Praying until Jesus returns: commitment and prayerfulness among charismatic Christians in Ghana

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ABSTRACT
Charismatic Christians in Ghana display heterogeneous intensities of personal piety, often mapped out by believers to levels of ‘spiritual maturation’. In this article, I examine the devotional routines of ‘committed’ Christians, individuals recognized as ‘prayerful’ subjects. Through Marcel Mauss’ incidental definition of prayer as an ‘expenditure of physical and moral energy’, I investigate ethnographically the methods whereby prayerfulness comes about. I argue that charismatic prayer is not a discernible object of inquiry, but an ongoing field of ethical problematization driven forward by two modes of physical and moral expenditure: habit and anticipation. From this angle, spiritual maturity indicates not a durable ethical asset, but a continuous effort to produce homeostatic balance between these embodied temporal forces. I conclude by stressing how attention to the internal goods of prayer allow us to integrate vulnerability within religious projects, instead of reducing it to an external causal force, as in most deprivation theories of religion.

During 15 months of fieldwork among charismatic Christians in Ghana, I became close to a local evangelist called Richard Agyeman. I accompanied this enthusiastic man of god as he wandered throughout the streets of Accra spreading the gospel, and he eventually became my Bible instructor. Richard was a diligent but highly critical believer, reflexive enough to attend to my unusual questions and welcome my replicas as he strived to enlighten me on what makes an authentic convert (Garriott and O’Neill 2008). One day, maybe worn out by too many theological statements followed by conditional claims, Richard opted for a straightforward summary: a charismatic Christian is simply someone ‘ready to pray until Jesus returns’.

Richard corroborates Marshall’s (2009) argument that Pentecostal spirituality should be approached not only as a set of axiomatic truth-claims, but mostly as a ‘prescriptive apparatus’ (Marshall 2009, 13), a set of practices from which a specific type of subject is supposed to emerge teleologically or autopoetically (Asad 1993; Faubion 2001; Hirschkind 2006). This includes modes of self-fashioning, ways of speaking, moral norms, uses of time, performance genres (such as the testimony, preaching, prophecy, and praise and worship), and spiritual exercises, especially fasting and prayer.

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In a context like Ghana, in which Pentecostal spirituality has become part of mass-scale movement, it is important to highlight that such intrinsic connection between doing and being, praying and being a Christian, is rarely stable, so nothing is more natural than watching both disseminate jointly with great heterogeneity. Since the 1980s, a new version of Pentecostal spirituality – locally addressed as ‘charismatic Christianity’, but also named ‘Neopentecostal’ or ‘Pentecostal-charismatic’ by the scholarship – has grown far and wide in this country (Gifford 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). Alllying intense piety and evangelism, expectations about the miraculous power of faith, and an urban modern notion of Christian entrepreneurship and success, it has condensed into multiple shapes: small and medium churches, large denominations with a transnational reach, parachurch associations or ‘fellowships’, solo men and women of God, and a strong mediatic culture that suffuses the public sphere and has become deeply entangled with Ghanaian popular culture at large (Meyer 2015). Prayer has followed this lead, reaching out to every corner of society.

Charismatics pray ‘in tongues’ and ‘in their own words’. They pray individually or corporately: with family members, friends, neighbours, fellow congregants or total strangers. In Accra, I testified to prayer sessions happening in church buildings, households, tro-tros (public transports), marketplaces, hospitals, schools, bureaucracies, stadiums, public squares, and prayer retreats, such as Achimota forest. A more microscopic look captures similar heterogeneity. Prayer genres vary even during a single meeting or church service, ranging from placid adoration to excited worship, from thanksgiving to petition and intercession, from repentance to deliverance, from highly formalized creeds, such as the Lord’s Supper, to intense ‘travelling’ prayers, followed by sweat, shaking bodies, and loud glosso-lalic cries.

Intensity also varies at a biographical level. Some converts pray methodically and habitually, whereas others are more likely to be ‘prayed over’ by a pastor during times of need. These multiple shades of piety become inevitably entangled. Converts who do not lead a daily devotional life are the first to rely on a client-centred prayer economy (Soares 2005), in which faith is outsourced to ministers endowed with greater intercessory powers. Their privileged relationship with God becomes an asset exchanged for money offerings or gifts, inciting forms of ‘holy hustling’ (Werbner 2011), especially among charismatic prophets. Such a heavy reliance on intercession has led Gifford (2004, 155–156) to diagnose that ‘for a considerable number of Ghana’s charismatic churches, faith, giving, deliverance and the pastor’s gifts are much more than hard work in achieving victorious prosperity’. Indeed, as the charismatic movement as such, prayer in Ghana has become saturated by contingency. Although the revival has poured over the country by promising to wash away the past and present of believers, it cannot avoid being inflected by the spirit of neoliberal times, marked by economic informality and uncertainty, and a general crisis of legitimacy at the level of social imaginaries, including pervasive anxieties about fake and occultic ministers and converts.¹ From this point of view, Pentecostal prayers may appear reducible to desperate attempts to reach out for God’s miraculous power by converts who – trapped between survival and salvation – have lost any sense of midrange futurity (Guyer 2007). However, it should be equally clear that converts like Richard have also responded to their predicaments by attempting to stabilize more authoritatively the ethical boundaries lending legibility to their faith (Daswani 2013, 2016; Reinhardt 2016).

¹See Marshall (2009, 92–127) for similar dynamics in Nigeria.
Acknowledging that charismatics in Ghana display highly heterogeneous levels of personal engagement, all of them legitimate when it comes to representing this religious movement as an object of scholarly inquiry, I will draw here from the practices of ‘committed’ or ‘convicted’ Christians. As I will show, an ethnographic analysis of committed prayers does not sideline the contingencies of the everyday. Rather, it investigates how these can be at least partially tamed by a generative cycle of faith my interlocutors call ‘spiritual maturation’ (Reinhardt 2014, 318–22), a process coeval to, among other things, becoming ‘prayerful’.

My argument unfolds in three parts. First, in the celebratory spirit of this special issue, I explore Marcel Mauss’ (2003, 54) incidental definition of prayer as ‘an expenditure of physical and moral energy’, showing how it allows us to understand how one moves from conversion to commitment, from prayer to prayerfulness. Second, a closer ethnographic look at different prayer methods will lead me to investigate the relation between the habitual and charismatic components of Pentecostal prayers, and how this energetic force can expand into converts’ everyday lives through intensification, differentiation, and the accumulation of a variety of purposes. I argue that charismatic prayer is not a discernible object of inquiry, but an ongoing field of ethical problematization driven forward by two modes of prayer expenditure: habit and anticipation. Consequently, spiritual maturity indicates not a durable ethical asset, but a continuous effort to produce a homeostatic balance between these embodied temporal forces. I conclude by stressing how attention to the ‘internal goods’ (MacIntyre 2007) of prayer allow us to acknowledge the productive work of vulnerability within religious world-making, instead of reducing it to a passive and external causal force, as in most deprivation theories of religion.

**From conversion to commitment, from prayer to prayerfulness**

One of the peculiar traits of everyday charismatic discourse in Ghana is the tendency to recast, prayer, a practice, as an acquire personal quality and virtue: prayerfulness. Mature Christians were often characterized as prayerful subjects, a notion deemed coeval to moral traits such as stability, holiness, and trustworthiness, bestowing upon them prestige and greater potential for exemplarity. I want to explore here the double metamorphosis that underpins the process of seeking prayerfulness: first, how the practitioner changes by becoming attached generatively or autopoietically (Faubion 2001) to this practice, and second, how prayer itself shifts in nature by taking part in this organic unity, thus moving from occasional act to disposition (Figure 1).

In December 2011, I attended a youth meeting at International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), where a praise and worship leader, who was about to get married, shared with his audience some bits of practical knowledge about premarital chastity. He talked frankly about friendship between different sexes, saying that, although obviously allowed by the Bible, unmarried members should constantly examine themselves as their intimacy with someone from another sex grew. He was happy to disclose two personal rules that allowed him to successfully keep his virginity intact before marriage:

If it happens that you’re with your friend or your future wife, and you start feeling something strange, a strong attraction, dangerous thoughts, there are two rules. The first is run! [general laughter]. Seriously, go home. Go elsewhere. Don’t try to be holier than Jesus. If you can’t stand it, tell her you’ll be disappearing for a while. She’ll understand. Two, after going
home, pray. Attack the power of those thoughts, of those desires, with the power of prayer. Fill your head with prayers. Try to become prayerful.

The informal tone is vintage charismatic Christianity. Christianity must be appealing, rewarding, fun, which does not mean that the ‘walk with Christ’ is a smooth path. In some way, it is exactly because the Christian life is an ongoing struggle that it can never dissipate the comic. Holiness is an activity, not a state, especially if we take as an axiomatic truth the fallen nature of man and the unreachable model of Jesus. To be holy is to make the right choices when temptations arise and be aware that they will. It is a state of activity, not a deeply ingrained sobriety of body and soul, which can be taken for granted once it is achieved. As a reflex, the minister prescribed not heroic resilience against the urges of the flesh. His version of asceticism was not a tragic ‘inner struggle’, but the process of embracing very down to earth rules, among them, a way of using prayer that included but also transcended the notion of ‘talking to God’. Prayer appeared explicitly as a tool deemed effective and a good in itself, an exercise that should be performed both in moments of micro-crisis and as a habit.

In On Prayer ([1909] 2003), Marcel Mauss comes close to this emic perspective when he acknowledges that ‘every prayer is an act’, as ‘it implies an effort, an expenditure of
physical and moral energy in order to produce certain results. Even when it is entirely mental, with no words spoken, with scarcely even a gesture, it is still a voluntary movement or an attitude of the soul’ (Mauss 2003, 54). This is valid even when the format of prayer is consciously that of a communicative exchange, since ‘to speak is both to act and to think: that is why prayer gives rise to belief and ritual at the same time’ (Mauss 2003, 22). Mauss’ attention to the volitional core of prayer resonates fruitfully with recent anthropological works that take this practice explicitly as a matter of acquired skill.

For instance, Mahmood (2001) compares the cultivated docility of her prayerful Muslim interlocutors in Egypt to a pianist ‘who submits herself to the, at times painful, regime of disciplinary practice, as well as hierarchical structures of apprenticeship, in order to acquire the ability’ (Mahmood 2001, 210). In a similar vein, Luhrmann, Thisted, and Nusbaum (2010, 66) compare the exercises of ‘absorption’ practised by American evangelicals, whereby they attune themselves to hear God, to the process of ‘becoming a skilled athlete’ (see also Luhrmann 2012, 189–226). Despite the great gap separating those two traditions in terms of authority structures and devotional styles – one relying on formalized bodily movements and oral recitations, the other unfolding at the level of inner attention – they still display a shared vector of prayer-as-labour, an orchestrated expenditure of physical and moral energy.

Mauss himself struggled to reconcile the craftsmanship or athletics of prayer in this early work with his own methodological reduction of this practice to a specific type of traditional action: an ‘oral rite’ (Mauss 2003, 57). I believe this conceptual tension justifies much of the ambiguity that permeates his incomplete doctoral thesis, as reflected in distinctions between ‘rite’, ‘custom’, and ‘industrial technique’ (Mauss 2003, 49–57), followed by the recognition of a number of anomalies. It also persistently interrupts his evolutionary hypothesis about the dematerialization and individualization of prayer, which has to be constantly tempered with instances of ‘regression’ (Mauss 2003, 26).²

Not by chance, a few years later, in The Gift (1923–24), Mauss engages in what seems to be a piece of self-criticism, and evokes ‘prayer’ as the type of analytical object sociologists should abandon for the sake of a more encompassing study of concrete totalities:

> The historians feel and rightly object to the fact that the sociologists are too ready with abstractions and unduly separate the various elements of societies from one another. We must do as they do: observe what is given. Now, the given is Rome or Athens, the average Frenchmen, the Melanesian from this island or another, and not prayer or law by itself (my emphasis). After having of necessity divided things up too much, and abstracted from them, the sociologists must strive to reconstitute the whole. (Mauss 2002, 103)

As argues Karsenti (1997), during the post-war years, Mauss advanced a silent revolution in the French School. At this stage of his work, Durkheim’s *homo duplex –

²In *On Prayer*, Mauss deploys the same methodological style used by Durkheim to construct prayer as a singular object of inquiry, although with much more uneasiness and awareness about nuances and grey zones. He argues that the efficacy of ‘rites’ like prayer are sui generis vis-à-vis both customs and techniques. But he also admits that ‘it is in fact true that rites are linked with ordinary customs by an uninterrupted series of intermediate phenomena’ (Mauss 2003, 50) and that ‘sometimes it even happens that the rite is a technique’ (Mauss 2003, 52), for instance, the Jewish shechita. Prayer is eventually defined as in ‘continuous osmosis’ (Mauss 2003, 55) vis-à-vis material artefacts, thus with the technicality that characterizes ‘magical’ efficacy. This leads him to conclude that ‘there are all sort of degrees between incantations and prayer’ (Mauss 2003, 55). The same oscillation characterizes Mauss’ close association between prayer and orality: ‘Prayer is obviously an oral rite. This does not mean that there are not some doubtful cases which are occasionally difficult to classify’ (Mauss 2003, 56).
characterized by a gap between individual and social dimensions bridged by the moral force of society through sanction or ritual effervescence – gives room to *l’homme total*, an organic-psyche-social-historical-technical unit shaped in and through practice. Asad (1997) singles out *Techniques of the Body* (Mauss [1935] 1973) as the founding text of an ‘anthropology of practical reason’ (Asad 1997, 45), and argues that Mauss’ retrieval of the ancient notion of *hexis/habitus* consciously undermined the division between extra-ordinary ritual and ordinary practice by reframing the human body as a ‘self-developable means for achieving a range of human objects – from styles of physical movement (for example, walking), through modes of emotional being (for example, composure), to kinds of spiritual experience (for example, mystical states)’ (Asad 1997, 47–48; cf. Asad 1993, 55–82). The argument that the body is ‘man’s first and most natural instrument’ (Mauss 1973, 75) reclaims to habituation a generative component, thus avoiding its secular modernist reduction to sterile, imposed, and irrational ‘rote repetition’. Habitation might transfigure conventional norms into dispositions, thus giving rise to an embodied and enabling form of rationality-as-competency.

Indeed, the moral sentiment Pentecostals call commitment is best defined as an affective index of the emergence in one’s life of a Christian *habitus*, a moment in which prayer has moved from obligation to aptitude. Not by chance, whenever I asked my interlocutors to pinpoint the moment of commitment in their walk with Christ, they addressed me to shifts in temperament, such as becoming serene, more reflective, and ‘holiness conscious’, but mostly to the *how* of piety, that is, to a way of feeling-while-doing. In the last case, the spark of commitment was felt when they started feeling ‘at ease’, ‘flowing’, and literally found pleasure while embracing prescriptive practices that, at first, felt mandatory, like Bible reading, fasting, evangelism, voluntary church labour, and especially everyday prayer. In this sense, commitment was situated in the variable rhythms of life not only as a more sincere trust in Christianity’s truth-claims (Keane 2007), but mostly as what they called an ‘inner push’ to continue performing devotional practices. In sum, to be committed is not to believe differently, but to desire differently.

A token of this process came out forcefully during one of my conversations with Emmanuel, at that time a 32-year-old neophyte pastor enrolled at Lighthouse Chapel International’s (LCI) seminary. While reconstituting his trajectory, Emmanuel had shared about his struggle to quit smoking, a habit that lasted quite a few months after conversion. Emmanuel became born-again in 2006, when he first recited the sinner’s prayer, the evangelical pledge of conversion, in which one repents and ‘accepts Christ as Lord and personal saviour’. However, what followed was not a radical temporal discontinuity (Robbins 2007), but what Emmanuel called a ‘double life’, the life of a ‘church goer’. When he went to church on Sundays, he felt ‘moved’ by the preacher’s message, and wanted to change and embrace Christ fully. But when the service ended and he went back home, he would act just like he did before, which included smoking, among other ‘unchristian habits’. According to Emmanuel, his Christianity ‘stayed in church’, which is a basic definition of a ‘church goer’.

Emmanuel attributed his double-life to the fact that he had not changed his social networks after conversion, so he naturally mimicked their behavioural patterns. This situation started changing when Emmanuel found a ‘spiritual father’, an assistant pastor at his LCI temple, who started monitoring Emmanuel’s Christian life, to the point of calling
him daily on the phone to remind him of praying, reading the Bible, and attending church during weekday meetings. At first, Emmanuel felt annoyed, but, with time and insistence, he submitted to the pastor’s interpellations and created with him a bond of spiritual kinship (Reinhardt 2014). Today Emmanuel defines himself as a ‘pure son of Lighthouse Chapel’.

By acting as a spiritual father or mentor, the assistant pastor set the conditions for Emmanuel to mature in his faith through ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave and Wenger 1999) in church life: first, by becoming an active member and lay leader, eventually, by becoming an apprentice minister. ‘After ministry meeting, I used to go to visitations and evangelism with him. I was exposed to how a pastor lives. My pastor started training me.’ In consonance, Emmanuel shifted from a position of being only ‘prayed over’ by ministers to actually ‘praying for’ other members at home and at church. Christian practices became part of his daily routines, and Emmanuel started feeling committed and prayerful.

To my surprise, smoking appeared once again later in our conversation, when Emmanuel had long shifted the focus to his current spiritual life. Trying to summarize the place occupied by prayer in it, he declared: ‘You know … today, the relation I have with prayer is like the one I had with cigarettes when I was in the world. I just can’t see myself without it. I miss it so much when I don’t have time to pray. I feel empty. I just love it.’

As many of my committed interlocutors, Emmanuel had found in daily prayer a place to lose and find himself anew. His analogy between praying and smoking is telling in many ways, and reiterates widely shared traces among this charismatic sub-group, such as the tendency to demystify piety through parallelisms with secular practices. The reverse is also true, and converts can be accused of ‘worshiping’ their football team, secular TV celebrities or even their families, that is, missing the point that Christianity is about finding in Christ a paramount focus of moral and physical expenditures. The main purpose of this rhetorical move is to reframe the secular/religious or unchristian/Christian divide not as a matter of belief or its lack, but mostly of allegiance and submission to alternative lifestyles. Albeit incommensurable, these lifestyles can only unfold on a single plan of existence – ‘the world’ – so they become a question of practical investment.

By evoking the self-justified pleasure of smoking, Emmanuel redefined prayer as a curious form of gratifying consumption without a discernible object, like an embodied cigarette, showing how commitment has meant to him a shift from Christianity as obligation to Christianity as a self-rewarding desire for god, a holy addiction.

**Methodic communion: a life of prayer**

In order to achieve commitment one needs methods. Those are often multimodal, and can be arranged by converts as they draw from a plethora of prayer manuals sold in churches and popular bookstands, engage with trial-and-error, and acquire practical knowledges at church services, prayer ministries, discipleship programmes, fellowships, Bible schools, and relations of mentorship. As shown by Emmanuel’s path to prayerfulness, the social infrastructure whereby prayer skills are transmitted is a condition of possibility to this process. However, I will focus here mostly on the techniques travelling through it.
My emphasis on method and habituation might indeed surprise those equipped with a notion of charisma that highlights its givenness and spontaneity. The charismatic component of these prayer methods is, after all, evident, endowing prayer with a rather ambiguous distribution of agency. Who prays after all? According to Csordas (2001), during Catholic charismatic prayers, 'humans both speak and listen to the deity. The 'lord' should be 'present' within a group or with an individual in prayer' (Csordas 2001, 175). Luhrmann (2008) approaches the overlapping between communication and communion in charismatic spiritual exercises through Lévy-Bruhl's notion of 'participation', stressing the co-fusion between human vessels and divinity during prayer. This participatory dimension is never opposed to questions of cultivation (Brahinsky 2012), and in this section I also look at how committed Pentecostals articulate methodically the everyday labour of prayer with its charismatic potentialities.

When we first met in 2011, Asamoah was 27 years old and a lay leader at Royalhouse Chapel International. He became committed at 17, during his last year of secondary education, after finding the initial coordinates for his walk with Christ through the fellowship Scripture Union, which operates in Ghana’s primary and secondary schools.3

At Scripture Union, I was told that I had to read the Bible very carefully every day and pray a lot. I embraced this lifestyle. Actually, I lived a life of prayer. I prayed a lot during those years. I became really committed, prayerful, you know? Besides that, I also liked to meditate on scriptures. Having my quiet time. Since those days, I also developed this rule that, if rains or shines, I follow. Thursdays and Fridays, I fast from six to six. There are also times when I’m about to eat and God says: ‘don’t eat’. I wake up in the morning and I’m about to take some tea, and God says: ‘don’t’. I can hear it vividly! It’s not my mind. I can sense it. It’s spontaneous. [Does it ever change?] Yes, it can change, but only my personal rule. Since I set that rule, I fulfilled it in about 90% of the times. Sometimes I disobey, when I’m going to a place with a group and I’m offered food, so I can’t … But the other one is spontaneous and it happens whenever God wants. I can’t disobey.

Similarly to Emmanuel, Asamoah became committed by dedicating greater portions of his daily routines to relatively fixed devotional practices, establishing habits that lasted and today allow him to live in the world without belonging to it. This state of partial alienation has been achieved not through monastic seclusion, but by taming the contingencies of the everyday through a mix of rule-governed behaviour and a cultivated sensibility to the Holy Spirit, understood as an active and malleable expression of the will of God.

Asamoah mentioned the spiritual exercise called quiet time. Scripture Union was probably the first institution to introduce in Ghana this mix of silent prayer, Bible reading and meditation, and inner testimony, whereby converts activate and cultivate their personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. The result of periodic quiet times is the capacity to hear God during the performance and the everyday, a phenomenon that assumes various somatic forms, always condensed phonocentrically around speaking and hearing. One hears God through audible revelations, but also through visions, dreams, and inner prompts to do certain things and to refrain from others. It is

3Originally a British parachurch organization, Scripture Union dates back to the late 19th century. It was established in Ghana in 1952, soon becoming autonomous. It started growing exponentially especially since the 1980s. Taking advantage of the porosity of the post-structural adjustment state, SU has established units in more than 80% of the country’s educational system. Most of the major charismatic leaders in contemporary Ghana were nurtured by SU (Adubofour 1994; Barker and Boadi-Siaw 2005).
common among pious charismatics in Ghana to respond to situations requiring a decision with a concise ‘I will pray about it’.

Scripture Union also encourages its pupils to keep a quiet time log, which Asamoah still does, where they are supposed to register date, time, scriptures read, and revelations received. Those can be highly formalized, as in Figure 2, or any regular notebook.

As a charismatic form of ‘self-writing’ (Foucault 1997), quiet time logs are necessarily heteroglossic, composed of both personal reflections and reported dialogues between vessel and divinity. They are mnemonic reservoirs for revelational/Biblical knowledge and a way of straightening one’s ‘fellowship’ with the Spirit. South African Bible student Akhona, from Lighthouse Chapel International’s seminary, exemplified how this technique can expand into other contexts: ‘Sometimes I pray, I start reading [the Bible], and he drops a word in my spirit, so I write. Sometimes I’m asleep and he gives me a word through a dream. That’s the first word that I get, and then I wake up. It’s a sentence, a statement about to begin. It could be a scripture, a word of encouragement, so I also go to my diary and write’. According to Akhona, the Spirit of God operates in ‘its own time’, and a revelation can be just a unit in a much larger syntagma. Writing helps her to slowly reconstruct divine utterances linearly and seek for interpretation, a process that often reintegrates revelations generatively into more prayer, meditation, and writing, for instance, when she ‘prays about’ a dream, that is, asks the Spirit for an interpretation. The notion of praying about a revelation in order to receive more revelations exemplifies well how the cyclical temporality of habit can be catalysed, instead of interrupted, by charisma.

Figure 2. Scripture Union’s quiet time logbook.
Asamoah also called attention above to the importance of fasting. Fasting is intrinsically connected to prayer, and it is a common adage among committed charismatics that ‘fasting without prayer is dieting’. Continuing with our talk, Asamoah revealed that he spent six years of his born-again life without speaking in tongues. As it tends to be the case, it was through fasting that he received his Holy Ghost baptism with the evidence of tongues:

For about six years I was serious in Christ. I was having personal revelations, but I was not speaking in tongues. One day, at church, I learned that some Christian brothers had a place where they went to pray. It’s a mountain at the Ashanti region called Atwea. I told them: why not? We all went to the place. We left on Thursday and stayed until Sunday. Only prayer and fasting. Just some little water and juice, but even the juice, you don’t take it in the morning or afternoon, you take it at night, maybe after seven. We went there for prayers and that’s when I received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. After that my prayer life improved day by day.

As a form self-abasement, fasting is a generative means for both cultivating the virtue of humility and heightening one’s spiritual sensibility. Charismatics in Ghana frame fasting as one of the many forms of ‘yielding’ to the Spirit, like prayer itself, both having greater power when combined. Similarly to ‘prayerfulness’, my interlocutors always used ‘yielding’ in English, even when they spoke Akan. This phenomenon testifies to how global Pentecostalism travels not only through prayer techniques, but also through the frames of recognition that follow these practices, that is, through forms of metapragmatic awareness (Verschueren 2000). Csordas, for instance, defines submission among American Catholic charismatics as ‘the proper attitude to authority, also a synonym for ‘yielding’ in that one submits or yield to gifts [i.e. accepts gifts] given by God’ (Csordas 2001, 196). Based upon ethnographic work among the Assemblies of God in America, Brahinsky notices that ‘Pentecostals don’t speak of cultivation, preferring ‘yielding’ as a more God-centred depiction of spiritual experience, one that can open to an experience of rupture’ (Brahinsky 2013, 405).

Through fasting, Asamoah was yielding to the Spirit. He was displaying concretely his desire to speak in tongues by offering himself sacrificially to God, who eventually attended his calls. Generally, yielding gives a spiritual inflection to obedience, and can be translated as the process of gesturing passively-actively to the Holy Spirit’s sovereign agency. One cannot produce a spiritual gift, a grace or a miracle, since these are all freely given by God, but one can yield to them or accept them, since submission is required to actualize divine promises. By highlighting the agentive powers of submission, notions such as yielding allow charismatics to acknowledge the importance of religious pedagogy without reducing its fruits to human ‘works’. In a way, it downgrades ‘works’ in order to embrace and prescribe them.

Such space of relative alienation between a devotional practice’s economy of agency and its pedagogical means of cultivation legitimizes interesting phenomena in Ghana, such as the popular method of yielding to the gift of tongues by speaking out of faith. That is how Abanawa, a lay leader at Lighthouse Chapel International, narrated quite unashamedly how he literally learned how to speak in tongues:

It was five years ago. We were four or five. Our pastor taught us about the Holy Ghost baptism. We also had the desire to receive it and he prayed for us and by faith we spoke in tongues. [By faith? What does it mean?]. Well, I just spoke out of faith. It’s not that
something spectacular happened to me or I felt something unusual. This might happen, but it was not the case. I just spoke out because I saw the pastor speaking. It’s like a baby. As the baby is growing, he will hear the parent talking and he will imitate. We do the same. The pastor was like my father in church. I also desired the gift, and he taught us about the gift and prayed for us. So I spoke out of faith. Then it grows, like with the baby. It becomes more elaborate. It was just ‘small small’ in the beginning, and now it’s like I can’t stop doing it. You realize that this thing is real. It’s not something I’m making up. At the beginning it was out of faith, but later I realized this is something supernatural.

By speaking out of faith and watching his gift grow, Abanawa was not only nurturing nature, or cultivating a habitus. He was simultaneously attuning himself as a vessel to be led by Spirit of God. His narrative summarizes the basic principles involved in this unintuitive learning process: first, learning about this spiritual gift and receiving Biblical evidence about its reality; second, abiding to apostle Paul’s command and eagerly desiring spiritual gifts as legitimate Christian promises; and third, yielding to these promises concretely, in this case, by expressing his desire for God while imitating his spiritual father. As a frame for recognition, yielding preserves the absolute givenness of charisma while organizing apparently dissonant practices, such as fasting, prayer, and mimesis, into a single meta-pragmatic category during performance.

Once the gift is activated, it literally grows, both materially and spiritually. Its supernatural origins were identified by practitioners both through the feeling of ‘flowing’ more during prayer, that is, long spontaneous performances, or by noting phonetic shifts. Amorine, a Kenyan student at Lighthouse Chapel’s Bible school, exemplified this dynamic: ‘Yes. I used to speak only “one tongue”, like mamamamamam, but as I continued to speak, it became more diverse and complex, like cha-la-ha-ba-le-ra-ka-ri-an-ta-be-le-re.’ Different, but complementarily vis-à-vis the self-rewarding feeling of flow enabled by optimal performance (Turner 1974), spiritual maturation was materially marked in this case by an increase in phonetic complexity, which indicates that what was once an immature, baby-like, faith-charged copy has flourished simultaneously as a competency and an authentic divine infusion. Amorine’s unwillingness to oppose enskilment and charisma was manifested by her very unapologetic miming of tongues during our interview, this time as an example, not necessarily an act of faith. Like prayer addict Emmanuel and tongues emulator Abanawa, Amorine was unconcerned with mystifying charismatic piety in order to assert its authenticity.

But why do charismatics pray in tongues? According to Mauss, ‘sounds, breath and gestures can be prayer, that is, long spontaneous performances, or by noting phonetic shifts. That is certainly the case with Pentecostal spirituality, whose sacramental personhood is based on the pneumatic conception of the Holy Spirit as ‘inspired breath’ (DeAbreu 2009, 162). Glossolalia is a primary example of charismatics’ spiritualized engagement with what Merleau-Ponty (2005, 202–234) calls the ‘gestural’ nature of speech or the fact that speech is the fruit of a holistic apparatus, which integrates the mind and linguistic signs pragmatically and dynamically with breath, voice, face, gestures, and motility. Whereas quiet time indeed coordinates dialogue and communion in more intimate and discernible ways, through a dialogical emphasis on hearing God and feelings of tranquillity, glossolalia seems to implode any possible distinction between participant

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4Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit’ (1 Cor 14: 1).
roles, since the Holy Spirit is directing the vessel as she prays (De Certeau 1996). In con-
sonance, the affective intensities and moral moods (Throop 2014) of glossolalia are much
more ecstatic and outward-oriented, inspired breath acquiring thermodynamic qualities
related to heat and fire as the Holy Spirit moves across individual or synchronized
bodies in prayer.

This simultaneously charismatic, pneumatic, and embodied perspective on language
helps us clarify why almost all my interlocutors pointed to a main factor when it came
to justify how the gift of tongues has made them more prayerful: glossolalia increases
the length of prayer. Basically, by praying in tongues, this spiritual language of bodily
intensities, they could pray longer and more feverously, instead of distracting themselves
while struggling to find words and quotations to compose prayers ‘in their own words’.
This athletic concern with duration appears quite explicitly in the testimony of Love, a
member of the small Compassion Ministries, in the neighbourhood of Darkuman:

Before, when I prayed only in my own words, I was just waking up, thanking God, and
moving on with the day. Then I made a target to pray for twenty minutes. After that, I
moved to thirty minutes, but I could not grow anymore. I used to get tired. I started repeating
myself. After I received the tongues, I was praying for at least one hour. This became a rule. In
the morning, during my devotion, I want to pray in tongues for at least one hour. I read a
K. C. Price book [American minister], where he talks about this. […] I also started using
this method I found in his book. I called people and asked them: what are your problems?
Let me pray for you. I wrote the names down in a notebook, with their specific problems.
So I mentioned the names, prayed for them in tongues, and ‘cancelled’ the issues, using
the name of Jesus. […] I marked the date, names, and requests and ticked them when I
was done. I did that for a long time to build up my prayer life. Today people call me and
we pray over the phone. I can pray for four, five, six hours. I love it.

Love’s path to prayerfulness was analogous to athletic enskilment. This is not simply an
etic analogy. It is corroborated emically, for instance, when Ghanaian churches call their
month-long prayer vigils ‘prayerthons’ or when converts hierarchize peers and ministers
informally in terms of ‘prayer stamina’. What matters in this case is ‘spending more time
with the Lord’, and human words, even when sincere and Biblically sound, can stand on
one’s way. Love expanded the length of his prayers by methodically keeping himself
accountable through a prayer list. Whereas in Akhona’s case, self-writing was about height-
ening spiritual discernment during quiet times, in Love’s case, it was about setting marks
to be reached, while prolonging his prayers as much as he could.

Length in glossolalia finds a charismatic inflection as soaking in the Spirit. For instance,
Ebenezer, a member of Lighthouse Chapel International’s prayer ministry, told me about
the uncanny habit he developed of ‘speaking in silent tongues’ during his daily routines,
that is, praying through inner voice glossolalia while taking a public transport, doing dom-
estic work, or walking on the streets of Accra. According to Ebenezer, this practice allowed
him to remain as long as possible ‘soaked’ in the Spirit, thus making him feel ‘safer’,
‘holier’, and ‘stronger’.

Similar to most of my prayerful interlocutors, Ebenezer justified this practice without
much attention to more conventional distinctions between morality (being holier, or
closer to Christ as a virtuous model) and spiritual intercession and empowerment
(being safer and stronger against evil). From a charismatic stance, both these goods
stem from God’s sovereign guidance and everyday influence, so the human labour in
soaking in the Spirit is ultimately only expenditure or, again, yielding. The practice straightens this desired hierarchical relation while attributing to the Spirit any positive outcomes, be those moral or intercessory.

Ebenezer’s way of accounting for soaking indicates that prayer is not oriented by a single function. It is a laminated practice, which, as I will show later, is vital to understand some of the tensions between prayerfulness and expectations about divine intercession. But before I do that, I would like to mention one last prayer method leading to lengthier prayers, understood as a path to both ethical enskilment and intensification of charisma: praying against demonic opposition or ‘spiritual warfare’ prayers (Butticci 2013; Marshall 2016). Although the doctrine of ‘spiritual battle theology’ underpinning these prayers has a global reach, the special emphasis they have acquired in African Pentecostalism has often been taken as a sign of its indigenization. From this angle, the popularity of spiritual warfare prayers would exemplify how Christianity in Africa has absorbed African Traditional Religion’s relational sense of personhood, based more on ongoing ritual negotiations with spiritual powers and an expiatory attitude vis-à-vis the problem of evil than a clear-cut rupture with these forces, followed by the internalization of evil as sin (Cox 1995; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005). In contrast, I would like to highlight how the agonistic notion that Christian life is an ongoing struggle against evil can be itself a path to prayerfulness.

Evangelist Daniel was a 30 years old ‘prayer warrior’ when I first met him at Compassion Ministries. Daniel was born in the Volta Region, within an extended family that hosted in their compound house an important town shrine. He grew up observing the activities of his paternal grandmother, the main keeper of the shrine: ‘All I knew about life was pouring libation and doing sacrifices. I knew no other God than the small Gods’. Ewe shrines are inherited in the family, and Daniel had also established more intimate ties with this spiritual entity. When he was born, sickness was prevailing in the household. As a response, oracles were consulted, and the lesser god declared the desire to enter in what he called, through post-conversion language, a ‘covenant’ with the new family member. In order to appease the divinity, Daniel was dedicated to the shrine through a ceremony that left a scarification on his belly.

Daniel eventually became born-again, abandoned his family, and moved to Accra. Similar to Emmanuel and many others, his path toward spiritual maturation was long and crooked, and he made sure to acknowledge the centrality of a number of Christian peers and mentors in it, who today serve as a surrogate family. Knowledgeable about his background and having been exposed to the deep inscription of the past in his own body, I could not avoid leading our conversation to issues of demonic influences in his contemporary life. Is the past all gone? Apparently, far from it:

Sometimes they call me from the village and say they’re praying for me to their god, to make me prosperous. But the Bible says that every good gift comes from above, and these are idols. Worship no other god except Jesus, or God. It’s like I’m in-between gods. These people are pouring libation to the shrine and calling my name and I am here in Accra calling on the heavenly father, so I’m in-between. Evil can come on my way; good can also come on my

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5 A classic defence of the opposition between defilement and sin, expiation and confession, is Ricoeur (1967). For an alternative view on the problem of evil among the Pauline communities, a sacred prototype to much of contemporary Pentecostalism, see Caird (2003). See Pype (2011) for a careful ethnographic analysis of Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality in Africa that highlights the dynamic overlapping of confession and expiation or ‘deliverance’.
way. [ … ] As much as they’re calling my name, I’m also calling my God. The power of God supersedes any other power, so what they do back in the village will come to nothing. Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, has died for me. If somebody tells you that when you’re a Christian, you’re free from all those things [demonic influences], it’s a lie. They’ll still fight you. ‘Sit at my right hand side, until I’ve made them a footstool under your feet’ [Psalm 110:1, cited by Jesus himself in Mtt 22:44]. Those are words of Jesus Christ. It’s something they have been doing for generations, so there’s no way you could say you’re exempted from it.

Daniel’s argument seems to corroborate Meyer’s (1998) point about how the cyclical recourse to ‘deliverance’ rituals in Ghana jeopardizes the temporal discontinuity of spiritual rebirth, which she interprets not as a continuation with traditional religion, but as reflecting the ambivalences of an individualistic spirituality in a modern, post-colonial context. After all, Daniel reads his relation with the ‘heavenly Father’ as an inverse mirror of the traditional practices his kin address on his behalf to the shrine, a tie that persists despite his own chosen exile from the family. The past has assumed a haunting presence in his life, not despite, but because of spiritual battle theology. It was not disavowed by conversion. It was agonistically repressed, remaining ‘under his feet’ with the aid of divine authority.

But Daniel also departs from Meyer’s argument when he situates his ongoing ‘power struggle’ beyond the church site and the ritualized interference of men of God. He was never exposed to a formal ‘deliverance’ ceremony, and made sure to highlight that his war against ‘principalities and powers’ (Ephesians 6: 12) has been waged in the everyday of piety, through Bible reading, prayer, and mentorship.

When you look back to what you were doing first, it is always with you. Now I know their secret, but as long as I fight them, they’re also trying to draw me back to their covenant [ … ] [I asked: It never ends?]. The effects? They end! Now I don’t have these experiences anymore, the demonic dreams and attacks. I was filled by the Spirit, and also started feeding in the Word regularly. I memorized scriptures. The Bible encourages me a lot. I got close to men of God, received advice, and improved my prayer life. This made me a little mature, and the attacks stopped. So I’d say that the Word, the Spirit, and prayer can deliver you.

Evil emanating ‘from the village’ is indeed an ongoing potentiality in Daniel’s life, but so far it has not jeopardized his certainty about spiritual rebirth. Instead of the decay of a Christian ‘symbolic of sin’ into a ‘symbolic of defilement’ (Ricoeur 1967), David has converted evil and the past into a negative motor for increasing investment in his Christianity. Against the possibility of being predated upon and ‘eaten’ by witches, he has developed his own spiritual diet, becoming full with the Word and the Spirit, and ‘strong’ in prayer.

I can’t even remember the last day I got into a fight. I’ve never fought anyone since I became a Christian. I don’t beat anyone. I fall on my knees and pray. Our body is the temple of God, and the temple of God has nothing to do with darkness. My father is a pagan, not my enemy. The enemy is behind him. So I don’t fight the physical body, I fight the spirit in him, and I use the weapon of prayer.

Militaristic intensity is transpired in Daniel’s transfiguration into his ‘prayer warrior’ persona. During the long prayer sections I experienced in his company, his short thin body and calm countenance were infused by a sacred fury that often scared me. Gutural glossolalia, sweat, and physical exhaustion signal that Daniel has converted travelling prayers into a constitutive part of his Christianity, of his personal prayer economy. The subject of faith here is neither a blank slate, as it retains the past, nor
a self-possessed individual, but a subject that constitutes itself through continuous self-donation, of body and soul, to God. Evil has itself been converted into an ongoing fuel to Christian expenditure, transforming the past into a piety-increasing negativity, hence also a catalyst of prayerfulness.

Habit, anticipation, and the quest for ethical homeostasis

The scenes and methods I reconstructed above exemplify merely a section of the vast devotional apparatus used by committed charismatics to advance in their everyday a methodic communion with the Spirit. By orchestrating the holistic labour of prayer in time and space, converts mature in their faith as their prayer arsenal grows in close consonance. With maturity, prayers expand in length and differentiate in purposes and styles: from attacking dangerous thoughts to petitionary lists, from intimate quiet times to glossolalia. The organic link of subject and practice within a ‘prayer life’ provides converts with a space of relative alienation from ‘the world’, as well as moments of deeper communion with the Spirit. I also showed how demonic attacks are not necessarily hindrances to spiritual growth (although they certainly can be), as they might catalyse prayerfulness agonistically.

In this section I would like to extract from these resources a model. This is not a clear-cut definition of charismatic prayer, for instance, an ‘oral rite’, but an ethnographically based attempt to recast this practice as an arrangement of temporal forces, an economy of expenditures, whose patterns can either reinforce or undermine each other. This perspective assumes that prayer is not a discernible object of inquiry, but is itself a field of ethical problematization.6

Habituation or the ‘establishment in our nature of a rule of action’ (Peirce 1955, 28) is the first form of prayer expenditure I would like to highlight. This is the process of reinvesting one’s physical and moral efforts toward God through generative, Self-making repetition. There is no better example than emic notions, such as prayerfulness, which refer simultaneously to a practice, a prescribed virtue and a desired personal disposition. Prayerful Christians are those who have learned to acknowledge the ‘internal goods’ (MacIntyre 2007) of prayer. As such, this practice provides maturing subjects with a practical means for (against and with all the odds) reclaiming what MacIntyre (2007, 239) calls ‘the unity of a human life’, ‘a life that can be conceived and evaluated as a whole’. I believe that, by defining a Christian as somebody ‘ready to pray until Jesus returns’, evangelist Richard was calling attention to the same ethically informed quest for coherence between being and doing, a process that evades sociological definitions of Christianity as an identity or social role.7

The project of living a unitary life includes a more distracted ‘ordinary ethics’, ‘relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule [… ] and happening without calling undue attention to itself’ (Lampek 2010, 2), but, as I have shown, it still constantly brings to the fore teleological models for feeling, doing, and being (Hirschkind 2006), at times, quite rationalized ones. If the normativity of this prayer apparatus reshapes subjects by first

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6See Reinhardt (2016) for a similar methodological approach to the problem of Pentecostal materiality in Ghana.
7According to MacIntyre (2007, 37), social dramaturges, such as Ervin Goffman, miss the moral dimension of subject formation by defining the subject as ‘no more than “a peg” on which the clothes of the role are hung’.
countering and controlling ‘worldly desires’, its final aim is to engender Christian desires. It implies that prayer can become a peculiar self-feeding mechanism, converting expenditure into more energy: commitment or conviction, which is nothing but desire to pray more, to evangelize more, to preach more, to work more ‘for the Kingdom’.

From this angle, experiences of ‘flowing’ during prayer articulate the intrinsic moral goods of prayers as self-rewarding performance, whereas spiritual experiences of ‘soaking in the Spirit’ actualize charisma as duration, making it animate the lengthily temporality of habituation. This is evoked by a testimony of bishop Dag Heward-Mills registered in one of the textbooks used in Lighthouse Chapel’s seminary. After inviting his readers to develop methods that will allow them to ‘pray habitually without even thinking of what you are doing’ (Heward-Mills 2007, 96), the bishop recalls his first years as a born-again Christian. ‘Many years ago, I remember fasting for three days. By the third day, I was so weak that I could not rise out of bed.’ At that time, his prayer life was not yet mature, so he fell ill and had to be taken to a hospital. He tried again a few months later, but now waking up at 4 am and spending a couple of hours in prayer before the day begun. On the third day: ‘I felt as I had had something to eat […] I had such strength because I had been more prayerful. My Christian friend, prayer is a supernatural act that provides strength even when your flesh is weak’ (Heward-Mills 2007, 108).

Heward-Mills’s testimony addresses almost literally the nurturing potential of prayer expenditure, implying that ascetic renunciation of the world (fasting) can be transfigured into an *askesis* (Foucault 2005), an empowering form of embracing the world while denying it. In this case, it does so because fasting and prayer are basically modalities of yielding to the Spirit’s energetic force. This process of self-transfiguration through intensification of charisma is at the heart of charismatics’ revivalist ethos, and it might unfold at an individual level, as a series of ‘personal revivals’ reanimating bodily-temples, but also at a corporate level (Robbins 2009; DeAbreu 2009), a topic I could not develop here. Spiritual techniques can also become highly governmentalized, directing physical and moral expenditure and modulating charisma habitually according to specific institutional channels and projects (Reinhardt 2014). Generally, my point is that what, where, with whom one prays, as well as the methods one deploys, define the kind of Christian one becomes. Evangelist Daniel’s violent prayers make him a specific type of charismatic subject, whose militaristic engagement with the Spirit my other interlocutors would recognize and empathize, but not necessarily identify with.

A second mode of prayer expenditure that pervaded my ethnographic cases was anticipation. Although carrying important elective affinities with the Aristotelian tradition, privileged by MacIntyre, in which the good life (*eudaimonia*) flourishes as individuals seek goods teleologically inscribed in practices, Pentecostal spirituality is composed by acts of faith (Marshall 2009, 128–165), defined by the apostle Paul as ‘confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see’ (Hebrews 11:1). As a religion of salvation, Christianity introduces into ethical teleology a series of promises with transcendent origins and ends, like communion with the Holy Spirit and eternal life. In this sense, as Christians in general, Pentecostals struggle to conciliate ‘a life other’ (*une autre vie*) (ethics) with ‘another life’ (*une vie autre*) (salvation and grace) (Foucault 2011, 325–342), that is, habit and anticipation. If practices such as quiet time and soaking in the Spirit afford great proximity between vessel and Spirit, these experiences of intensified communion can only be a temporary restoration of a broken link with transcendence.
Returning to evangelist Richard’s opening remarks, we might claim that the notion of ‘praying until Jesus returns’ also implies that prayer, this generative marker of proper Christianity, is doomed to expire. As a post-Fall technology, prayer has a mid-range place in the history of salvation, and implies alienation. Adam was holy, but he did not pray, at least before he disobeyed. Moreover, once Christ returns and opens the ‘Book of Life’, prayer loses purpose, since the moment of decision has come. In sum, at least normatively, prayer can only carry intrinsic goods if recognized in its precariousness, as an attempt to bridge an unbridgeable gap. Mauss (2003, 55) highlights how contingency governs the very distinction between prayer and incantation, beseeching and conjuring, evoking and invoking, as it signals that the efficacy of prayer techniques is predicated elsewhere, on a transcendental force. Without delay or the possibility of misfiring, prayer is not prayer, it is magic.

It is exactly at the intersection of habituation and faithful anticipation that charismatic prayer unveils itself as what it ultimately is: a field of ongoing ethical problematization. This economy of expenditures becomes even harder to pilot when anticipations are amplified by adding to the quest for ‘a life other’ and ‘another life’ a quite erratic catalyst of hope: a prosperous life. Expectations about miracles and material breakthroughs might help one’s devotional life blossom and spread like a sacred weed into the profane everyday. But they might also induce frustrations, negative feedback into habituation, and the monetary delegation of one’s prayer expenditures to third parties: charismatic ministers, figures who display an ambiguity akin to that of Catholic saints (Coleman 2009).

Ministers can be models for Christian flourishing, but they can also become intercessors hindering one’s personal relationship with Christ and the Spirit. Despite all the promises of worldly restoration in terms of charismatic communion or prosperity, hearing god and finding a job, Pentecostal spirituality, like Christianity in general, cannot but rely on alienation in order necessitate itself, which indicates that the whole ‘walk with Christ’, from conversion to commitment, from prayer to prayerfulness, is an ethical teleology unfolding between a ‘right now’ (Coleman 2011) and a ‘not yet’.

As defined by my interlocutors, spiritual maturity is exactly the attempt to juggle with these potentialities while striving to make them produce positive feedback upon each other.8 During our conversations, evangelist Richard never questioned the intercessory efficacy of prayers uttered by both converts and ministers. Moreover, as with most individuals cited above, Richard simply could not circumvent the obvious material vulnerabilities affecting his daily routines. He was indeed always ready to give testimony about the moral and material rewards Jesus had gifted him with, and prayed frequently for more. He also had his preferable men of God, and attended their intercessory church services periodically. And yet Richard was permanently concerned about ‘balancing’ his hopes with prayerfulness, making of those different potentialities part of a single lifestyle. It was from this homeostatic space between habit and anticipation, and not from an external point of view, that Richard articulated his criticism of charismatic ‘excesses’, or the tendency of some ministers to capitalize upon their followers’ desires without dedicating equal attention to nurturing them into the new life. By doing so, they operate more as

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8For a comparative reference on spiritual maturity and prayer among American evangelicals, see Luhrmann (2012, 267–299).
what he called ‘miracle makers’ than ‘teachers’, meaning that a sterile submission to men of God might also abort the empowering effects of submission to God.

Committed Christians manage emergent conflicts between miracles and piety by building homeostatic series in their devotional life, like going to a highly intercessory ‘miracle service’ before travelling to a prayer retreat, being both ‘prayed over’ and prayerful. In this case, maturity is not individualistic autonomy, but the capacity to oscillate wisely between the various ethical stances (Keane 2010) that compose a way of life. I observed a similar dynamics during church services, when powerful pastors eventually asked to be ‘prayed over’ by church members, giving a public reminder of the shared vulnerability binding ministers and followers.

Another strategy of ethical homoeostasis is managing the inner economy of prayers as laminated practices, that is, praying petitionary or intercessory prayers that retain their charismatic and teleological substratum. Take Love’s highly rationalized prayer list, a long collection of his peers’ anticipations. What looks awkward in this method is that it seems to be crossing the line between convicted pragmatism and cold instrumentality. Was Love merely manipulating the anticipation of his fellow Christians as a springboard to build up his prayer muscles? Not necessarily. As Love mentioned the names, prayer requests, and prayed in tongues he was communicating with divinity as an addressee, and eventually asking for effective results. Simultaneously, he was soaking, thus expanding his communion with the Spirit, which prayed through him. Finally, Love was becoming prayerful by exercising prayer as a habit.

Love’s intercessory, habitual, and divinely infused prayers can only make sense if judged as a laminated practice. This model helps us acknowledge how praying for protection or prosperity (deemed more instrumental from a secular perspective) and praying for holiness, spiritual gifts, or salvation (deemed more ethical and spiritual) can be framed as fundamentally the same practice articulating discernible purposes. While praying for a job, fertility, or a visa for oneself or others, the subject is manifesting actively her submission to God, thus developing the habit of prayer and spending more time ‘soaked’ in His presence. This helps us understand why many of those who never actually receive their miracles still remain ‘strong in prayer’, since this practice’s internal goods can be overlapped with other aims and yet remain dissociable from them.

I am aware of how the problem of having prayers answered or not is more complex than this, including issues of fate, suffering, and evil summarized by Max Weber’s ‘theodicy’ problem: ‘how could a power that is said to be both omnipotent and good have created such an irrational world of unmerited suffering, unpunished injustice, and incorrigible stupidity?’ (Weber 2004, 86). I am simply underlining how faith in divine intervention often unfolds within a more complex set of expectations and indeed partial fulfilsments, which must include the notion that prayer carries internal goods and self-rewarding experiences. Without such awareness, it is hardly possible to see charismatic prayers in Ghana as not completely enmeshed in the near-future temporality of survival, a topic I address as I conclude.

**Concluding remarks: how faith grows**

According to Robbins (2004, 123), one of the problems with deprivation theories about the success of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in the Global South is that by focusing
exclusively on why this spirituality has grown – poverty, exclusion, violence – it says near to nothing about how it grows. This is exemplified by Gifford (2004, ix), who argues that charismatic churches have expanded in Ghana so powerfully simply ‘because they claim to have the answer to Ghanaians’ existential problems and especially to their most pressing existential problem, economic survival’.

Much of the epiphenomenal flavour acquired by charismatic Christianity in Gifford’s book reflects his own reliance on modernization theory. He is deeply concerned with the fact that charismatics are not Weberian Protestants (Gifford 2004, 159). It is also a matter of empirical selectivity. Gifford’s data come almost solely from church services and mediatic materials. By shifting from one Sunday service to another, his narrative produces an extremely useful reconstitution of this movement’s ‘recurring emphases’ in Ghana, but we are left completely ignorant about how converts live their lives beyond church walls. This lack of attention seems to be justified by Gifford’s assumptions that charismatic churches are ‘not really communities or fellowships at all’ (Gifford 2004, 185), having ‘absolutely nothing except the pastor’s vision’ (Gifford 2004, 188). From this angle, prayer can only be a way of channelling one’s frustrations through dubious pastors while expecting magical solutions.9

In this article, I followed Robbins’ advice and attempted to explore how charismatic spirituality grows, not as a movement, a set of institutions or as popular culture, but mostly at an individual scale. My concern, in sum, was to explore ethnographically how prayer can make faith grow qualitatively, an empirical dimension that tends to be overshadowed by these churches’ flamboyant quantitative success in Ghana. I showed how this qualitative dimension is still acknowledged by most converts, who tend to populate the apparently sharp boundary separating the spiritual reborn from ‘the world’ through gradational notions such as ‘spiritual maturation’. By recasting the Christian life as shaped by a dialectics of grace and growth, they recognize that it is also a competence, which must be learned through time and dedication. In the case of prayer, it requires shifting from a passive object of someone else’s prayers into an active prayerful vessel.

I believe my interlocutors would not find Gifford’s bleak diagnostic wrong. They would agree with most of it, but would certainty find it partial, as it conveys the sense that all converts in Ghana are what they call ‘spiritual babies’ or ‘church goers’. Contrarily, the recurrence and self-transforming effects of the prayer methods I presented above show how charismatic Christianity in Ghana is not merely a narrative or ritual response to a dire setting. It also equips converts with tools and skills for living, which reshape their sensibilities about themselves, others, and their surrounding environment. By doing so, prayer becomes both world-reflecting and world-making.

I would add to Robbins’ important point about how deprivation theories of religion are not only simplistic but also distracting, that they also prevent a deeper inquiry on how desires and hopes become constitutive of ethico-religious flourishing. As I showed, a convert’s path to prayerfulness is not only a matter of embodiment, of shifting from uncertainty to certainty, from verbal promises to sensorial evidences. To argue so would be to ignore that these methods and techniques reorient a life by attaching it to a practice, prayer, that is itself prospective, a form of projecting oneself hopefully into an open future (Miyazaki 2004). In this sense, to become prayerful is not to overcome vulnerability, but to convert vulnerability into an ethical good (MacIntyre 1999) by making anticipations

9See Kalu (2006) for a more nuanced approach to the place of poverty in African Pentecostalism.
further animate habit. This is the main virtue of Mauss’ volitional approach to prayer as expenditure, since religion deals with desires by acting upon them, not only by stabilizing them with meaning (Asad 1993, 125–169). In this sense, it allows us to counter deprivation theories not by shifting the debate’s register from material desires into immaterial symbolism, but by capturing the transfigurations of desire across religious projects.

A life of prayer can only be a generative and eventually pleasurable form of waiting. So if I argued that the spark of commitment is the arrival of an embodied skill and virtue, prayerfulness, this should not obscure the fact that prayer can only be a technology of waiting, which keeps promises alive by dwelling in God’s ‘own time’. Similarly, spiritual maturity is indeed an embodied proclivity, but it is not a durable ethical asset. It is the very effort of organizing one’s Christian life as a series of pregnant moments, of teleological but unfulfilled steps, making of prayer a strange temporal synthesis: a habit of faith.

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