, a 34 year old dressmaker who returned to Goka in 2006 after her apprenticeship training in Takoradi in Southern Ghana had this to say regarding her starting capital:

I did not get any help from anywhere. As soon as I set foot in this town, my father died and it was my sister and her husband who gave me some amount of money. It was with that money that I bought someone's damaged kiosk and repaired it. It was with that same money that I managed until I had enough to set up this shop by God's grace. ... I knew I would make profit if I committed myself and did the work. All those who engaged in the work were old so their sense of fashion was not as modern as mine. Moreover, there were no young people doing this in this town at the time I started.

In addition, participants had no affiliation to associations or church based co-operatives that are meant to support enterprise development. Therefore, in spite of its prosperity teachings, the church of Pentecost at Goka does not have any institutional structure or

training programmes to support entrepreneurship development among its members. These findings contrast with those made by Maxwell (1998) during his study among Pentecostals in Zimbabwe.

### ***Church hierarchy and monopoly of networks***

Moreover, apart from those who occupy the top hierarchy of the Church of Pentecost at Goka and the Prayer Camp, interviewees depended on very limited social networks for their business activities. Though Goka is a rural community, the activities of the Prayer Camp has opened the community up to the outside world. The Camp congregates people of all social backgrounds, yet the level at which people interact and benefit from such interaction is limited. The reason may be that most people go to the Camp with individual problems and there is thus a vertical relationship between the client and the spiritual leader of the Camp. This condition reduces communication between clients which in turn does not promote network development between clients.

However, we noticed that the lasting relationship that is developed between valued clients and the spiritual leader becomes a rich source of social capital for the top hierarchy of the Camp. People at the top level of the church benefit immensely from these networks which they use to seek education, employment and overseas travel opportunities for their close family relatives, as well as to lobby politicians and rich entrepreneurs for provision of social amenities such as schools, clinics and boreholes to the town, and to facilitate their personal business activities.

### **Conclusion**

This research shows that there is a nexus between Pentecostalism and entrepreneurship development in Goka, a non-urban community in central Ghana. Data from our field research at the Maame Sarah Prayer Camp shows that, in many situations, Pentecostalism is directly or indirectly the spirit behind many business enterprise activities in the town.

In the first place, Pentecostal teachings on prosperity constitute an important motivation for entrepreneurship development among people in Goka. We found that one of the primary concerns of Pentecostalism is to improve the lot of its members by providing healing, deliverance, spiritual renewal, protection and moral direction, which constitute the reason for which the Camp exists. Their doctrines encourage members to believe that because they are born in the image of God they are destined to prosper, and that poverty, illness and suffering are not part of their destiny, but are the work of the devil. These teachings encourage self-determination, self-reliance, and personal discipline. It also motivates members to look beyond their present circumstances and to establish a direct relationship with God. Of these Pentecostal precepts, Martin (1991, 83) writes that

a religion which encourages sobriety and personal discipline, and which is lay and participatory in style, which abolishes the hierarchy of mediation between man and God, and which is created by and helps create a competitive milieu, may also create useful and potent congruences with an entrepreneurial culture.

In Goka, we found that, people's belief that they are born to succeed is one of the forces behind innovative entrepreneurship initiative among church members. These

entrepreneurs also resort to the Prayer Camp for spiritual guidance in order to ensure that their destiny is not tampered with by any evil power.

Secondly, Pentecostalism provides spiritual backing, in that it allays people's fear to embark on business ventures that hitherto have been prohibited by customs and traditions as taboos. This frees people from superstitions that may instil fear in people that they will be accused of witchcraft or they will die once they become successful. Before Maame Sarah became a prophetess, she was herself accused of witchcraft, probably because she was doing well in her business.

Finally, despite the role of Pentecostal Christianity in motivating individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activities, we found that this strand of religion provides weak networks and institutional support to facilitate entrepreneurship development among members, except for those in the top hierarchy of the church.

## Notes

1. This paper focuses on Pentecostalism in Ghana. By Pentecostalism, we refer to a strand of Christianity that traces its roots to the event of Pentecost as it is depicted in Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12–14, in which the Holy Spirit of God was said to have descended on the Apostles in tongues of flames (Sackey 2006). According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2005, 12) this stream of Christianity emphasises 'salvation in Christ as a transformative experience, wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic phenomenon including "speaking in tongues", prophecies, visions, healing, and miracles in general' are paramount.
2. Expressed permission was sought from participants and from the Camp before the interviews were conducted. Additionally, identity of our participants was protected by using pseudonyms during the coding and in this paper.
3. Information provided in this section is based on oral accounts during the group discussion, key informant interviews, and documentary evidence, including a video documentary and a brochure reporting Maame Sarah's life history.
4. Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana has its roots in the Faith Tabernacle Assemblies and Apostolic faith that were introduced in Ghana during the late 1930s through the activities of Peter Anim and James McKeown, as well as the earlier evangelical activity by Prophet Harris on the West African coast. Faith healing and female leadership featured a lot in the early stages of this new form of Christianity (Wyllie 1974; Sackey 2006).
5. This information was attained during an interview session with Elder Joe Daah, leader of the Goka Prayer Camp
6. The theology of giving is articulated as follows: 'God is waiting for you to bless him before he blesses you'. In other words, the first requirement for prosperity is to first give to God or to the Man of God (Gifford 2004, 62).
7. The chief of Goka said he also dammed part of the river and started fish farming following the woman's initiative. But he added that when the fish were harvested, people who ate them had skin rashes and boils, so the business was discontinued. Later, a person drowned in one of the dams, and so people stopped going there to fetch water. This was interpreted as a defeat to Maame Sarah in her effort to challenge ancient traditions.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by John Templeton Foundation.

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