

# ‘I WISH YOU PROSPERITY!’

*Analysing The Social Effect of The Prosperity  
Gospel on Poverty Alleviation in  
Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Ghana*

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## **Analysing The Social Effect of the Prosperity Gospel on Poverty Alleviation in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Ghana**

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<sup>1</sup> The image above was accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2016 from the official Facebook page of Arch-bishop Nicholas Duncan Williams (See <https://www.facebook.com/archbishopduncanwilliams/photos/pb.81348477963.-2207520000.1461687411./10153812097427964/?type=3&theater>). It was an advertised image for a program dubbed "National All Believers Emergency All-Night", an 8 hour prayer service organized on Wednesday 23rd of December, 2015 to overturn the economic crisis in Ghana.

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‘I Wish You Prosperity!’: Analysing The Social Effect of the Prosperity Gospel on Poverty Alleviation in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Ghana.

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## Abstract

This research contributes new knowledge by exploring a Neo-Pentecostalist notion of poverty and its relationship with the prosperity gospel in a Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic church. It categorises Neo-Propheticism as the most recent form of Pentecostalism in Ghana, which has specific theological emphasis on the concepts of *yiedie* (prosperity), *atamfo* (enemies), and *akwankyere* (prophetic guidance). With the tendency of Neo-Prophets seeking to address issues that are most pressing in their local contexts, this research investigates how the prosperity gospel, expressed by Neo-Prophetic leaders influences believers attitudes towards poverty alleviation. Earlier studies argued that, although the prosperity gospel provides motivation in conditions where it is easy to despair, the pervasive emphasis on miracles militates against the fostering of a new work ethic. Others have viewed the doctrine as an impetus for delusion. Proponents, contrarily, have suggested that the prosperity gospel fosters a modernising work ethic by encouraging entrepreneurship and creating employment. This research is qualitative in nature and is supported by ethnographic methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders and members of a Neo-Prophetic church in Accra on the content of the prosperity gospel and their perceptions of poverty. Participant observations were performed at the research site in order to identify the theological orientation of adherents on the themes of poverty and prosperity. Believers' attitudes towards situations of poverty were analysed by drawing insights from their testimonies in relation to the theoretical perspectives of Gifford, Togarasei and Dada.

Our findings revealed an ambivalent relationship between the praxis of the prosperity gospel and believers attitudes towards poverty alleviation. On the one hand, the prosperity gospel appears to demonstrate elements of optimism, entrepreneurship, self-reliance and self-supporting attitudes among believers. On the other hand, religious rites espoused by preachers of the doctrine seem to be embedded with the exploitation of believers, individualism, and a pervasive emphasis on a “miraculous economy”, which impedes the socio-economic transformation believers themselves seek. This feature of ambivalence, it is argued, suggests that the prosperity gospel does not contribute significantly in engendering poverty alleviation among believers. Overall, this research identifies beliefs and practices under Neo-Pentecostal religion that bring to the foreground the relevance of religion in the development debate. It is, however, argued that the presence, nature, and activities of religious people need to be better understood, so that they can be taken into account in developmental activities.

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# **Dedication**

To the memory of my late dad, Mr Isaac Kwateng-Yeboah, who played the role of my first teacher. Dad, you have been of an enormous inspiration in my academic pursuit. I would not have known what it means to be educated without you!

# Abbreviations

AIR	African Indigenous Religion
CAFM	Christian Action Faith Ministries
GLSS	Ghana Living Standards Survey
GSS	Ghana Statistical Services
GWPMI	Glorious Word Power Ministry International
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Developments Goals
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TF	Faculty of Theology
UNDP	United Nation's Development Program
USA	United States of America
WB	World Bank



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# Chapter 1

## 1.1 Introduction

This research explored the prosperity gospel, particularly, in Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic churches and its influence on believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation. Omenyo and Atiemo (2006: 55) describe "Neo Prophetism" as the most recent form of Neo-Pentecostalism, built around prophetic figures who claim to possess answers to Ghanaians' most pressing need, economic survival. With its recurrent emphasis on prosperity, Neo-Prophetism has attracted a large following in Ghana which aspires to escape poverty by religious means.

In *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*, Paul Gifford (2004: 196) concludes that although the prosperity gospel instils a sense of self-belief and motivation in Ghanaian Charismatic Christians, the teachings fail to make any concrete changes in the political and economic institutions in the country. A similar study by Ghanaian theologian, Asamoah-Gyadu (2005a: 201-232) identified several theological and pastoral problems the prosperity gospel raises. Elsewhere, in Nigeria for example, the doctrine was evaluated as an impetus for delusion (Dada 2004).

Whereas most works on Neo-Pentecostalism reviewed for this thesis had constructed theologies on prosperity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a; Liroy 2007; Young 1996; Anim 2010), few had explored the notion of poverty as conceptualised by Neo-Pentecostals. The Zimbabwean theologian, Lovemore Togarasei (2011) indicates that prosperity gospel in Africa thrives in African contexts of poverty. This makes imperative, an interpretation of poverty from Pentecostal worldviews. What meaning do Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostals attribute to poverty? Are there any connections with such understanding of poverty and the prosperity gospel? Does the prosperity gospel have any potential contribution to make in influencing attitudes towards poverty alleviation? Indeed, the paradox presented by Neo-Pentecostals themselves on the realities of poverty and prosperity is worthy of research: whereas prosperity is expected to materialise in one's socio-economic condition, poverty is perceived in spiritual terms, and is attributed to the work of the devil (Meyer 1998: 323).

In exploring this interaction, the research adopted a qualitative approach, supported by ethnographic methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on the content of the prosperity gospel and notions of poverty, with leaders and adherents of Glorious Word Power

Ministry International (GWPMI), a Neo-Prophetic Church in Accra. Informant observations were performed at GWPMI to determine the theological orientation of Neo-Prophetic adherents in relation to the themes of poverty and prosperity. In order to identify believer's roles in and response to poverty, specific case studies of believers' testimonies were analysed by drawing connections with larger theoretical perspectives of scholars like Gifford (2004), Togarasei (2011) and Dada (2004).

In conclusion, this thesis identifies key beliefs and practices within Neo-Pentecostal religion that bring to the foreground the relevance of religion in the development debate. This study contributes knowledge on the prosperity gospel by introducing the principle of "sowing and reaping" as both a potential driver and obstacle to attitudes towards poverty alleviation.

## **1.2 Research Background**

The United Nations Summit in 2000 declared eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) wherein, the number one goal was to eradicate, by half, the proportion of people living under the poverty line by 2015. Although this effort was worldwide, most of the MDG campaigns on poverty alleviation focused on Africa, where the problem continues to be of the greatest urgency (Easterly 2009: 374). Estimates from 2015 by the World Bank suggest that although poverty in Africa did decline from 56% in 1990 to 43% in 2012, extreme poverty in Africa increased by more than 100 million people (Beegle et al 2015: xi).

In Ghana, measures of poverty and living conditions of the more than 24 million-strong population are periodically conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). Results from GSS 2013 survey, The Ghana Living Standards Survey 6 (GLSS 6: xi), indicate that 24.2% of Ghanaians are poor<sup>2</sup>. Thus, some 6.4 million people cannot afford to spend 3.60 Ghana Cedis (0.90 US dollars) on food daily. Recently, Ghana has been facing serious economic challenges: an inflation rate at 14.7%, a rising budget deficit, increased cost of borrowing, frequent labour strikes, youth unemployment, and depreciation of the local currency by over 20% against major foreign currencies<sup>3</sup>. "Ghana's economy was expected to slow down for the fourth consecutive year in 2015 to an estimated 3.9% growth rate, owing to

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<sup>2</sup> The GLSS is a multi-purpose household survey which collects information on many different dimensions of living conditions, including education, health, employment and household expenditure on food and non-food items. See [http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/glss6/GLSS6\\_Main%20Report.pdf](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/glss6/GLSS6_Main%20Report.pdf) p. xi (accessed 07.01.2015)

<sup>3</sup> See <http://citifmonline.com/2014/05/23/ghana-begs-eu-to-help-solve-economic-crisis/> (accessed 21.09.2015)



a severe energy crisis, unsustainable domestic and external debt burdens, and deteriorated financial imbalances” (Okudzeto et al 2015: 2).

In the wake of these economic hardships, religious functionaries in Neo-Pentecostal churches have proclaimed “spiritual” causes of the country’s predicament. Some have attributed the economic situation to the work of the devil and evil spirits. For example, on Sunday, 2nd February, 2014 the founder and leader of Ghana’s first Charismatic Church, Arch-bishop Nicholas Duncan Williams, voiced the following words as he led prayer with his congregation<sup>4</sup>:

...I hold up the cedi with prayer and I command the cedi to recover and I declare the cedi will not fall; ..... I command and release a miracle for the economy.... In the name of Jesus..., Satan take your hands off the President; take your hands off the Central Bank and the Finance Minister....we release innovation for the President, the Governor of the Bank of Ghana ...in the name of Jesus Christ... .

The Arch-Bishop’s declaration attests to Ogbu Kalu’s research on some African Pentecostal groups such as the “Intercessors for Africa”, who believe there are activities of malevolent spirits hindering development on the African continent (Kalu 2007: 347). Such groups claim that financial institutions like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are demonic agents of Satan causing hardship on the African continent (ibid).

Perhaps it is within this context of poverty that Neo-Prophetism in Ghana, with its promise of prosperity, is in ascendancy. The central belief is that God blesses his people with prosperity, not poverty. Poverty is perceived partly as a curse over an individual’s or nation’s life which requires deliverance (Maxwell 1998). In keeping with the principles concerning prosperity, one must sow “seeds of prosperity” and reap the benefits later, giving one’s money, material possessions and using one’s abilities to serve God in expectation of material rewards (Asamoah Gyadu 2005: 211). This principle reveals how people affiliate to religious beliefs and rituals in the hope of opportunities that will enhance their socio-economic condition. It was in this context, that this research with Glorious Word Power Ministry International (GWPMI) in Accra was undertaken.

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<sup>4</sup> See News file from Joy fm, a radio station in Accra: “Duncan Williams Spiritually Commands the Cedi to Rise” <http://news.myjoyonline.com/business/2014/February-2nd/duncan-williams-spiritually-commands-the-cedi-to-rise.php> (accessed 19.06.2015)

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The aim of this research was to investigate how poverty is conceptualised and alleviated in the context of the prosperity gospel. Ghanaians need no convincing that life is incredibly hard. The country has undergone structural adjustments by IMF and the World Bank for several years, yet the economy still has enormous problems. Whereas critics have cited external factors like the negative impact of colonialism and the slave trade, others cite internal factors like corruption and the defective governance of politicians. Amidst these challenges, believers are promised economic success, if they remain faithful to God by tithing and “sowing seeds of prosperity”. What then, is the relationship between this religious idea and the attitudes of believers towards poverty alleviation? Does the prosperity gospel play any transformative role in poverty alleviation? What are the effects of a religiously inspired notion of poverty and prosperity on individual developmental attitudes? Being a project within a theological faculty, this study is more concerned with investigations into individual attitudes or the shared testimonies of believers towards poverty alleviation than interrogations of the political and economic structures of the country.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Three main research questions form this thesis:

1. How do Neo-Pentecostals, particularly leaders and members of Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic churches, conceptualise poverty?
2. What is the content of the prosperity gospel among leaders and members Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic churches?
3. How does the prosperity gospel, as expressed by Neo-Prophetic adherents, influence their attitudes towards poverty alleviation?

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

1. To produce and contribute insights into whether religious beliefs and rites influence the actions of individuals towards their developmental issues like poverty alleviation in Ghana.
2. To provide knowledge and tools that can enable dialogue between development partners, religious organisations and government in Ghana.

3. To help identify drivers and obstacles to pro-poor social change, that can inform the development and poverty alleviation activities of all concerned actors.

## **1.6 Methodology**

The choice of methodology was informed by the lack of Neo-Pentecostal discourses on poverty in relation to the prosperity gospel in Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic contexts. A combination of research techniques under the umbrella of qualitative research was used. Qualitative research has a plethora of definitions by scholars, detailing its essential features.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) situate its definition in the process and context of data collection:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Sharan Merriam (2009: 13) also situates the definition of qualitative research by underlining the research purpose and focus: “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world”. The notion of investigating how people construct meaning in their world, which is common to both definitions, was prevalent in this qualitative study. Principally, the aim was to inquire what meaning Neo-Prophetic adherents attribute to poverty, how they interpret their experiences of poverty, and what actions they undertake to combat poverty, all in the context of the prosperity gospel. In the quest for a vivid description of these realities, ethnographic techniques were employed in the methodology.

### **1.6.1 Ethnography**

Even though ethnography is defined in the Dictionary of Anthropology as “the systematic description of a single contemporary culture”, there is no standardisation among scholars. The reason for there being no standardised definition of ethnography, according to Hammersely and Atkinson (2007: 1), can be attributed to the “considerable overlap with other labels such as “qualitative inquiry”, “fieldwork”, “interpretive method”, “case study”, and “informant

observation”. Nonetheless, there is a greater consensus among researchers in detailing the procedures and distinctive features involved in ethnographic research.

The ethnography partly embarked upon in this study falls under what Clifford Geertz (1973: 10) refers to as “thick description”. Geertz argues,

what the ethnographer is confronted with is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once, strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he[*/she*] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render (Geertz 1973: 10).

Geertz is essentially referring to the traditional anthropological ethnography wherein researchers move to the field and spend long periods with their subjects, say for one or two years. This type of fieldwork is called “total immersion” (Delamont 2006: 206). But the kind of ethnography adopted in this study was “partial immersion”, because in Accra, GWPMI was visited three times a week, and church services, prayer meetings, and prophetic sessions were participated in and observed. The fieldwork lasted for two months, between June and August 2015.

Despite the partial immersion, this research can still be referred to as ethnography, as Sara Delamont (2006: 206) confirms: “in both total and partial immersion fieldwork, being fully engaged in another culture is a *sine qua non*. When the research is done, the result is ethnography: a theorised account of the culture studied with ethnographic methods”.

John Brewer (2004: 312) advances ethnography as a style of research rather than a single method because ethnography uses a variety of techniques in the collection of data. Therefore, in efforts to achieve the research aim of identifying drivers and obstacles to pro-poor social change, I employed John Creswell’s (2007: 70) “critical ethnography”. According to Creswell, “whereas realist ethnography employs a traditional approach of producing objective accounts of informants’ views without personal judgments, critical ethnography includes an advocacy perspective or a value laden orientation, which challenges and addresses social concerns” (Creswell 2007: 70). Critical ethnography was also helpful because, among Ghanaian Pentecostal-Charismatic groups, social concerns such as empowerment and well-being, as well as poverty and inequality are crucial (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 132-232).

What follows is a discussion of the procedures carried out during the study.

### **1.6.2 Choosing the Research Site**

In selecting the church to be investigated, consideration was given to churches whose ethos, style and ministry, although popular in Ghana, had attracted little discussion in academic discourse. Whereas previous research in Ghana on the prosperity gospel selected “premier division churches” (Gifford 2004: vii), this study sought the marginalised but burgeoning crop of prophetic ministries, which have, nevertheless, exerted huge influence on Ghanaian media and its religious context. A large section of these churches fall under what Omenyo and Atiemo (2006) classify as “Neo-Prophetic”. Typical examples include Alive Chapel International of Prophet Salifu Amoako, Ebenezer Miracle Center of Prophet Ebenezer Yiadom (alias Nation’s Prophet) and Glorious Word Power Ministry International (GWPMI) of Prophet Owusu Bempah. So far, no academic discussion on the prosperity gospel has been fully devoted to the style, ethos and ministry of Prophet Owusu Bempah, though he is mentioned in the works of Gifford (2004: vii), as well as Omenyo and Atiemo (2006: 56). This formed the basis for which leaders and members of GWPMI were selected.

Neo-Prophetic congregations in Ghana are usually founded by individuals, wherein personal visions of leaders normally determine the trend of teaching and practice in the church (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 4). It would be misleading to give the impression that views represented in this work form an undifferentiated perception of poverty and prosperity among Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic churches. The cases presented were chosen because of their general prominence among the Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal stream and their connections with existing literature (Meyer 1995; Gifford 2004). Overall, tendencies and emphases of Neo-Pentecostal notions of poverty and prosperity gospel rather than particular churches and personalities were sought.

### **1.6.3 Prophet Owusu Bempah & GWPMI**

Owusu Bempah seems to have not only gained a large following in the Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic scene, but also on political platforms. Indeed, what stimulated this research was the leader’s rather problematic statement; “Poverty is linked to the devil”, when he was asked on national television about the low socio-economic status of some Neo-Pentecostal adherents<sup>5</sup>. Earlier in 2014, the neo-prophet echoed “political prophecies” on Ghanaian media platforms

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<sup>5</sup> See Interview with Owusu Bempah at Ghana’s Television station TV3 on Poverty <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=amHsbn85YnE> (accessed 19.02.2015)

concerning the victory and defeat of some political parties in elections, the rigging of elections, civil wars, and the possible fate of Ghana's President, John Mahama. The field observations confirmed that the prophet's ministry attracts a following consisting of people of varying socio-economic status. This partly stands in conflict with Omenyo and Atiemo who contend that adherents to Neo-Prophetic churches are of low socio-economic status (2006: 56). The varying social status of Owusu Bempah's following produced relative responses to believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation.

#### **1.6.4 Negotiating Access to the Research Site**

Permission to carry out the study was sought at three levels: Faculty of Theology (TF) at the University of Oslo, the leader of the selected church, and informants. Clearance was gained from TF as information regarding my research topic was provided along with the assurance of keeping collected data confidential. In ethnography, access to sites typically begins with gatekeepers - individuals who have insider status with the group (Creswell 2007: 71). Identifying a gatekeeper aided in seeking permission at the administrative level of the church. The study was overt in that the researcher's identity was disclosed. Access was negotiated and permission was granted.

Michael Hornsby-Smith (1993: 53) distinguishes open and closed access to the research site. Access to GWPMI was relatively open because there were no formal barriers in place. Pertinent issues regarding the purpose of the research, how confidentiality and anonymity were going to be maintained, and how results would be used were discussed. Consent forms were presented to gatekeepers and informants. Appointments were booked with the leader of the church (usually called "prophet") and the research began with field observations.

#### **1.6.5 Field Observation**

The observer roles assumed in the research were the combination of "informant as observer" and "observer as informant (Junker 1960: 10). Thus, participation in church activities was purely for the purpose of research, but I occasionally shifted to doing more observation than participation.

I took part in the Tuesday and Friday church services of GWPMI, observing closely prayer sessions, testimonies, prophetic sessions, sermons, and rituals, while paying particular attention to the themes of poverty and prosperity. The church services on Tuesdays were

from 9 am to 4pm, whereas Sundays began at 10am and closed at 2pm. On Thursdays, prayer and deliverance sessions were performed to address the varying problems believers encounter, including sickness, marital problems, and financial loss, among others. The prophetic ministrations on Tuesdays attracted large numbers who were in search of timely solutions to their problems. The Tuesday sessions included non-congregants of our research site who had left their churches or work places in search of spiritual solutions to their crises. The majority of the congregants were women, around which prophecies usually centred. The prophecies spoken by the leader often centred on the foretelling of occurrences such as death, financial loss, and failure in business, and usually ended with a time for *seed sowing* (offering money) as a means of dealing with these set-backs in a believers' life.

These observations and the participation however, were not enough to provide understanding regarding the attitudes of believers towards socio-economic transformation. Other issues such as how poverty is linked to malevolent spirits needed to be probed further. At that stage, the question that came to mind was one asked by Steinar Kvale (2009: xvii) "if you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?" I therefore sampled informants and conducted semi-structured interviews.

### **1.6.6 Sampling Method**

As a qualitative researcher, my aim was not to make generalisations but to understand the particular ways in which individuals respond to poverty in line with the prosperity gospel. The need for a thick description made necessary a small sample size for the qualitative interviews. The selection of informants was based on *purposive sampling*, as the aim of the field work was to generate themes on prosperity and poverty in Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostalism. According to Teddlie and Yu (2007), the purposive sampling technique is primarily used in qualitative studies by selecting units (individuals, groups, organisations) based on specific purposes associated with answering research study questions. The resident pastor informed the congregation of my request to interview church members for research purposes. As Janice Morse (2005: 228) asserts; "a good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate". Inspired by Morse, I selected eleven informants from those members who had time to be interviewed and were willing to participate. Demographics such as age, gender, employment status, and length of adherence to Neo-

Pentecostal beliefs and rituals were considered. The target of equal representation of gender was achieved. The informants, excluding the head-pastor, had been Pentecostal- Charismatic adherents for a mean of 5 years.

**Table of Informants (Table 1)**

<b>Informants</b>	<b>Total (11)</b>	<b>Length of Pentecostal Adherence</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>
Prophet	1	More than 20 years	Pastoral Work	Not disclosed
Resident Pastor	2	More than 8 years	Pastoral Work	2 Single
Male congregants	4	5-7 years	3 Self-Employed 1 Unemployed	1 Married 3 Single
Female congregants	4	5-7 years	2 Self-Employed 2 Unemployed	3 Married 1 Single

It was interesting to note that some informants were self-employed, and each had a different story to share regarding poverty. This enriched the varied responses, adding a comparative value to the research.

### **1.6.7 Interview Process**

Unlike survey-based interviews which tend to follow a structured format, the interview type used in this research was a semi-structured one, which involved loosely planned, open-ended questions concerning three main themes: poverty, prosperity and attitudes towards poverty alleviation. Open-ended questions allowed informants to feel free to express their beliefs on prosperity, detail their experiences of poverty, and explain how they deal with poverty. According to Gordon (1975), the semi-structured interview technique is suited to the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues. Indeed, if closed ended questions had been used, certain factors like “the issue of delay” after seed sowing, which Gifford (2004: 78) earlier observed, would not have been revealed in the interview for further interrogation. This helped standardise the research and facilitated comparability (Treece & Treece 1986). While some informants used the English language during the interview process, others felt comfortable speaking in the local dialect of the Akans, Twi. Overall, responses to the semi-structured interviews and the field observations formed the primary data for the thesis.



### **1.6.8 Data Recording**

All respondents granted me permission to record the interviews. The digital tape recording device was very useful in obtaining accurately the responses provided by informants and translating them from the local dialect to English. The tape recording also helped in the preservation of the data and facilitated cross-checking of important information. Additionally, field notes were taken to augment the tape-recording. This ensured that precise information provided by the informants was gathered. According to Margery Wolf (1992: 86), field notes are unvarnished descriptions of events as they occur. In order to ensure that exact opinions expressed by the informants were obtained, I relied on the tape-recordings and the hand written notes when transcribing the data. Each interview section took at least forty minutes.

### **1.6.9 Data Storage**

Apart from copies of the consent forms and the semi structured question guide, which were presented to the head pastor and church members, all research materials, including the recorded files, were kept securely. I uploaded the raw data to my computer and secured it with a password. I carried out all the translations and transcriptions to make sure that the views articulated by the informants were properly accounted for in the analysis. I returned from the field research with voluminous materials made up of interview transcripts and notes taken during the observation process which needed organisation and analysis.

### **1.6.10 Data Analysis**

In analysing the field-data collected, Wolcott's three aspects of ethnographic data analysis: *description*, *analysis* and *interpretation* of the culture-sharing group were followed (Wolcott 1994: 144-145). My analysis began with straight forward descriptions of the Ghanaian socio-religious settings in which Neo-Pentecostal Christianity flourishes with its promise of prosperity. Wolcott asserts that description is the foundation upon which qualitative research is built, where the researcher becomes the story teller, inviting readers to see, through what has been seen on the field (Wolcott 1994: 145).

From an interpretive perspective, Wolcott (1994) argues that the researcher presents his description in a chronological order. I grouped the empirical data that was collected from Ghana under headings: (a) poverty, (b) prosperity, (c) beliefs and rituals as resources for development. In my interpretation, I employed historical approaches in tracing the origin of

Pentecostal movements in Ghana with its recurrent emphasis on the prosperity gospel. I focused on the principle of sowing and reaping and how it is emphasised as a way out of poverty. This forms a critical discussion in the study.

For my analysis, I drew connections between the field data and theoretical perspectives of relevant scholarly works of Gifford (2004), Togarasei (2011) and Dada (2004).

Gifford analysed the economic and political roles of Charismatic Churches in Ghana. With data collected from interviews and personal observation for over nineteen months, Gifford concluded that the prosperity gospel fails to make concrete changes in the political and economic institutions of Ghana (Gifford 2004: 196). He admits however, that the Neo-Pentecostal churches often instil motivation and self-belief (p.197). For Gifford, “if Ghana is to join the modern world economy, the greatest need is the development of transparent and accountable structures, systems, procedures and institutions to regulate all aspects of society” (p. 197). Inspired by Gifford, my research drew connections between religious ideas and economic attitudes in Ghanaian society. However, whereas Gifford discounted religious ideas as a resource for development, I critically engaged religious notions of poverty and prosperity as both a potential driver and obstacle regarding attitudes towards poverty alleviation.

The Zimbabwean theologian, Love Togarasei (2011), also sought the possible contribution of the prosperity gospel in alleviating poverty in Zimbabwe and Botswana. With data from pastors’ sermons and individual adherents, Togarasei (2011) concluded that the prosperity gospel contributes to poverty alleviation by encouraging entrepreneurship, creating employment, inspiring members to be generous, creating a positive mind-set, and encouraging a holistic approach to life. Building on Togarasei, my research employed notions of entrepreneurship and employment creation as categories for analysing self-supporting attitudes towards poverty alleviation. However, while Togarasei discussed poverty from socio-economic perspectives, giving statistical data, my work focused on religiously inspired notions of poverty as expressed in the sermons, and testimonies acquired in the interview process.

In Nigeria, Dada (2004) evaluated the prosperity gospel as an impetus for delusion. Using the theory of cognitive dissonance, Dada conducted interviews in ten churches pastored by prosperity preachers in Ibadan, Nigeria. He found that although many Pentecostals were attracted to the churches by the prosperity gospel, their economic status had not changed. Instead, they were deluded in three ways: that they should wait patiently for the day when

wealth will manifest, that they are personally responsible for their lack of prosperity through sin, and their failure to sow “seeds of prosperity”. Dada’s insights were helpful in analysing the paradox resulting from the difference between the rich life of prosperity teachers and the poverty of adherents in Ghanaian contexts.

I shall now discuss some challenges encountered in carrying out the study.

#### **1.6.11 Limitations of the Study**

The choice of Critical Ethnography was challenging. It raised tensions between what Hammersley (2006) calls “informant and analytic perspectives”. This tension involved, on one hand, the importance of coming to understand and to describe, as accurately as possible, the perspectives of my informants, and on the other hand, developing analytical perspectives from the informants’ view which might be in conflict with how informants construct their world view.

In addressing this overarching issue, the research drew insights from Stephen B. Bevans’ (2002) *Models of Contextual Theology* in efforts to remain sensitive in describing the cultural portrait of Neo-Pentecostal beliefs regarding poverty and prosperity, but at the same time, keeping a critical distance from such belief systems in carrying out my analysis. In *Models of Contextual Theology*, Bevans (2002: 5) argues that doing theology contextually means two things: firstly, taking into account the faith experiences of the past as recorded in scripture and handed down in tradition; and secondly, taking into account the experiences of the present, the context - the “individual and contemporary-collective experience”. Bevans provided further insight as to analysing the prosperity gospel as “a way of life that moves beyond beliefs”, while critically investigating what actions believers take in response to their poverty (Bevans 2002: 74).

#### **1.6.12 Ethical Issues**

In order to undertake the research in an ethical manner, certain considerations were taken. As mentioned earlier, permission was sought and gained from the head of the congregation, as well as informants. There was no element of deception nor invasion of privacy as every interview was carried out in agreement with the informant about the venue, day and timespan. The anonymity of informants was protected, as there was no single element of using the

informants' real identity. Apart from the head pastor, who agreed with consent forms to the use of his identity, names of all other informants were not mentioned.

### **1.6.13 My Role as a Researcher**

The researcher's roles range from complete membership of the group being studied (an insider) to complete stranger (an outsider) (Adler & Adler, 1994). The field work I undertook was carried out in my home country and in an urban area of which I am, to a large extent, native. I have lived in Accra Ghana for most of my life. I have previously been a member of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement in Accra for close to three years (2007 – 2010). These shared experiences with my subjects placed me, partly, as an insider.

There are pros and cons to being an insider in any given research. While it creates greater understanding and breaks barriers linguistically and culturally (Strathern 1987:17), greater familiarity can also lead to a loss of objectivity, as the researcher's prior knowledge can lead to incorrect assumptions (Hewitt-Taylor 2002). Nevertheless, it has to be clarified that I am not a native in the same way as the individuals under study, seeing as I am a researcher undertaking field work from a different perspective. I am also not a member of the specific congregation under study. This role places me, partly, as an outsider, enabling me to bracket shared experiences and to take a critical stance on the core beliefs and attitudes of the group studied (Creswell 2007: 142). Thus, in the field, I assumed the role of what David Walsh (2006: 233) refers to as *marginal native*, because I placed myself "between a strangeness that avoids over rapport and a familiarity that grasps the perspectives of people in the situation".

## **1.7 Definition of Key Concepts**

### **1.7.1 Pentecostalism**

For the purpose of this research, I refer to Asamoah-Gyadu's concept of Pentecostals in Ghana:

a group of Christians who emphasize salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which the "Spirit phenomenon" (including speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general) are perceived as a historic continuity of the experiences of the early church as found in the Acts of Apostles and as a

sign of the presence of God and experience of His Spirit (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005a: 12).

In addition to the emphasis on the spirit phenomenon, many Ghanaian Pentecostal churches stress prosperity and the desire for success (Gifford 2004: 44).

### **1.7.2 Types of Pentecostals in Ghana**

Among Ghanaian Pentecostals, some beliefs are more prominent in particular sections of the movement than others. I group the different trends of Ghanaian Pentecostal churches into two: *Classical Pentecostal Churches* and *Neo-Pentecostal* (or Charismatic) *Churches*. The Classical Pentecostal Churches include churches like Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God, and the different Apostolic Churches, whose presence in Ghana dates back to the 1920's (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005b: 235). The Neo-Pentecostal Churches comprise a collection of renewal movements in mainline churches, trans-national denominations, and new independent Pentecostal churches, popularly referred to as *Charismatic Churches* (ibid).

Even though the difference between Classical Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals cannot be neatly divided, since beliefs and rituals between the two streams overlap, Jane E. Soothill's assertion is noteworthy:

whereas Pentecostalism in its classical form was characterized by a retreat from the world or an anti-material or "holiness" stance, the [Neo-Pentecostal] new charismatic churches are most definitely of "this world" and express frequent concern for the health, wealth and general success of adherents in this life time (Soothill 2007: 37).

Thus, the recurrent emphases among Neo-Pentecostals or Charismatic churches, are on "success, wealth and status" (Gifford 2004: 44). In this study, I use the term Neo-Pentecostal to embrace the various new Charismatic churches in the Accra locality which do not fall under the description of Classical Pentecostal Churches by virtue of their strong emphasis on individual material progress in life, here and now.

### **1.7.3 Neo-Pentecostal Accra**

The location, Accra, was selected because it reflects a large Pentecostal-Charismatic adherent population. The Ghana Statistical Service Report 2013 states Accra as the

second most populated region, embracing perhaps, more than 38% of Pentecostal-Charismatics adherents. In this thesis, the term *Neo-Pentecostal Accra* is generally used to refer to all adherents in Accra who adhere to Neo-Pentecostal traditions as defined above.

#### **1.7.4 Neo-Prophetism**

Ghanaian scholars of religion, Omenyo and Atiemo (2006: 55-68), describe the emergence and stupendous growth of contemporary prophecy in Ghana as Neo-Prophetism. Prophetism in the African primal worldview seeks the cause of evil occurrences and the power to deal with it or to prevent future occurrence (Omenyo 2011). It also includes the search for one's destiny or good omen through divination. Omenyo and Atiemo (2006: 55) contend that Neo-Prophetism appropriates Prophetism in primal worldview, "while remaining supposedly Pentecostal, but with ethos and style that depart markedly from mainstream Pentecostal traditions". Particular teachings and practices related to Neo-prophetic movements which are of relevance to this thesis include the concept of *otamfo* (enemy) and the practice of *akwankyere* (guidance).

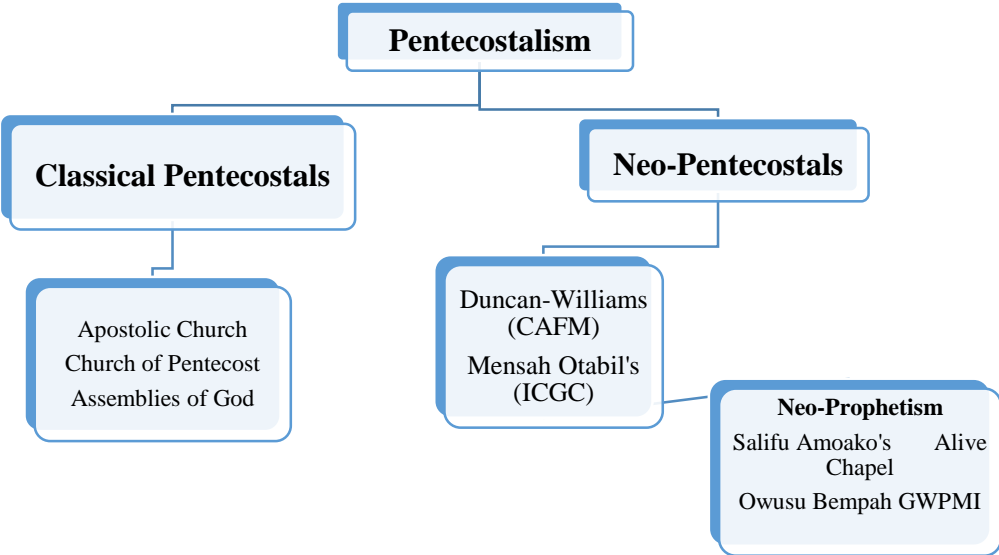
**Otamfo**, in traditional Akan life and thought, is normally suspected of undermining other people's prosperity, health and general progress through witchcraft, evil juju, or the spread of malicious gossip (Omenyo and Atiemo 2006: 62). Ghanaian Neo-Prophets, in their teaching and practice, appropriate the Akan concept of *otamfo* as not only evil spirits and witches, but also human-beings that believers have cause to suspect or envy, jealousy or malicious gossip. The concept of *otamfo* is of relevance to this thesis because it lays emphasis on the cause of a person's misfortune, like poverty, as a result of "enemies" (evil spirits, witches, and human beings) believed to be agents of the devil.

In **akwankyere**, otherwise called "prophetic guidance", the Neo-Prophetic leaders, (who prefer to be called "prophets"), render information which allegedly explains a person's pertinent problems in life, and prescribe immediate solutions (Omenyo and Atiemo 2006: 65). *Akwankyere* may be done openly in public worship settings, usually termed "prophetic ministration", or on a one-on-one basis, commonly referred to as "counselling" or "guidance session" (ibid). Pertinent problems that resurface during *akwankyere* include socio-economic hardship, poverty, sickness, unemployment, singleness, and lack of progress in one's life. During *akwankyere*, prophecies are

declared. The contents of prophecies include vivid descriptions of one’s enemies and the reason for hatred from one’s enemies. Prophecies may also range from individual lives to pertinent social, political or economic issues at the national level such as economic crisis, national disaster, poverty, and election results.

In this study, Neo-Prophetism refers to contemporary Pentecostal movements that emphasise prophecies, spiritual power, and charisma (divine gift), and as such, develop churches that supposedly thrive on the assurance of addressing all problems its adherents face. Gifford (2004: 19) identifies the late Prophet Francis Akwasi Amoako as the precursor of Neo-Prophetism in Ghana. Other contemporary prophets who came to ministry through the late Prophet Amoako’s ministry include Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako and Prophet Owusu Bempah, the latter of whom is of relevance to this study.

**Pentecostalism -An Overarching Banner (Figure 1)**



**1.7.5 Poverty**

Poverty in this thesis refers to the lack of basic needs for survival. Many Ghanaians lack such basic needs as three square meals a day, adequate jobs, frequent access to water, affordable healthcare and a moderate level of education. Some Ghanaians attribute the causes of this poverty to defective governance, corruption, and the negative impact of

colonialism and the slave trade. The discourse on poverty shall be further dissected in later chapters.

### **1.7.6 Prosperity Gospel**

An underlying theory of the prosperity gospel is that “God rewards faithful Christians with wealth, financial success and good health” (Asamoah Gyadu 2005: 202). The biblical text often cited in Ghana in relation to the prosperity gospel is 3 John 2: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth” (King James Version). There are necessary principles to be followed in efforts to become prosperous: engaging in hard work, positive oral confession and sowing seeds of prosperity. This thesis focuses on the principle of sowing and reaping, usually referred in Malachi 3:10-11 as giving one’s money and material possession and devoting one’s abilities to the Lord’s work.

### **1.7.7 Organisation of Study**

The thesis is organised into six chapters. This Chapter has been a general introduction to the entire thesis, comprising: an introduction to the work, a background to the study and the statement of the problem, methods of the study, organisation of chapters and the relevance of conducting this research.

Chapter two places the study in context. It presents the historical, economic, and the socio-religious context of Ghana. It also discusses the phenomenon of Neo-Propheticism, and its theological orientation.

Chapter three concerns the reality of poverty in Neo-Pentecostal Accra. It presents the Neo-Pentecostals’ understanding of the meaning of poverty.

Chapter four concerns the content of the prosperity gospel. It presents the origins and the source of influence of the prosperity gospel on Ghana’s Christianity; it presents the main tenets and principles of the prosperity gospel, particularly in Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic Churches.

Chapter five analyses believers’ attitudes towards poverty alleviation. Drawing on the principle of sowing and reaping, it identifies drivers and obstacles to individual attitudes



towards poverty alleviation. An attempt is made to relate my conclusions to theory, so that knowledge is added to existing research on the prosperity gospel.

Chapter six contains the general conclusions of the thesis. A summary of some of the major findings of the thesis are presented in this section, and discussions shift from the purely descriptive and analytical to the prescriptive.

### **1.7.8 Relevance of the Study**

In Africa, religion shows no sign of disappearing or diminishing in public spheres. How then can the presence, nature, and activities of religious people be better understood so that they can be taken into account in developmental activities? Are there ways in which for example, Pentecostal beliefs and practices may be relevant to development thinking and practice? The polarised views are clear: whereas critics of religion consider religion as an obstacle to development, religious adherents insist that religious beliefs and practices can motivate believers towards progress in life.

The quest to find answers to these conversely related hypotheses forms the relevance of my research. The analysis of the investigations conducted is expected to improve understanding of the meaning of religion in the lives of believers. It will further show the ways in which religion in Ghana intersects with the social, political and economic attitudes of individuals, thereby providing relevant tools to enable dialogue between development partners, religious organisations and governments.

## 2 CHAPTER 2 - PLACING THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

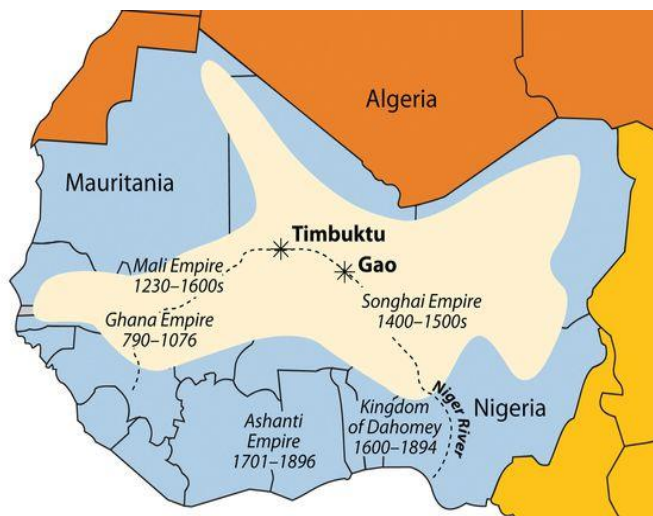
### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter places our study into a historical, economic and socio-religious context. Without following any strict chronological order of history, the chapter begins with brief reflections on ancient Ghana Empire, through to the pre-colonial and colonial era. This is followed by presentation on the economic situation in the country, particularly in the Accra region, where our research was conducted. A historical analysis of the problem of poverty in Accra will be explored, underscoring the argument that religious beliefs and practices have apparently become a livelihood strategy for believers to cope with their socio-economic hardships in Accra. This background is expected to pave the way for our assessment of the Prosperity Gospel.

### 2.2 Ancient Ghana Empire

Modern Ghana is named after the great Sudanic Empire of Ghana, which existed from the

sixth to the thirteenth centuries in West Africa (Gocking 2005: 1). The name *Ghana* is believed to be a title for kings that ruled in that empire (ibid). Geographically, Ancient Ghana was approximately 500 miles north-west of modern Ghana. It occupied the modern day Southern Senegal, Southern Mauritania and Mali. It was made up of the Soninke people, a Mande speaking people of the Niger-Congo family.



Map of Ancient Empires of West Africa<sup>6</sup> (Figure 2)

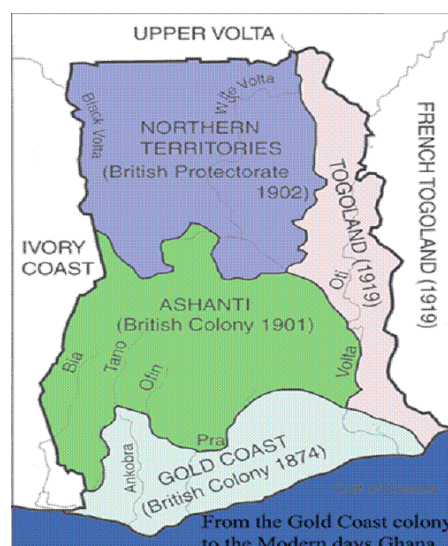
Economically, Ancient Ghana derived power and wealth from gold and the introduction of the camel during the Trans-Saharan trade. Some historians described the empire as the “land of

<sup>6</sup> This map was taken from Royal Berglee’s *World Regional Geography: People, Places, and Globalization*: [http://catalog.flatworldknowledge.com/bookhub/2657?e=berglee\\_1.0-ch07\\_s01](http://catalog.flatworldknowledge.com/bookhub/2657?e=berglee_1.0-ch07_s01) (accessed 14.03.2015)

gold” for its role as an economic intermediary within the gold trade from the south to north (Gocking 2005: 25). The empire lasted from 750 A.D. to about 1200 A.D.

### 2.3 Pre-Colonial Ghana

By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, most ethnic groups constituting the Mande speaking people had invaded parts of modern Ghana and were striving to settle into their newly acquired territories. Some of these territories like the Mamprusi, Gonja and Asante developed as states in the region. It was during this time that the region had its first contact with the Europeans. The Portuguese first landed on the coast of the then Ashanti Empire in 1471. Having found abundant gold, the Portuguese named the region *Gold Coast*. They built their first fortress and named it “da Mina”, now Elmina, meaning “the Mine” in order to facilitate trade in gold and ivory (Gocking 2005: 26-27). The abundance gold and other natural resources attracted other European traders like the Dutch, Swedes, Danes and the British to the Gold Coast. Having discovered these riches, the European traders built fortresses and castles to facilitate their commercial activities. Through the barter system of trade, gold and other minerals were taken by the early European traders in exchange for textiles, copper, brass-ware, and iron products by the local people (Gocking 2005: 26). To ease the carriage of their products to the coast, slaves were bought and some were exchanged for gold at the gold mining centres in Gold Coast. Other slaves were sent to the European centres.



From Gold Coast to Modern day Ghana<sup>7</sup> (Figure 3)

<sup>7</sup> This map was taken from the google images: Exploring Africa, “Module Twenty Four, Activity Two

## 2.4 Colonial Ghana

By the latter part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch and the British were the only traders left. And when the Dutch withdrew in 1874, the British made the Gold Coast a crown colony. The major trade allies of the Europeans were the Ashantis who belonged to the Akan ethnic group and practiced the Akan Traditional Religion. When the Gold Coast became a colony of the British, the Ashanti Empire maintained their political influence until the defeat in 1874.

### 2.4.1 Impact of Colonization

It is widely perceived that the introduction of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the negative impact of colonialism attributed to the poverty situation in Ghana (Amoah 2009: 111). Indeed, the perpetrators of slave trade were not only the Europeans but also the local leaders of the indigenous people who agreed to sell out their natural resources and their best people as slaves. As custodians of the lands resources, the local leaders in the communities enriched themselves at the expense of the masses whilst trading with the Europeans (Cannon 2009: 19). This has negatively impacted the orientation of many Ghanaians towards leadership and riches. Thus, we can postulate that, leadership in Ghana- both in the political and religious spheres- is largely perceived as a means of amassing wealth. Gifford (2009: 2) attests to this fact as he confirms how the category of “profiteering” permeates socio-economic life in Ghana. He writes:

the popular mood included a great deal of envy and anger against those who were thought to have enriched themselves at the expense of the masses – “We no go sit down make them cheat us every day”- “Kalabule” was the word widely used to denote this profiteering (Gifford 2004:2).

## 2.5 Independence

In 1957, Ghana attained independence from the British rule. It was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to do so, and hence, enjoyed economic and political advantages unrivalled elsewhere in West Africa. Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, pursued a strategy of state-directed economic growth. The economy was solidly based on the production and export of cocoa, of which Ghana was the world’s leading producer (Berry 1994). Other natural

resources like gold and timber were also sources of income to the county. Ghana had a well-developed transportation network, relatively high per capita income, low national debt, and sizable foreign currency reserves. Its educational system was relatively advanced, and its people were heirs to a tradition of parliamentary government (Berry 1994). Ghana's future looked promising, and it seemed destined to be a leader in Africa.

However, rather than prosperity during the next twenty-five years, Ghanaians experienced substantial declines in the economy. As in other African countries after independence, Ghana experienced decades of political instabilities in the form of frequent coup d'états. In 1966 Nkrumah was overthrown and a military government assumed power. The military nor civilian governments during the next fifteen years were not able to deal successfully with the host of political and economic problems that were emerging.

Based on the extant literature reviewed for this thesis, we will restrict our discussion on Ghana's early economic decline to the following purported reasons: Corruption and policies on Structural Adjustment Programmes.

## **2.6 Poverty in Ghana –Root Causes**

### **2.6.1 Corruption**

Corruption in Ghana has been common since independence. Even though Ghana's ranking on the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index<sup>8</sup> improved slightly from 61st position in 2014 to 56th place in 2015, it is still widely perceived that corruption perpetrated by national leaders and government officials is part of the root causes of poverty in the country. According to Khan (1996: 12), corruption is an act that "deviates the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private-regarding-motive such as wealth, power or status". Gbenga (2007) also describes corruption as the conscious attempt or deliberate diversion of resources from the satisfaction of general interest to that of self (personal) interest.

A myriad of causes can be cited for this menace in Ghana; however, "Neo-patrimonialism", which Kempe (2002: 2) defines as "a perverse system that awards economic and political

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<sup>8</sup> The Transparency International (TI) is an organization that annually publishes the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), ranking about 177 countries by their perceived levels of corruption, as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys. See report on Ghana: [http://www.transparency.org/country/#GHA\\_DataResearch](http://www.transparency.org/country/#GHA_DataResearch) (accessed 05.04.2015)

benefits to politicians and their followers” is often cited as one of the causes of corruption. Very often in Ghana, Neo-patrimonialism operates through clientelism - the exchange of goods and services for political support, often involving an implicit or explicit give and take (i.e. a favour for a favour). Additionally, Loyalty to one’s ethnic group, religious affiliation, community, political party and family becomes the main motivation for many individuals to engage in corruption. Qualification to appointment into public office are often based on these terms of loyalties instead of meritocracy. In such situations, as Kempe (2000: 18) points out, a “dependent patron-client relationship” is formed, which in the long run, deteriorates the economic conditions in the country, rendering the lives of the average citizens poorer and poorer. A more recent example of a corruption scandal in Ghana can be cited in the Ghanaian judiciary, which made the headlines in September 2015, following an exposé by an undercover investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas<sup>9</sup>.

Interestingly, our Chapter on the prosperity gospel reveals a similar notion of a patron-client relationship permeating between leaders and members in Neo-Pentecostal settings as believers *sow seeds* (i.e. giving money and other material goods) to religious functionaries in anticipation for God’s blessings. We will show in our analysis how this patron-client relationship, which we termed, *transactional theology*, gives impetus to perceptions on exploitation and economic disparities between some Neo-Pentecostal leaders and their members, as the former seemingly is enriched at the expense of the latter.

## **2.6.2 Structural Adjustment Programmes**

In April 1983, the Government of Ghana adopted an Economic Recovery Programme introduced by the IMF and World Bank to curtail the economic crisis (Gifford 2004: 3). It included “macroeconomic stabilization measures comprising fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies, liberalization of prices, and restructuring of the public and financial sectors” (Sowa 2002: 6). The initial years of the adjustment in Ghana involving macroeconomic stabilization seemed successful; however, by the 1990s, the so-called Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) appeared to have further deepened the woes of the Ghanaian population, particularly sections of the urban area – Accra (Hutchful 1996).

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<sup>9</sup> See BBC News, "Accused Ghana judges shown bribe videos", <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34210925> Accessed 11.09.2015

The liberalisation of prices led to a sharp rise in the prices of fuel, manufactured goods, food and other social services. The restructuring of the public sectors also led to the removal of Government subsidies for key social services such as water, electricity, telephone and housing. Thousands of workers, both skilled and unskilled, working in the civil and public services were laid off. After these adjustments were made, the real wages of workers in the formal sector declined seriously (Hutchful 1996; Post 2001; Owusu 2001). In brief, the Structural Adjustment Programme partly increased poverty among sections of the Ghanaian populace as subsidies on food and other social services were removed while wages of most workers fell below levels able to provide food, shelter, clothing and cost of transportation for their families (Jamal and Weeks 1993).

Now we turn our discussions on poverty to Accra, where our research was conducted.

## 2.7 Accra – General Information

Accra gained its status as the capital city of Ghana in 1877 when the British Colonial authorities moved the capital of the Gold Coast from Cape Coast. Prior to its establishment, Accra was predominantly Ga<sup>10</sup> settlement where most inhabitants were engaged in farming, fishing and trading. However, the city's new status as the capital necessitated the recruitment of local administrative staff, the expansion of commercial activities, and infrastructural developments. Roads and railway networks with other coastal towns were constructed, enhancing trade and the movement of persons to the city (Kilson 1974; Robertson 1984).

**Map of Accra (Figure 4)**



<sup>10</sup> The Ga peoples are an ethnic group in Ghana that lives primarily in the Greater Accra region. They are organized into six independent towns: Accra, Osu, Labadi, Teshie, Nungua, and Tema

### **2.7.1 Geography**

The Greater Accra Region, in terms of geographical land size, is the smallest of the ten regions in Ghana. It covers a total land area of 139.674 Km<sup>2</sup>. However, it is the second most populated region, after the Ashanti Region. Accra recorded a total population of 4,010,054 as of 2010 which accounts for 15.4 per cent of Ghana's total population (GSS: 2012).

### **2.7.2 Economic Activities**

The city of Accra is the economic hub of the Greater Accra Region and the rest of the country. It hosts a number of manufacturing industries, oil companies, financial organizations, as well as telecommunication, tourism, education, and health institutions. Most of these institutions are not state owned. They are part of the private formal sector, and are therefore run by private individuals or groups, as an enterprise for profit. Even though the presence of these private enterprises continue to attract people from all parts of the country, the employment opportunities it offers are relatively low. Most residents in Accra are therefore economically active in the private *informal* sector, where they do operate small scale enterprises such as fast food joints, kiosks, chop bars, and retail shops (Grant & Yankson 2003: 73). Our field interviews indeed constituted some informants who were operating such enterprises for a living. These enterprises yield low profits, which indicates the impoverishment of many residents. The indigenous people of the city are mostly engaged in fishing and farming. Currently, the minimum wage in Ghana is 8.00 GHC (approximately 2.00 USD). This partly paints a picture of the economic situation a majority of Ghanaians and residents in Accra experience.

## **2.8 Poverty in Accra – A Historical Overview**

Even though results from the sixth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey<sup>11</sup> appears to portray poverty as a rural phenomenon, recent studies by Ghanaian sociologists Margaret Essamuah and Steve Tonah indicate that sections of the urban population in Accra also experience “urban poverty”. According to Essamuah and Tonah (2004: 79), “the massive migration of rural residents to the city” were contributing factors to the growing phenomenon of poverty in the city. Being the second most populated region in the country, Accra is unable to provide infrastructural facilities for its growing population (Essamuah and Tonah 2004:

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 1.



79). In what follows, we present a historical analysis of poverty in the region, accentuating how individuals in the urban area affiliate to religious beliefs, practices and associations as livelihood strategies in coping with poverty.

The movement of the capital to Accra strengthened the economy of the Gold Coast. It attracted people from neighbouring countries to trade. After Ghana's independence in 1957, the then President Nkrumah embarked on a policy of rapid industrialization and further expansion in infrastructural facilities. By the end of the 1960's, Accra had not only become the administrative and political capital, but also, the central city where major financial, commercial, and educational institutions were located (Essamuah and Steve Tonah 2009).

The rapid transformation of the region from a small Ga fishing settlement into an administrative centre however, resulted in rapid increase in population size from about 20,000 persons in the early 1900's to roughly 388 396 persons by 1960 (Robertson 1984). By the year 2000, Accra's population had increased to 1,657,856. This figure further increased to 4,010,054 as of 2010, which accounts for 15.4 per cent of Ghana's total population<sup>12</sup>. Margaret Essamuah and Steve Tonah (2009: 84) attribute the rapid increase in the population size of Accra to the concentration of the economic and social infrastructural facilities in the city. They argue that the better opportunities for income generation that Accra offered to all other towns ushered migrants into the city (Essamuah and Tonah 2009: 84). This led to a huge economic strain on the city, as the growing population could not cope with Accra's infrastructural facilities. In effect, the economic growth took a decline turn in the 1970's.

During the 1970's the physical infrastructure in Accra began to deteriorate (Essamuah and Tonah 2009: 84). Many industries established in the 1960's were forced to shut down as they were producing under capacity due to shortages in raw material and the foreign exchange needed to refurbish the aging machinery (ibid). This led to severe shortage of manufactured and semi processed goods on the Ghanaian market. The economic crises worsened by the drought during the mid-1970 amidst the poor and overcrowded suburbs in the city (Essamuah and Tonah 2009: 85). Several attempts at reviving the industries and food production failed, leading to devastating impact on the urban poor. Salaries went low and were not adjusted for the steep rate of inflation over several years.

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<sup>12</sup> See 2010 Ghana Population and Housing Census [http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/2010\\_POPULATION\\_AND\\_HOUSING\\_CENSUS\\_FINAL\\_RESULTS.pdf](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/2010_POPULATION_AND_HOUSING_CENSUS_FINAL_RESULTS.pdf) (accessed 13.03.2015).

In an attempt to cope with this issue of poverty, many urban workers resorted to backyard gardening, raising of poultry, and participation in informal sector activities like street food vending to meet their food requirements (Essamuah and Tonah 2009: 85; cited in Chazan 1983; Ewusi 1984). However, it was within these same years of economic decline that Neo-Pentecostalism in Ghana witnessed a phenomenal expansion. As Gifford rightly asserts, churches ascribed to Neo-Pentecostal phenomenon in Accra “flourished because they [claimed] to have answers to Ghanaians existential problems, and especially, to their most pressing existential problem, economic survival. (Gifford 2004: ix). Several individuals attempted a livelihood strategy by affiliating to religious organizations with its associated beliefs and practices in order to escape poverty. Our next section discusses the underlying theme of religion as a means for existential ends in Ghana. But first, we outline the religious landscape<sup>13</sup> in the country, with special focus on the indigenous religions.

## **2.9 Religion in Ghana as a Livelihood Strategy**

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana provides for freedom of religion. Hence, by its constitution, Ghana is secular state. That notwithstanding, the state is endowed with religious pluralism and fluidity of religious affiliations. As a result of the numerous religions, scholars like Gerrie Ter Haar (1994: 221) and Max Assimeng (1995: 2005) have respectively described Ghana as a “religious Gold mine” and a “Religious Zoo manifesting all manner of religious wild life”. It is not surprising therefore that a mere response to “how are you?” in Ghana is embedded with theological connotations -“By God’s grace, I am fine”, or “I am alive because of God or Christ” or “We thank God”. This attests to the assertion by the Ghanaian theologian Pobe (1992: 62) that “in Ghana, to be is to be religious”.

Religious traditions which command substantial number of followers in Ghana can be identified as *Traditional Religion*, *Islam*, and *Christianity*. According to the 2010 Ghana Population Census, seventy-one percent of the population (71.2%) reported to be Christians (Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal/Charismatic and other Christian), followed by Islam (17.6%) and Traditionalists (5.2%). Nevertheless, there are host of other new religious movements with eclectic features traceable to the above mentioned traditions or to foreign imports. About five percent (5.3%) indicated that they had no affiliation to any religion.

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term religious landscape here to refer to the religious demographics and orientations in Ghana.

Observe the following table portraying the percentages of religious affiliations of both the 2000 and 2010 Population Census:

**Table 2: 2000 & 2010 Ghana Population Census By Religious Affiliation<sup>14</sup>**

Religious Affiliation	2000 Census	2010 Census
Total Population	18,912,079	24,658,823
Catholic	15.1 %	13.1%
Protestant	18.6 %	18.4%
Pentecostal- Charismatic	24.1 %	28.3%
Other Christians	11 %	11.4%
Islam	15.9 %	17.6%
Traditionalist	8.5 %	5.2%
Other	0.7%	0.8%
No Religion	6.1%	5.3%

The aforementioned figures reveal that Christianity is the most prevalent religion in Ghana with Pentecostals and Charismatic churches making the greater chunk of Christians in the Greater Accra Region. The multiplicity of religions in the country can be attributed to the traditional notion of an invisible world which is believed to be inhabited by malicious spirits, serving as impediments for the full enjoyments of human life in the physical world. Most Ghanaians are therefore open to any religion which claims to have the power to help them to overcome any form of evil and suffering, particularly, economic hardships.

Against this background, we show how the traditional religion, particularly of the Akans, resonates well with the religious orientation of leaders and adherents in the Neo-Prophetic stream.

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<sup>14</sup> See “2010 Ghana Population and Housing Census” compiled by Ghana Statistical Service 2012 [http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/Census2010\\_Summary\\_report\\_of\\_final\\_results.pdf](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/2010phc/Census2010_Summary_report_of_final_results.pdf) p.84. (accessed 14.03.2015)

### **2.9.1 Traditional Religion**

Traditional religion in Ghana fits into those described by Mbiti (1969: 1) as belonging to tribes or ethnic groups. The varied nature of ethnic groups, and by extension, traditional religions in Ghana makes the generalization of traditional religion in Ghana problematic. Nonetheless, the Akan traditional religion will be used in this research to represent Ghanaian traditional religions because they form the majority of the Ghanaian population.

The 2010 Ghana Population and Housing Census categorised the population into nine main ethnic groups: Akan 47.5%, Mole-Dagomba 16.6%, Ewe 13.9%, Ga 7.4% with the rest each constituting less than 6% of the total population. The Akan traditional religion becomes significant in this research as most Ghanaians, irrespective of their religious affiliations speak or understand Twi, the local language for the Akan ethnic group. More so, Twi is commonly used in many Ghanaian Pentecostal- Charismatic churches.

### **2.9.2 Akan Traditional Religion**

Like most other traditional religions, the Akan religion is not a systematic theological system. It is an undifferentiated number of rituals, articulating beliefs that are not embedded in “scriptures”, but expressed in oral history and in practitioner’s hearts and minds, and by religious personages like the priests, elders and kings (Mbiti 1960: 4). The key elements of Akan religious beliefs can be categorised as the beliefs in the Supreme Being (Onyame), gods (divinities) and charms (abosom and asuman), the spirit-ancestors (asaman), and numerous types of evil spirits (such as Satan (Sasabonsam) and witches abayifo). Central to our discussion on themes of poverty and the prosperity gospel are *the Akan concepts of wellbeing (yiedie), the dualistic view of life (nkwa), and the role of religious functionaries.*

### **2.9.3 Akans’ Traditional Concept of Well-being (yiedie)**

According to the Ghanaian scholar of religion, Elizabeth Amoah (2009: 111), “the African [Akan] concept of well-being comprises everything that makes life worth-living ... good health, peace and harmony with the spirits, and the entire society, to the material or physical resources that seem to give comfort”. Amoah further writes: “well-being in this sense has both internal (psychological and spiritual) and external (material) dimensions” (ibid). Put differently, harmony with the divinities becomes a prerequisite not only for spiritual protection from evil forces but also for physical enjoyment of success, good health, fertility

and longevity. The Akan traditional concept of well-being, otherwise called *yiedie*, is also related to *ahonyade* which indicates possessions or properties of all forms, wealth, riches, and substance (Christaller 1933: 186).

The concepts of *yiedie* and *ahonayde* have crucial implications for our themes on poverty and the prosperity gospel. It demonstrates that the notion of the sacred and secular complement each other in the Ghanaian societies. Thus, the issues of poverty and prosperity in the Ghanaian traditional context is perceived in not only material terms, but also spiritual, thus making the realities of poverty and prosperity a broad and complex phenomena. Yiedie, as a concept, stands in direct continuity with the prosperity gospel in Neo-Prophetic churches (Omenyo and Arthur 2013: 56).

#### **2.9.4 Akans' Dualistic View of Life**

The Akans have a dual view of the world as consisting - the physical and the spiritual – which are intricately linked. This dualistic worldview is also common across most West African countries (Okorochoa 1987: 52). It is within this religious context that the Ghanaian sociologist of religion, Max Assimeng, argues that “until the sphere of the African’s conception of spiritual “darkness” is reckoned with, one cannot claim that one is studying the religious consciousness of the traditional peoples of West Africa” (Assimeng 1989: 64). Significantly, Akans believe in a spirit world which is well populated by godly and evil agents. Much emphasis is placed on the supernatural in every sphere of life than explaining events from any scientific point of view.

#### **2.9.5 Role of Religious Functionaries**

The dualistic view of life in the Akan Traditional Religion partly evokes the need of religious functionaries like diviners and traditional priests. The Akans believes that man is vulnerable to spiritual forces, both evil and good. Hence, there is the need for a more potent power to overcome the evil ones. The services of religious functionaries in the Akan religion, just like the leaders of the Neo-Prophetic churches, becomes essential as the latter claims to have the power to deal with malevolent forces, to protecting people spiritually, and to help individuals prosper. As Omenyo and Arthur (2013: 57) aptly describe:

The oft-asked question is “why?” In that case, diviners (revered people who, by virtue of extra-sensitivity to spiritual reality and years of training, have become

“fathers of secrets) are able to decipher the past, the present and the future as well as uncover the human and spiritual causes of events and the possible solutions to the problems of life.

Akans call this “divinatory consultation or the desire to know the supernatural causalities of affairs” *abisa* (literally, “asking”) (Nyinah 2002: 115). Having identified the cause of the problem, a sacrifice is performed as way of communicating with the spirit world (Omenyo and Adjei 2013: 57) in seeking solutions.

## **2.10 Neo-Propheticism In Continuity With Akan Traditional Religion**

In keeping with this orientation of religious functionaries in the Akan world view, Neo-Prophetic leaders apparently perform a similar feat by using the Bible to indicate that they have a more powerful religious alternative. They tend to respond to the real needs of the people and reveal Christianity as a better alternative. They deal with demonic cases and life’s problems such as poverty, diseases, bareness, and failure, which are often attributed to evil forces. My field observations and interviews, as shown in our next chapter, revealed church members who admitted to joining Neo-Prophetic churches because they had been helped by the leader out of their pertinent problems. This is what often attracts people to the neo-prophets for *akwankyere* (or prophetic direction) in dealing with the reality of poverty.

Whereas the early Western missionaries were preoccupied with issues like atheism or secularization which were not being raised in local situations, the Pentecostal-Charismatic groups, particularly the Neo-Prophetic adherents, have found a fertile soil with large following. They appear to concern themselves with the burden of poverty. Today, many Ghanaian Christians turn to these religious traditions in the event of life’s crisis. Those religious traditions or theologies that are unable to take up issues that are most pressing in the local circumstances are considered irrelevant. It is in these socio-religious contexts that individuals affiliate to religious beliefs in hope for transformation in their personal lives.

## **2.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has briefly presented the geographical, historical, economic, and socio-religious, setting of Ghana. It traced the history and development of Ghana from its early centuries to its modern state. Specifically, we concentrated on the historical roots of poverty, underlining socio-economic structures such as structural adjustments, corruption and exploitation of

natural resources as part of the root causes. However, we underscored how individuals resort to religious affiliations, beliefs and practices as means of coping with their existential needs. Our next chapter will foreground a Neo-Pentecostal view of poverty which reveals poverty as a complex and broad phenomenon, assuming both material and non-material designations.

### **3 CHAPTER 3 - POVERTY IN NEO-PENTECOSTAL ACCRA**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Ghana is a country of contrasts; spectacular wealth exists side by side with devastating poverty. How does one make sense of this reality? The country remains incredibly rich in human, natural, and mineral resources; yet, many citizens strive to access daily food, lack quality healthcare, and basically struggle to survive. Scholars from various disciplines (Ross 1999; Sachs and Warner 1995; Karl 1997) have propounded various theories to account for this paradox; but religious beliefs are generally dismissed as irrelevant in such discourses. The African universe, Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (1995: 69) argues, “is a spiritual universe, one in which supernatural beings play significant roles in the thoughts and actions of the people”. This assertion which explains the continued pervasiveness of religion on African thinking and living makes imperative a religiously inspired view of poverty in Ghana.

This chapter examines how our informants bring their faith in engaging with the challenge of poverty. It pays attention to their perceptions of poverty, detailing causes and effects. Beyond a theorisation of poverty, the chapter discusses implications of such religious beliefs on developmental attitudes. Whereas it has been argued by scholars like Meyer (1995: 237) that Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal adherents use their religious ideas to understand or describe their lifeworlds, this chapter contends that such understandings, stressing an imaginary and invisible framework, must be critically engaged in poverty discourses in order meaningfully deal with the very real contradictions in the economic lives of many Ghanaians.

The data presented in this chapter are primarily excerpts of semi-structured interviews conducted with the leader of our research site, along with some adherents. As earlier mentioned, the trend of teachings and practices in Neo-Pentecostal congregations are normally determined by the personal orientation and vision of the leader (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 4). It would therefore be misleading to give the impression that views represented here are representative of Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostals. Nonetheless, the general prominence exhibited by these perceptions and its connections with existing academic literature (Meyer 1995; Gifford 2004) on the phenomenon, served as the guiding principle in this presentation.

Before discussing what meaning our informants attribute to poverty, I shall first introduce some relevant themes in African Indigenous Religions (AIR) which arguably provides a



common language of religion in Africa. I assume these beliefs in AIR seemingly influences Neo-Pentecostalist notions of poverty.

### **3.2 Key Concepts in African Indigenous Religions for Poverty**

Religion, in African indigenous context, has been defined by the Dutch scholar, Gerrie ter Haar (2009: 1) as “a widespread belief in an invisible world, inhabited by spiritual forces or entities that are deemed to have effective powers over the material world”. This definition is useful for our discussion because it brings to core, people’s belief in a perceived spirit world and the use of spiritual powers. Commenting on the African understanding of religion as related to Cicero’s *religio*, Ter Haar (2009:1) notes divination in Roman religion – “a response to the continuous revelatory messages sent from the Roman gods to world of humans” – as having a similar feature in African contexts. Previously, scholars dismissed these elements in African Religion and used prejudicial terms like “superstition”, “idolatry” or “animism” (cited in Ter Haar 2009).

As stated in our introductory chapter, many Africans believe, not only in the physical world, but also in an invisible or spiritual world in which of evil forces exist to impede the full enjoyment of human life. The search for a power to counter-act these evil forces is apparently the driving force of most religious beliefs and practices in Africa. At one end of Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostalism are Neo-Prophetic churches that build on this traditional religious imagination and perceive evil forces as omnipresent, influencing poverty and blocking prosperity. The crucial factor then is the “prophet” who is understood to have the “spiritual eyes” to see, and the spiritual power to conquer all evil forces.

As one female congregant of GWPMI remarked in the field interview:

I have been in this church for 5 years and I know how God is using him [the prophet] to work in delivering us from so many evil forces and *atamfo* (enemies). When I was about to give birth, I was supposed to die, but the prophet, who saw the evil forces surrounding my birth, prayed for me and I survived (July 7th, 2015, Accra).

Here, religion functions to deal with existential challenges (Anderson 1991: 71). The prolonged search for solutions to life’s challenges like poverty are also part of the common language of religion influenced by AIR. Many Neo-Prophetic churches in Accra flourish on the perceived assurance offered by the so-called “prophet” in solving existential problems.

These Neo-Prophets, as was observed in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, claim to covet spiritual powers in the spiritual realms in meeting practical ends in the material world. Gerrie ter Haar calls this “spiritual technology” (2009: 5-6). Further observations on Ghanaian media platforms revealed the recurring statement made by these Neo-prophets—“Come to me, and your life will never be the same”. They claim to bring intervention by giving insights into spiritual realities in tackling real life situations.

Spiritual technology, in AIR, also highlights the link between spiritual and material power. Ellis and Ter Haar (2004: 4) note the African idea of power, both good and evil, as having its ultimate origin in the spiritual world. The powers in the spiritual realm are believed to have the capacity to influence events in the physical world. Therefore, the central concern of religious activity in Africa, as Ghanaian sociologist Max Assimeng rightly concluded, is the “warding off of what Akans call “honhom fi” (evil forces) from the affairs of men” (Assimeng 1989: 60). Against this background, Neo-Pentecostals contextualize biblical passages by selecting texts and appropriating the influence of evil forces in the physical world. Chief amongst these biblical texts is Ephesians 6: 12 (NRSV): “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”. In effect, the search for solutions to material crisis among many Neo-Pentecostals usually begins in the repertory of the spiritual, wherein lies the source of real and effective power (Marshall 2009: 17).

The preoccupation with evil forces in AIR has given paramount importance to Satan in Ghanaian Pentecostalism. In her work *Translating the Devil*, which is based on ethnographic data concerning the Peki-Ewe of Ghana, Meyer (1999: xii) records this concept of Satan as a Western missionary import, which later became central in Ghanaian Christianity. She explains how Satan is often considered by Neo-Pentecostals as the prince of all the evil spiritual forces of the indigenous religion (ibid). In Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Satan has no symbolic form; yet, he is believed to be the brain behind all forms of evil such as infertility, sickness, and poverty. This Neo-Pentecostal worldview provides both the belief and ritual context within which evil, suffering or hardships is mystically explained and dealt with. Such interpretations and responses to evil are continuous with traditional religious ideas.

Having discussed these elements in AIR which seems prevalent in the thoughts and actions of many Neo-Pentecostals in Accra, I shall now discuss how poverty is conceptualised.

### 3.3 Meaning of Poverty in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

Poverty is a social construct and has meaning only within specific contexts (Padwick 2012: 469). “In Accra”, as one male informant remarked: “when you don’t have food to eat, a place to sleep, or a little comfortable life, then you are poor” (July 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra). Thus, poverty in Accra is simply the lack of basic amenities for survival. However, the discourse on poverty from a Neo-Pentecostal perspective is not entirely a socio-economic condition. In Neo-Pentecostal Accra, the causality of poverty is discerned primarily in the spiritual realm—“a category designed by Satan to primarily win more souls for his Kingdom”<sup>15</sup>. Interviews with all of our informants and observations revealed that poverty, from a Neo-Pentecostal viewpoint, constitutes a spiritual dimension, a stronger or higher spirit acting negatively upon the lives of individuals, families and even the nation. Commenting on the reality of poverty as spiritual, one pastor at GWPMI explained:

As an African, I also believe that there is a spiritual dimension to poverty. There are situations where people have done everything they can, but things are just not working well for them; they have gone to the schools, they have worked very hard, they have looked for the jobs, roamed everywhere; in fact, you can say that they have done almost everything they can, but they are just not making it, as in, they cannot afford a basic comfortable life. This is spiritual! (July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra)

Here, personal responsibility is not entirely overlooked. But this notion of personal responsibility in situations of poverty seems to oscillate with spiritual causality. This notion of oscillation was prevalent in the views expressed by all of our informants. Thus, it is commonly believed that, “a man’s business may succeed as the good forces [God’s Angels and the Holy Spirit] enables him, or be unsuccessful as his *atamfo* [enemies i.e. Satan and his cohorts] in the spiritual realm “fight” against him”<sup>16</sup>. Thus, although personal responsibility is not entirely overlooked, the cause and power to change situations of poverty is deeply interrelated or dependent on spiritual conditions. In her article “African Traditional Religion and the Concept of Poverty”, the Ghanaian religionist Elizabeth Amoah (2009: 111) confirms our finding by arguing that the holistic nature of AIR connotes the sacred and the secular as complementing each other. She further argues that poverty in such African contexts are not only material but also spiritual (Amoah 2009: 112). In effect, the Neo-Pentecostal lifeworld

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<sup>15</sup> Information acquired in an interview with Prophet Owusu Bempah of GWPMI on 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2015 in Accra

<sup>16</sup> This notion was expressed in all our interviews with our informants. We later found out through observations on Neo-Pentecostal programs on Ghanaian radio stations and television that it is commonly expressed in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

emphasizes one of action and counteraction, of man and of potent spiritual forces; spirits acting upon and influencing actions of human beings. The prevention of the works of evil forces therefore brings fulfilment in life. But the continued presence and influence of the former impedes progress. Owusu Bempah also shared his notion of poverty during the field interview:

Poverty is from the devil. It is a tool used by Satan to spread his kingdom and evil in this world. I don't see where God walked with someone in the bible whose life was poor. Look at Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and even Job - who initially lost all his things but later God gave back to him [Job], a double portion of all that he lost. So must this be in our time (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra).

Here, Bempah advances poverty as a situation unwilled by God. But one other male informant queried rhetorically in a rather unclear notion:

Is it possible that God allows people to be poor? I have been struggling with an answer to this. My thinking is that when you come to God and you are heavy laden, you will receive rest. But the Bible also says that the poor and the rich are created by God [He refers to Proverbs 22: 6 NRSV –“The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all”] I sometimes struggle with that phrase. I think there are situations where God allows the devil to take the believers resources to teach him some lessons. But I don't think God has forever designed anybody to be poor (July 20<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra).

As we can see, the notion of poverty expressed here with our informant seems much nuanced with Bempah's. It demonstrates a subtle degree of difference in the occurrence of poverty in relation to God. Nevertheless, in both views, the imagination of evil is incorporated with the meaning of poverty. This imagination of evil categorised in the spiritual realm is our principal focus for discussion. Such beliefs tends to portray poverty as a spiritual category of evil, transmitted by the devil into the physical world.

In “Confessing to Satanic Riches”, Meyer (1995) studied a popular Christian culture in Ghanaian Pentecostal circles wherein the image of Satan and evil is crucial in explaining financial hardships. Meyer (1995: 237) rejects the expression of a “false consciousness” associated to these imaginations of evil. Rather, she argues that such imaginations serve as templates for Neo-Pentecostals “to understand their social, political and economic situation, and to grapple with their changing conditions”. Meyer (1995: 248) further postulates that this “framework of an imaginary world which employs the realm of darkness offers the free space to explore new possibilities” in clarifying existential questions.

Indeed, Neo-Pentecostals resort to religious ideas and rituals to comprehend difficult situations of life. These frameworks provide theological concepts for adherents to play out their fears. However, our concern in this study is how such religious ideas, for example on poverty, influence believers' attitudes in relation to their socio-economic conditions? More concretely, what are the implications of such imaginations on the behaviour patterns and actions of believers towards poverty alleviation? The focus on these issues will form our discussion in the latter section.

Now, we turn to the causes of poverty in Neo-Pentecostal context.

### **3.4 Causes of Poverty in Neo-Pentecostal Context**

#### **3.4.1 Supernatural Causes**

In the same way as a medical doctor is able to diagnose the ailment of his clients, the prophets in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, through *akwankyere*<sup>17</sup>, appear to “diagnose” the causes of poverty in the life of believers. During prophetic ministrations, the prophet brings to the knowledge of congregants the *atamfo* (enemies) or evil forces in the spiritual world that are inflicting economic hardships on believers. Observations made during church services confirmed that, although Satan is believed to be the principal orchestrator of poverty, he apparently carries out his plan with his cohorts’—demons, witches, sorcerers and numerous evil spirits. These cohorts are commonly regarded in Ghanaian Pentecostal circles as *agents of Satan*<sup>18</sup>. The agents take active roles on behalf of Satan in enforcing other evil schemes like infertility, sickness and failures in life. A discussion on two agents of Satan, namely, witches and demons are as follows.

#### **3.4.2 Witches**

Among Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostals, witches are regarded as part of *atamfo*. They are believed to be human beings who are possessed by evil spirits to purposely destroy the lives and properties of close relations. The Akan words *bayifo* (witch) or *bayie* (witchcraft) are frequently used in the churches. In *A Study on the Belief in Destructive Witches and Its Effects on the Akan Tribes* in Ghana, Hans Debrunner (1959: 1) asserts that “the specific concept of

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 1,

<sup>18</sup> My field interviews and observations revealed that the term *agents of Satan* is frequently used among believers in Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Accra

witchcraft is the idea of some supernatural power of which man can also be possessed, and used exclusively for evil and antisocial purposes”. Stories that underscore the activities of witches abound during prophetic ministrations.

Consider this church service on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at GWPMI. After his sermon, Owusu Bempah called a young woman who was helped on to the platform. He had a revelation about her joblessness:

There is somebody in your family, from your mother’s side called Auntie Bee... Do you know her..?? (Woman pauses to reflect for some minutes...and then replies yes!) She visited you two months ago in your house and cooked some food for you. That food you ate into your body has become a spell on you, blocking your chances of getting a job and placing you in financial hardships. Although you have been called several times for a job interview, you are always rejected right? (Woman nods in the affirmative). This is the doing of this witch –Auntie Bee in your family. But because you came here [Prophet’s church] today, and have seen the prophet, I would reverse what she did (July 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra).

By receiving items that are believed to be hypnotized by witches, one can experience misfortunes like poverty, incurable diseases, loss of job or infertility. The bewitched items may include consumables, money, beads, and clothing. The prophet reveals activities of witches and in other cases, the items that one has come into contact with that are spellbound. All of our informants considered witches as the most feared agent of Satan because, they are humans and are most often very close relatives. They are believed to have the power to leave their bodies, especially at night, when they want to attend a meeting with fellow witches, or when they want to attack their victims<sup>19</sup>. Their activities are considered invisible to all except the prophet. Thus, neo-prophets are allegedly endowed with “spiritual eyes” to see the activities of witches in the spiritual realm.

Witches causing poverty are primarily eliminated through prayers. Such prayers are “boisterous and very physical” (Omenyo & Adjei 2013: 53). Observations at GWPMI showed characteristic prayer sessions against witches include: clapping of hands, loud declarations, stamping of feet, and pacing to and fro in the church premises. Indeed, terms like “spiritual warfare”, “spiritual battle”, and “military prayers” are frequently mentioned by believers in expressing such prayer rituals (Asamoah Gyadu 2007: 311). There are special individuals, commonly referred to as *Prayer Warriors*, who are said to be endowed with the gift of

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<sup>19</sup> Information G from interviews with our informants at GWPMI.

effectual power in prayer. During one church session at GWPMI on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2015, the Prayer Warriors led the prayer rituals against witches by voicing the following words:

Awuradee,	Lord
Sɛmɛbô mensâm bômpaɛɛ a	When I clap my hands and pray,
Ôtamfo biara a, ômma me nnyɛ yie no	May the enemies, who work against me,
apranaa nte ngu no so	Be struck by thunder
anaa car mbômo nku no	Or be killed by a car
Sɛôyɛ me maame o,	whether it is my mother
Sɛôyɛ me papa o,	whether it is my father,
a naa obibiara a ô yɛ ma tanfo	Or whoever it is that my enemy is
Mawontetegu	Let them fall. <sup>20</sup>

### 3.4.3 Demons

Poverty is also perceived to be enhanced by demons. During the field interview, Owusu Bempah explained:

Satan has assistant demons whom he plans with in every generation. The demon from Satan who is in charge of money is called *Mammon*. Do you remember even Jesus Christ talked about serving God or Mammon? Mammon plays a major part when it comes to poverty and riches. He carries out Satan's plan of poverty by intentionally inflicting financial hardships and sufferings to Christians. He then gives out money to those who will submit to him in such hardships. Those who submit to Mammon in their poverty situations do so by engaging in evil practices like occultism, same sex relations and human sacrifice. When people submit to such evil practices in order to come out of poverty, Mammon gives them money and they become rich. Through this, Satan draws more souls to Himself" (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra).

Here, there is a belief in the existence of a specific demon – *Mammon* - who takes active role in Satan's scheme of poverty "wrongly acquired riches"<sup>21</sup>. Bempah supported his claims by referring to the scripture in Matthew 6:24 (NRSV) where Jesus said- "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon". Many other informants also expressed

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<sup>20</sup> Information recorded during my participant observation in a prayer meeting at GWPMI on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> I use the term "wrongly acquired wealth" which relates well with Meyers' (1995) discussion on Satanic Riches in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

the notion of demons are part of Satan's cohorts who transmit poverty. One female adherent stated: "demons can take your resources by causing you to lose your job, your means of survival" (July 10<sup>th</sup> 2015. Accra)

The meaning of the word "mammon" has been debated in popular culture and in religious circles over centuries. Even though scholars do not agree on its etymology, "mammon" generally connotes money, wealth, riches or possessions. The Classical theologian, Peter Lombard of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, personified "mammon" as the demon of wealth and greed. John Milton advanced this view in his *Paradise Lost* (originally published in 1667) by depicting Mammon as a fallen angel, "more interested in heaven's golden pavements," rather than God.

However, historical-critical studies of New Testament by R.T France (1979: 9) notes mammon as wealth or possessions rather than a demon. In his paper "God and Mammon", France contrasts that Jesus' usage of mammon was to warn his disciples, and later believers, about the dangers of excessive materialism which impedes the spiritual concern for God. France contends:

"Mammon" means "possessions". It was not the name of a pagan god or of a fallen angel, as it has become for Milton in *Paradise Lost*, nor need it imply "wealth gained dishonestly"...it is not only wrongly acquired wealth, but possessions...Jesus declares to be in competition with God for men's allegiance. The competition is such that Jesus elevates "Mammon" into a principle, [and] almost personifies it. It is the principle of materialism, and it is diametrically opposed to the service of God, because "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (France 1979: 9).

The notion of money, wealth, riches, and possessions, which is almost prevalent in most designations of the word mammon is our principal concern in this thesis. However, for our informants, demons, and particularly Mammon, are part of Satan's cohorts believed to influence the poverty situations of individuals.

#### **3.4.4 Generational/Ancestral Curses**

Our informants believed that the misdeeds of ancestors can inflict a curse of poverty on individuals in the family line. According to one female adherent, "curses occur when family heads or members enter into covenants with deities of the indigenous religion or other evil spirits, and are unable to fulfil contract deeds" (July 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra). In the event of any misdemeanour, individuals may also be cursed by those they offend. Curses are said to also



manifest in other calamities like bankruptcy, failures, inexplicable illnesses, child mortality, premature deaths, strange deaths and a host of other misfortunes<sup>22</sup>. Commenting on the covenantal idea in African Pentecostalism, the Nigerian theologian, Ogbu U. Kalu (2007: 8), argues that “Covenants can only be reversed by recognising their existence, potent reality, character and appropriate rituals of disengagement. They are legally binding and may not be simply wished away without due processes”.

### **3.5 Material Causes Attributed to Poverty**

Some informants also identified practical reasons for the cause of poverty: laziness, the failure of institutions in society, corruption and irresponsible parenting. However, these views were expressed by only two out of our eleven informants, indicating that material factors to the reality of poverty are less emphasized in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

### **3.6 Effects of Poverty**

In explaining how poverty can motivate individuals to engage in “evil practices”, Owusu Bempah stated:

Satan is using poverty to win souls for his Kingdom; because, if you would observe, it is poverty that makes people *join occultic or secret societies... consult diviners or spiritualists for “blood money”... engage in homosexuality*<sup>23</sup>. Poverty can even coerce poor nations to accept certain beliefs or practices that otherwise would have been frowned upon in their society. All these are the works of Satan (July 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra).

Here, the actions which are regarded as “evil” are associated with the effects of poverty. By the term *evil*, Neo-Pentecostal adherents refer to conducts that are generally not accepted within the Ghanaian context<sup>24</sup>. Some of these include:

#### **3.6.1 Joining Occultic/Secret societies**

Generally, informants believe occultic groups or secret societies exist to accumulate wealth by wrongful means. Members who quit these societies usually share their life stories as to what actions the group undertakes and for what purposes. Meyer (1995: 242) narrates vividly,

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<sup>22</sup> General perception of believers obtained through by field observations in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

<sup>23</sup> I put these phrases in italics as a matter of my emphasis for discussion

<sup>24</sup> Information acquired in all our field interviews.

the conversion story of the Nigerian Emmanuel Eni, who revealed how his involvement with Occultic groups regularly demanded human sacrifices that helped him to acquire “satanic riches”. Many of our informants also seemed convinced that affiliation to occultic societies are the effects of poverty, claiming: “they are ways Satan employs to win souls”<sup>25</sup>.

### **3.6.2 Consulting diviners, spiritualists, or sorcerers**

In efforts to come out of poverty, individuals are believed to seek help from diviners or spiritualists. When life does not go on well as expected, such consultations become necessary to adherents in Neo-Pentecostal Accra. Popular stories that emerged during visits to church services at GWPMI revealed that relatives and close friends may even be “sacrificed” by spiritual means to pacify indigenous gods or spirits in order to make money. This confirmed earlier research by Meyer (1995) in Accra on stories told about the devil and money in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

### **3.6.3 Joining Gay Groups**

One of the pastors interviewed indicated that “poverty may coerce individuals, groups and nations to promote or practice same sex relations in order to receive financial supports”<sup>26</sup>. For Owusu Bempah, “the issue of same-sex relations could increase to a level where as a result of poverty, nations might be coerced to legalise such practices which otherwise would have been unaccepted”. Indeed, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November 2011, the then President of Ghana, John Atta Mills, pledged to never initiate or support any attempt to legalize homosexuality in Ghana. This was in response to British Prime Minister David Cameron’s comment that the United Kingdom would consider cutting off aid to any country that failed to recognize gay rights<sup>27</sup>. Similarly, the Ugandan presidential adviser John Nagenda, also rejected UK’s threat to cut aid if his country refuses to legalise

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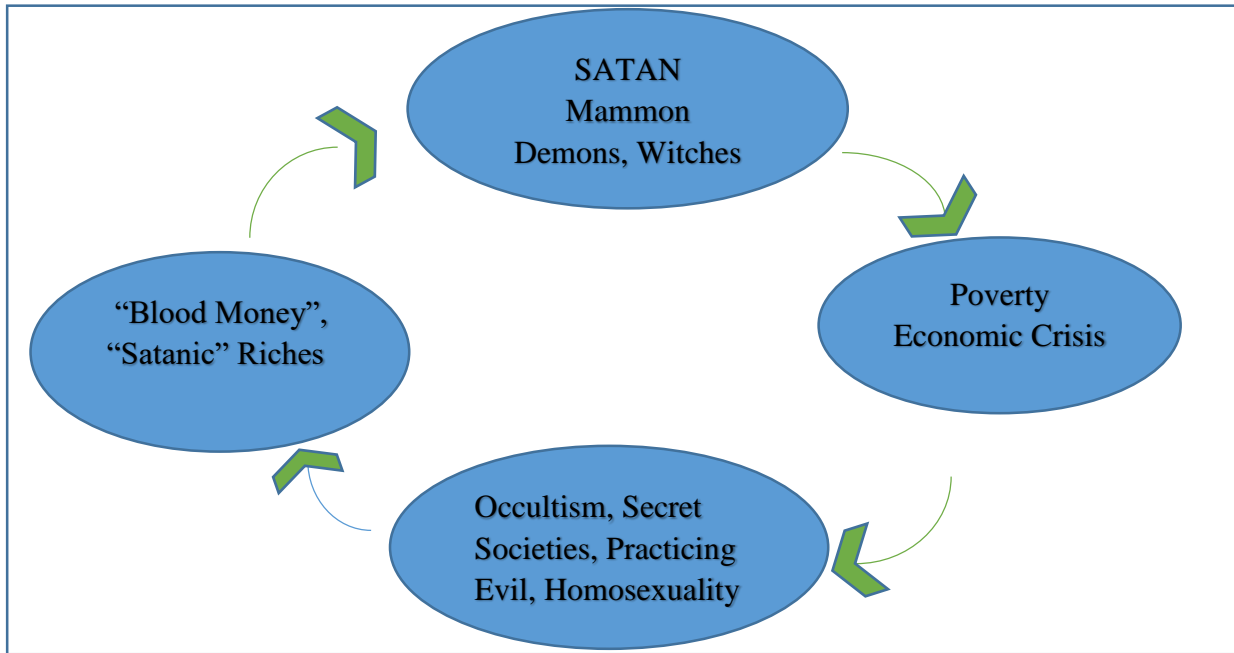
<sup>25</sup> Information acquired in our field interviews with informants on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in Accra.

<sup>26</sup> Information acquired in an interview with Prophet Owusu Bempah of GWPMI and Pastor Adom in Accra

<sup>27</sup> See “Ghana refuses to grant gays' rights despite aid threat”, BBC News website, 2 November 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15558769> (Accessed on 23.11.2015) See also "I will never support legalizing homosexuality, Ghana's President says", National Post, 2 November 2011. <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/ghanas-president-vows-to-never-support-any-attempts-to-legalize-homosexuality> (Accessed on 23.11.2015)

homosexuality<sup>28</sup>. Building on these events, many Neo-Pentecostal believers in Accra explain these occurrences as part of Satan’s schemes in the end times.

**Diagram Illustrating Neo-Pentecostalist Notion of Poverty (Figure 5)**



### **3.7 Analysing Neo-Pentecostalist Notion of Poverty**

So far, I have discussed a Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostalist notion of poverty: - a persistent belief of poverty as not only a socio-economic condition, but significantly, a form of spiritual evil mystically caused by inhabitants of the spirit world, the occurrence of which necessitates an inclusive spiritual remedy. A common notion is the consciousness of the image of the devil and his “agents” in the meaning, causes, and effects of poverty. How then do we approach such understanding of a spiritual phenomenon for which there otherwise appears to be no rational explanation? Do we relegate these ideas to the realm of fantasy, false consciousness or incorrect reasoning?

Many scholars of Western culture dismiss the existence of a spirit world in which evil forces exist (cited in Ter Haar 2009: 7). The argument made is that spiritual phenomena are non-

<sup>28</sup> See BBC News website, 2 November, 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15558769> (Accessed 23.11.2015)

scientific and often not a proper subject for inquiry since there are no well-established methods of investigation. Rather than dismissing such worldviews, as some may claim, lack explanatory power, this thesis attempts to critically engage religious worldviews in the development process, since the persistence of religion on Ghanaian living and thinking evokes the need for a more thoughtful answer. Besides, it is significant to recognize that many Ghanaians, as well as Africans, who are well educated in Western culture and science identify the existence and influence of evil spiritual powers with life's crisis.

Indeed, the belief about a perceived spirit world and its influence on the physical world is not exclusive to Africa. Ter Haar (2009: 1-5) mentions other societies like the ancient Roman religion, whose long religious tradition had established interactions with an invisible world. She further argues that "modern connotations of religion are only the result of a long theistic tradition conditioned by Europe's history rather than, for example, Africans' own history" (Ter Haar 2009: 2). These factors show, to an extent, the inadequacy of conceptualising imaginations of evil in a spirit world as merely false consciousness.

The position argued here is that concepts of evil are culturally conditioned. People's understandings and experiences, to large extent, shape the meaning of evil, in whatever form it may appear. Hence, a Neo-Pentecostal understanding of poverty in relation to spiritual evil must be critically engaged with non-religious approaches to poverty. This may help to meaningfully understand the conflicting socio-economic situations in Ghana and possibly create helpful developmental attitudes towards poverty alleviation. The critical engagement argued here is not intended to replace a socio-economic approach to poverty for a religious one, but to complement them in ways that can help individuals to not only understand and describe their lifeworlds, but improve their well-being.

Meyer (1995: 237) analysed "imaginings of evil as not merely, reflections of ill-understood social, political and economic conditions". She argues that imagination of evil can be seen as "fields within which people produce meanings, enabling them to analyse critically and thereby shape their life condition". For Meyer (1995: 248), providing believers with an image not only of Almighty God but also of a dark counterpart affords Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostals the opportunity to explore new possibilities in explaining "why and how things go wrong in the physical world". This gives impetus to a dualistic worldview wherein all occurrences, both good and evil, can be explained.

This study, however, argues that the dualistic worldview that undergirds the Neo-Pentecostalist notion of poverty is “twisted” in that, it creates a devil who seems to be equal in power and majesty with God. As shown by the excerpts of the interviews with our informants, there appears to be no clear distinction between the kingdom and power of the devil and his cohorts, and that of God. More so, our interview excerpts and field observations shown above reveal the tendency of adherents to place huge emphasis on the power of evil forces (witches and demons) unceasingly at war with believers. This “twisted” dualism is apparently difficult to sustain biblically.

The bible leaves no doubt about the destructive powers of Satan and of evil. More so, there is no denying the fact that there are some occurrences of evil in this physical world that may be beyond human comprehension. The turning point in the power of evil, however, is inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Biblical theology points out that Satan and his cohorts has been defeated through Jesus Christ, “who disarms powers and authorities, and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them on the cross” (Col. 2:15). Similarly, Jesus gives authority to his disciples, and by extension, to all believers “to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10: 19). Rather than stressing the power of Satan and his cohorts as the mystical cause of poverty, there is a theological potential for Neo-Pentecostals to focus on the liberating power of God exerted in Christ in the spirit world.

The huge emphasis placed on evil forces in the occurrence of poverty seems to have robbed believers, of their individual autonomy in transforming their situations. As shown in the interviews, believers are distracted by unseen powers (witches, demons, ancestral curses) which are assumed to be the rulers of one’s destiny. Field observations on 1st July 2015, revealed that the National Association of Christian and Charismatic Churches (NACCC) invited all Ghanaians to join in a “prayer marathon” to seek the face of God to intervene in Ghana’s economic crises<sup>29</sup>. Rev. Christy Doe Tetteh, Founder of Solid Rock Chapel International and a member of NACCC noted in an interview with Joy fm<sup>30</sup>: “the kind of signals we are picking in the realms of the spirit...we don’t want to sit down and calamity will befall us again”. This one sided spiritual approach to the issue of poverty, usually

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<sup>29</sup> See Myjoyonline.com, ‘Charismatic Pastors Hold Prayers for Ghana’s Economy on July 1’, <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/june-30th/charismatic-pastors-hold-prayers-for-ghanas-economy-on-july-1.php> (accessed 15.07.2015)

<sup>30</sup> Joy fm is an Accra based radio station.

expressed among believers in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, leads to the negligence of other socio-economic approaches to the issue to the economic crisis.

Thus, for a successful developmental attitude on poverty alleviation in Ghana, it appears two dimensions must be in balance. Religious adherents should be ready to critically engage their beliefs in a helpful ways and to appreciate pragmatic or non-religious interventions to the reality of poverty. Similarly, critics of religion and development practitioners, in advocating for socio-economic approaches, must holistically make use of existing religious resources or ideas to inspire helpful attitudes that motivates poverty reduction.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In summary, the Neo-Pentecostal understanding of poverty affords a glimpse of the realm of the powers of darkness from a safe distance. It brightens the dark and perhaps, makes visible what happens unnoticeably. The testimonies of adherents about the spirit realm can be considered as eye witness accounts of the so-called spiritual world. By constructing a religious meaning of poverty, Neo-Pentecostals affirm that things which are seen are made of things which are not seen, presenting themselves in what Meyer (2004: 244) calls “true purveyors of knowledge”. The crucial factor then is to critically engage these perceptions in a helpful ways so as to serve as an ideological resource for the development process.

In the next chapter, we delve into how Neo-Pentecostals respond to the reality of poverty by articulating the prosperity gospel.

## 4 CHAPTER 4 -PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN GHANAIAAN NEO-PROPHETISM

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the content of the prosperity gospel. It first defines the phenomenon and hypothesises how the term came to being. The history of the doctrine is then outlined, referring to the American context and its subsequent influence on African countries. Principally, the chapter unveils the underlying theories and principles of the Prosperity Gospel in a Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic context. This will aid in the process of analysing its theological, pastoral and social effect in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Ghana.

### 4.2 Definitions of Prosperity Gospel

The phenomenon called “Prosperity Gospel” has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars of various disciplines. The doctrine, however, is not a monolithic theological system; it comprises various perspectives. Thus, according to Stanley M. Burgess (2006: 393), any attempt to define the prosperity gospel will inevitably entail a risk of distorting or oversimplifying it. In attempt to minimise such risks, we refer to definitions of prosperity gospel from an encyclopaedia and from two notable scholars of African Christianity: Paul Gifford and Asamoah-Gyadu.

According to *The Encyclopaedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, the prosperity gospel can be defined as:

Christian worldviews that emphasize an earthly life of health, wealth, and happiness as the divine, inalienable right of all who have faith in God and live in obedience to His Commands.

Paul Gifford (1998: 62) summarises the doctrine as follows:

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

Asamoah Gyadu (2005: 202), from a Ghanaian perspective, articulates it this way:

The underlying theory of the “gospel of prosperity” is that God rewards faithful Christians with good health, financial success and material wealth, ‘according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 4:19).

The definitions above demonstrate how Pentecostal believers assert *right* and *power* to plunge into “spiritual resources” in Christ in order to control their physical well-being, financial fortunes, and material progress.

### **4.3 General Biblical Texts of Prosperity Gospel**

Several biblical texts are cited by pastors and believers in support of the prosperity gospel: 3 John 2ff (God’s will for believers is to prosper and be in good health); Philippians 4:19ff (God supplies all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ); 2 Corinthians 9: 8ff (Jesus Christ, though rich, became poor for our sakes, so that through his poverty, we might be rich); Luke 6: 38ff (Give and it shall be given unto you, a good and overflowing measure); Deuteronomy 8: 18ff (God gives power to become wealthy); and John 10: 10 (God gives abundant life characterised by wealth).

### **4.4 Hypothesising the Label – Prosperity Gospel**

The word *gospel* is probably attached to *prosperity* to postulate the doctrine as part of the central Christian message: - “faith in God and His Word can lead believers not only to redemption but more so, to true socio-economic success” (Stiles-Ocran<sup>31</sup> 2013: 73). Therefore, the label “prosperity gospel” apparently renders the message as salvific and true. However, in questioning the theological validity of this notion, critics use other labels such as *Name-it-and-claim-it*, *faith-formula theology*, or *faith-equals-fortune message*. Proponents, on the other hand, prefer the terms; *Holistic Gospel*, *Faith Gospel*, or *Health and Wealth Gospel* (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 203). In this work, the designations “Prosperity Gospel” and “Gospel of Prosperity” will be frequently employed since they are widely used in African scholarship.

### **4.5 Origin and History of the Prosperity Gospel**

The origin of the Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel is a highly debated issue among scholars. For instance, whereas Gifford (1990: 373) traces the prosperity gospel to North American roots, scholars like Matthew Ojo (1990: 106) insist the gospel of prosperity is original to African Charismatic movements. This chapter will not concern itself with arguments over the

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<sup>31</sup> David Stiles Ocran recently studied the Prosperity Gospel in his MPhil thesis submitted to the University of Oslo under the title, “Jesus’ Kingdom Message And Ghana’s New Christianity: A Contextual Approach to the Praxis of the Kingdom of God”, in 2013.



origins of the doctrine. Instead, we assert that despite the significant influence of North American Neo-Pentecostalism in shaping the prosperity gospel in African Neo-Pentecostal churches, the primal aspirations of *yiedie* (prosperity) characterised by indigenous religions played a crucial role in the formation of the prosperity gospel in African contexts. Commenting on the pursuit of prosperity as paramount in African cosmology, the Ghanaian theologian, Emmanuel Anim, affirms:

Africans do not “honour” or accept suffering or poverty, it is a battle they have always sought to fight, and the belief in the gods is primarily to ensure prosperity and well-being. Thus, the influence of American-type prosperity teaching only served as a catalyst and also reinforced what was already prevailing in the matrix of the primal world-view” (Anim 2010: 66).

Anim’s argument is helpful to our discussion because it shows how religious movements are invariably shaped by the cultural milieu in which they arise. Hence, to portray the prosperity gospel as an American export is to overlook the unique and equally significant contexts within which the message is variously delivered world-wide.

#### **4.5.1 The North American Influence**

The North American prosperity gospel emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. In America, the prosperity gospel is generally attributed to Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003) of Tulsa, Oklahoma. He served as a Baptist preacher before becoming a pastor with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God. He is said to have received a revelation in 1934 on the text of Matthew 23:11ff (Shorter & Njiru 2001: 32). Hagin’s teaching stressed that “prayer for health and wealth is infallibly answered” (ibid). In 1974, he founded his own bible training centre and mentored many prosperity preachers. Other prominent proponents of the doctrine in North America are E.W. Kenyon, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Joel Osteen.

The American type prosperity gospel emerged in a period in USA, described by the New Testament Scholar, Dan Liroy (2007: 4), as “the days when living standards were visibly increasing, opportunity was everywhere, and success through a positive mental attitude”. For Jonathan J. Bonk (2006: 18), the doctrine emerged in “an economy of superabundance where the craving for material rewards became a fatal addiction for which there was no cure”. Bonk emphasises how a materialistic lifestyle had “pervasive influence upon the American people [exerting] a profound effect upon the character of the individual members of society” (Bonk 2006: 18).

Over time, the prosperity gospel began to spread globally. The inspirational books, pamphlets, audio tapes, and televangelism of prosperity preachers in USA were instructive to African Neo-Pentecostal movements, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana. The highly patronised crusades and healing rallies by American preachers in capital cities like Accra and Lagos, also advanced the teachings.

The global spread of the prosperity gospel by North American preachers, has been described by Brouwer, *et al* (1996: 2) as possibly intertwined with a culture of conspicuous “consumerism”. The consumerist society, as explained by the Norwegian theologian Sturla Stålsett (2005: 203), is a society where “desire” is a legitimate and constructive force that should [always] find fulfilment, when it is expressed in faith”. Building on Stålsett and Brouer *et al*, we can postulate that the spread of the North American type prosperity gospel was intertwined with the homogenising influence of immediate gratification of desires for material goods and services.

However, unlike in North America, the prosperity gospel in Africa flourished in contexts of poverty (Togarasei 2011) and among struggling economies (Gifford 2004). It was seen as a message of hope, expected to be a means for human survival. Thus, the ultimate goal for many African believers as they adhered to the prosperity gospel was to meet their basic needs like jobs, food and a comfortable life.

Now, we turn to the beginnings of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

#### **4.5.2 The Nigerian Influence**

One of the earliest promoters of the prosperity gospel in Africa was the late Nigerian Archbishop Benson Idahosa. Idahosa was trained in the Rhema Bible College of Kenneth Hagin in Oklahoma. When he returned to Nigeria, he founded his own Bible school and later, started the Church of God Mission International, headquartered in Benin City. Africans who could not go to USA for training went to Idahosa’s Bible school (Akoko 2007: 6). Similarly, Idahosa’s frequent visits to African countries like Ghana, for crusades and leadership seminars, were very well attended by Pentecostal adherents. It was these leadership seminars that led to the training of Archbishop Nicholas Duncan Williams, the founder of Ghana’s first Charismatic Church—Christian Action Faith Ministry International.

Other Nigerian prosperity gospel preachers such as Bishop David O. Oyedepo have also been of influence in Africa. Oyedepo founded the “Living Faith World Outreach” or “Winners’ Chapel” in Lagos, 1983. Sixteen years later, the church spread to thirty-eight African countries (Clarke 2006: 5). “Oyedepo claims the Lord had told him that Hagin’s ‘baton had been passed’ to him” (ibid). He is also convinced of receiving Copeland’s anointing as he once slept in a bed Copeland had slept in (Gifford 2008: 287). The motto of his church - “I am a winner” - is sported on stickers adorning cars, shops and houses in Lagos and Accra. Explaining this slogan, Bishop Oyedepo says, “it gives you an identity, that I am a winner...it gives you a sense of conviction, that you are heading for something positive” (Maier 2000: 264). In 2011, Forbes<sup>32</sup> declared Bishop Oyedepo Nigeria’s richest pastor, having an estimated net worth of US \$ 150 million. He owns four private jets and homes in London, the United States, and a publishing company<sup>33</sup>.

#### **4.5.3 The Ghanaian History**

Archbishop Duncan Williams has been a chief advocate of the prosperity gospel in Ghana since the 1980’s. In fact, he is said to have opined during a primetime TV talk show in Accra, that “Jesus wore designer clothing”, construing that the seamless nature of Jesus’ robe as he entered into Jerusalem, made people gamble for it (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 205). He further contends that the donkey on which Jesus rode was probably the most expensive means of transport in Jesus’ days (ibid). For Duncan Williams, the principal message is that God wants his children to flourish and to have the best of everything. Many other popular Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal preachers were trained through Duncan Williams’s ministry, such as, Dag Heward Mills of the Lighthouse Chapel International, Robert Ampiah-Kwoffie of the Global Revival Ministries, Sam Korankye Ankrah of the Royal House Chapel International, and Eastwood Anaba of the Fountain Gate Chapel.

Another pioneering prosperity gospel preacher in Ghana is Mensa Otabil, founder of the International Central Gospel Church in Accra. He started his ministry in February 1984. Otabil’s style of ministry attracts elites or adherents of high socio-economic class in Accra. Unlike Duncan-Williams, Otabil’s prosperity gospel discounts extreme materialism, leaning more towards prosperity that results from “believers’ own education and skills, and from a

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<sup>32</sup> Forbes is an American business magazine owned by Forbes, Inc. It features original articles on finance, industry, investing, and marketing topics.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/06/07/the-five-richest-pastors-in-nigeria/> accessed on 18/12/2015.

transforming culture” (Gifford 2004: 113-139). Gifford (2004) discussed the emphasis on prosperity and the public role these leaders and their churches play, categorising them at one end of the spectrum in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

At the other end of the Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal spectrum are the Neo-Prophets, our primary concern in this thesis. These include Prophet Salifu Amoako of Alive Chapel, Prophet Ebenezer Darkwa Yiadom (aka Prophet 1) of Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre and Prophet Owusu Bempah of GWPMI, the latter of whom our prosperity gospel is centred around. In contrast to Duncan-Williams and his protégés, this burgeoning group of prophets attract a larger following, “whose orientation to life is deeply rooted in the primal world view” (Omenyo and Atiemo 2006: 55). What makes Neo-Prophetism very attractive to many Ghanaians is “the basic fear of malevolent forces [and the “power” to address them], a dependence on the [prophet’s] “anointing”, and the belief that the protection and blessing of God will remain upon them, so long as they remain faithful [to God, to the church, and to the prophet]” (Lartey 2001: 13).

In the following sections, we unveil the underlying theories and principles of prosperity gospel from a Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic context.

#### **4.6 Theorising A Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic Prosperity Gospel**

Among adherents of Neo-Prophetic churches, prosperity gospel is articulated specifically as a way out of poverty or financial hardship<sup>34</sup>. In order to become prosperous, some Neo-Prophets and their adherents emphasise *giving* or more preferably, *seed sowing*. Owusu Bempah, for example, asserts:

I don’t believe poverty can be cast out through deliverance sessions. If you desire to receive blessings from God, you cannot just say it with your mouth. What casts out poverty is giving. The more you give [to God, to the church, and to the prophet], the more you attract God’s presence; and God’s presence will drive out poverty, so you prosper. I have not seen a farmer who has not planted, and yet could harvest. If a farmer does not sow seed, he cannot harvest fruits. You sow before you reap! So it is with giving. As you give, you are sowing seeds of prosperity, and when the time is ripe, you will harvest (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra).

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<sup>34</sup> Information acquired during informant observations and interviews on the field.

Even though Owusu Bempah asserts that poverty, for him, cannot be dealt with by deliverance<sup>35</sup> sessions, field observations in Neo-Pentecostal Accra confirmed that deliverance sessions in church may include themes on poverty. However, in order to prosper, many believers agree that one must give.

In earlier definitions of the prosperity gospel, Gifford (1998: 62) stated “one can obtain these blessings [of prosperity] merely by a positive confession of faith”. But the Neo-Prophetic understanding of the prosperity gospel is much more than simply articulating one’s faith orally. As shown in example above, prosperity in Ghanaian Neo-Propheticism is understood as a commitment to a particular way of acting- *giving to God, the church and the prophet*. This method of theologising on prosperity can be appropriately understood in terms of what theologian Stephen Bevans (2002: 72) calls the *praxis model*.

According to Bevans,

When we speak of the praxis model of contextual theology... the central insight...is that theology is done not simply by providing relevant expressions of Christian faith but also by commitment to Christian action. What becomes clear is that theology done this way cannot be conceived in terms of books, essays or articles. Rather, theology is conceived more in terms of an activity, process, and a way of living (Bevans 2002: 72).

Thus, by first acting, thus *sowing seed or giving*, and then reflecting on that action in faith, practitioners of the prosperity gospel in the Neo-Prophetic strand develop a theology that is relevant to their context and struggle with poverty. One female adherent in GWPMI remarked: “In Christ, all these [prosperity] have been done already; but it is in the spirit realm, for it to be manifested into the physical realm, you must *do something*” (July 19<sup>th</sup> 2015 Accra). In this way, believers assert *principles* that need to be followed in efforts to “translate” spiritual prosperity into material prosperity. This “interaction between the spiritual world and material world”, Ter Haar correctly points out, is “both common and normal” in Africa (Ter Haar 2009: 82).

#### **4.7 Principles Needed for Prosperity.**

The field interviews with our informants revealed three main principles in keeping with prosperity: *hard work, prayer and giving*.

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<sup>35</sup> For more on the concept of Deliverance in Neo-Pentecostalism, see extensive discussions by scholars like Abamfo Atiemo (1994) and Asamoah Gyadu (2005a: 164-200).

### 4.7.1 Hardwork

All of our informants emphasised the need to engage in “hard work” in the pursuit of prosperity. For Bempah, hardwork is “what a person can do with his hands for survival in the midst of the choices open to him or her” (July 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra). He implied engaging in any profitable venture or activity. Our field interviews showed that many of our informants at GWPMI engaged in petty trading or small scale enterprises to earn a living. But such work activities, as was later discovered through interview questions, are usually distracted by our informants’ regular participation at church services during working hours in the week. Participant observations at GWPMI revealed that a typical Tuesday church service can last up to 7 hours, from 9 am and to approximately 4pm. Upon closure, the prophet waits in his office to attend to a long queue of congregants for *akwankyere*. This is typical of many other Neo-Pentecostal churches in Accra. Believers’ active participation in church activities, regardless of the time schedules, is often prioritised over one’s job for ends meet. The underlying theory which explains for this attitude was expressed in an interview with one female adherent: “it is God who gives you the ability to produce wealth, so in order to prosper, you must win Gods favour from God by giving and being committed to church” (July 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra). Thus, it is believed that “unless God blesses the work of your hands through your faithfulness in church going, as well as paying of tithes, offerings and seed sowing, you will never yield the fruits of prosperity”<sup>36</sup> (July 15<sup>th</sup>2015, Accra). Bempah added to this notion:

As you work, you must covenant with God through giving; thus the payment of *tithes*, *offerings*, and *seed sowing*. In as much as prosperity includes hardwork, if God is not in it, that hardwork may not yield the necessary returns. Psalm 127: 1-2: says ‘unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain those who build it, unless the Lord guards the city, the watch man stays awake in vain’ (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra).

From the foregoing, we can postulate that hardwork alone, if not tied to giving and active participation in church, is perceived as a fruitless venture towards prosperity.

### 4.7.2 Prayer

In hope for prosperity, believers engage in long prayers with the aim of receiving favour from God. These prayer sessions are quite similar to the warfare<sup>37</sup> type against

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<sup>36</sup> Information gathered from informants

<sup>37</sup> See the section under ‘witches’ in Chapter 3, discussed as causes of poverty.

*atamfo* (enemies). However, prosperity type prayers, as revealed through my participant observation at GWPMI, are usually said with an “authoritative tone” on the part of believers as they seem to assert or claim, what they call their *right* in Christ. In one of these prayer sessions at GWPMI, recorded on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 the prayer warrior voiced the following:

Lord, I command breakthroughs in my business, I declare that I shall prosper. I bind all my enemies against me, and I decree that I shall never go hungry in the sight of my enemies.<sup>38</sup>

Here, it is believed that believers’ thoughts, words and actions possess performative effects which eventually determine what believers receive as material prosperity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 214). Hence, we notice the use of authoritative words such as *command*, *decree*, and *declare* being used by believers as these words are perceived to evoke powerful effects in the spiritual realm.

#### **4.7.3 Giving**

Giving, in GWPMI, is said to include giving money, land, cars, time, abilities, and one’s possessions to God’s Work (evangelism, missions, etc.) and His servants – the prophets. Bempah believes that “Giving is not all about money”. Using an example from Acts 4: 33-37, he stated that Peter and the early church allowed believers to give whatever they had – time, abilities, talents, land, properties or money – as an offering to God and to the church. Contrarily, all of our informants as well as many church members in GWPMI understand giving to concern specifically money.

#### **4.7.4 Giving - An Ambivalent Phenomenon**

The principle of giving practiced in GWPMI and in much of Neo-Pentecostal Accra, is sometimes controversial and unclear. Interviews conducted revealed a lack of clarity on the side of believers concerning the relationship between their acts of giving and the alleged material rewards often expected or claimed to have received. It was difficult, if not impossible, for the study to ascertain through our interviews and observations, in what particular cases a believer’s act of giving can be directly related to a specific reaping of material reward. There seems to be no direct relationship. One fact however was discovered:

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<sup>38</sup> Information recorded during my field observation on July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015 in Accra.

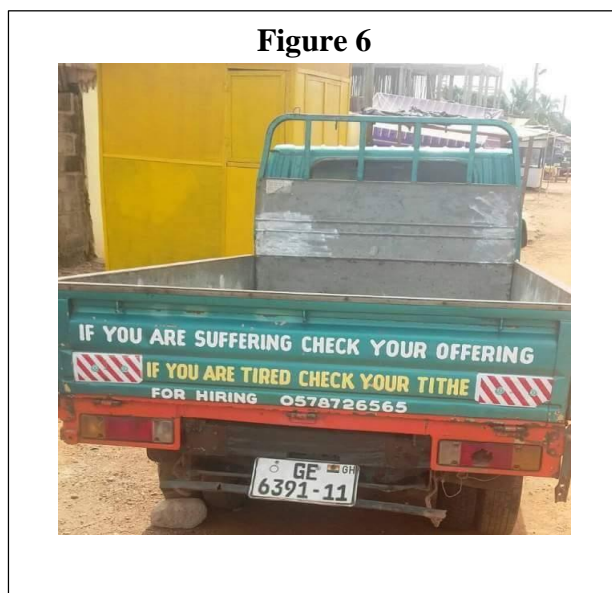
for the preachers who advance this message in GWPMI and in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, one asserted: “it works for me”<sup>39</sup>, as he shared testimonies of luxurious cars, houses, and lands received from some congregants as gifts. However, for the local adherents of the same principle of giving, none confirmed such significant rewards. Rather, concerns were raised by a few regarding the so-called “delayance” of the fruits of prosperity. As one female informant shared: “sometimes, God delays in rewarding us the prosperity we expect”. But as expected, our informant addresses this issue herself with a biblical text: “the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5.25) was also afflicted for twelve years before she Jesus brought her cure. Analysis on these will be advanced in our next chapter.

## 4.8 Types of Giving

Based on the data collected, three types of giving can be identified under the prosperity gospel; *offering*, *tithe* and *seed sowing*.

### 4.8.1 Offering

In GWPMI, offering generally refers to an amount of money given by each congregant at a particular time of the church service. It is a ritual done amidst singing, drumming, and



dancing. Each congregant rises from his or her seat and walks to deposit his or her money in offering bowls, placed in front of the podium. There is no specific amount or limitation on offering. Nevertheless, testimonies shared by all informants revealed that one’s amount given as offering is generally perceived as a determinant of the amount of blessing or material reward one is likely to receive from God. The picture shown in figure 6, which was taken

during observations in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, well summarises this notion.

<sup>39</sup>Information acquired in an interview with one pastor at GWPMI on July 19th, 2016.



### 4.8.2 Biblical Example Used for Offering

The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4: 4-5 was cited by one male adherent in explaining the size and quality of offerings by believers. For him, “even though both children [Cain and Abel] brought offerings, God had pleasure in Abel’s offering because it was “better” than Cain’s. Thus, “whereas Cain was selective, bringing less suitable or qualified fruits as offering, Abel offered fat portions of the firstborn of his flock, considering God more worthy of honour”<sup>40</sup>. Consequently, some believers postulate that the quality or size of one’s offering determines the size of blessing to be received from God. This motivates many congregants to give huge amounts of money to the church in hope of bigger returns or blessings.

### 4.8.3 Tithe

In Neo-Pentecostal Accra, tithe is a tenth of believer’s monthly salary or earnings that is given to the church<sup>41</sup>. Unlike offerings, tithe is a fixed requirement of church members. In GWPMI, adherents have tithe cards for record-keeping of tithes paid monthly. According to one female informant, “funerals and weddings of members who regularly pay their tithe appear well patronised than other members found contrary” (July 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra).

In this manner, tithe assumes a sociological implication. It becomes a method by which the church identifies those who are truly *belonging* rather than *believing*. In *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging*, the British sociologist Grace Davie (1994) found what she argued was a profound mismatch between religious values that people professed (“believing”) and actual religious practice and church going (“belonging”). Whereas Davie (1990: 455) found religion in contemporary Britain to be more of a question of *believing*, our research into the prosperity gospel reveals that, religion in GWPMI and in Neo-Pentecostal Accra assumes the question of belonging as one’s commitment to Neo-Pentecostal practices like tithing, offering and seed sowing, remains crucial.

### 4.8.4 Biblical Texts Used to Support Tithe

The scripture usually referred to in support of tithing is Malachi 3: 10 (NRSV) “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try Me now in this”, says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such

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<sup>40</sup> Information acquired in an interview with a male informant

<sup>41</sup> Information acquired in an interview with one pastor at GWPMI on July 9th 2015.

blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it”. The underlying principle here, according to Bempah, is that “when believers tithe, they put God to test in keeping with His promises of wealth, good health and financial success in life”.

#### **4.9 Seed Sowing**

“Seed sowing is specifically done for men of God”; says Bempah. In GWPMI, the special anointing of the prophet is believed to diagnose problems, cancel curses, and effect blessings. To be blessed is to be rich. However, one needs to sow seed by giving money, time, abilities or possessions to the prophet and the blessings will flow. In administering God’s blessings, the prophet usually shouts; “Take it!”, “I release it on you!”, “Receive it” and the “sower” responds “I receive it!” Here, seed sowing becomes an “element of remunerating the prophet for his gifts” which meet one’s pressing needs (Gifford 2004: 94).

Consider this session of 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2015. After his sermon, Owusu Bempah announced to the church that he saw visions of angels who had descended to the church premises “to shower blessings” to some congregants. He called out congregants with 200 cedis who were willing to sow seeds in order to reap blessings in their lives, and about 20 people went up. The prophet offered a special treatment, laying his hands on these congregants as he prayed for a long time and anointed their foreheads with oil. Then he called those with 100 cedis, and about 10 went up. These were prayed for, but not anointed with oil. Then those with 50 cedis were called, and about 60 went up, and he shouted “Receive it!” Finally, Bempah called for those with 10 cedis, almost all remaining congregants went up. As they filed past, he touched each one calling “Take your miracle! Take it!”

Here we see the principle of the seed sowing works in a similar way to a market system of buying and selling services in which the highest bidder gets the best offer, confirming a relationship between this kind of religiosity and global capitalism. For believers, seed sowing prompts God to provide immediate answers to pressing needs or blessings. Blessings, in Neo-Prophetism, also depict an increase in material wealth. Togarasei (2011: 339) referred to the Nigerian singer Uche, whose song -Double Double – well captures this notion:

Hey, My God is good oo!  
Everything na double double oo  
Promotion na double double oo  
Your money na double double oo  
Your cars na double double oo

Referring to the lyrics of the song, God is seen in GWPMI as a benevolent God who increases the material wealth of believers that sow seeds.

#### **4.9.1 Specific Biblical Texts for Neo-Prophetic Prosperity Gospel**

The field data revealed that biblical texts and narratives used for theologising on prosperity in Ghanaian Neo-Prophetism slightly differs from those which earlier research on the phenomenon (Asamoah Gyadu 2005; Gifford 2004) found. In Ghanaian Neo-Prophetism, there is much emphasis on the genre of prophetic legends in the Bible in theologizing on prosperity, specifically, sowing and reaping. We will use excerpts of Owusu Bempah's interview as a case. Bempah, in this matter can be said as representative of Neo-Prophetic strand since he is believed to be one of the pioneers in the Neo-Prophetic style of ministry in Ghana (Gifford 2004: 101; Omenyo and Atiemo 2006).

#### **4.9.2 The Shunammite woman and Prophet Elisha- 2 Kings 4: 8-17**

According to Bempah, “the Shunammite woman sowed seed in the life of Prophet Elisha by preparing an upper room in her house for Elisha, placing a bed there for him, a table, lampstand, and a chair; so that whenever the prophet Elisha came around, he could turn in her house” (July 19<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra). The Shunammite's act of hospitality, which Owusu Bempah referred to as *seed sowing* towards the prophet, is what prompted Elisha to undertake a tangible miracle or blessing for the woman, by providing a child.

#### **4.9.3 The Zarephath widow and the prophet Elijah- 1 Kings: 17: 7-16**

The widow of Zarephath, according to Bempah, sowed seed in the life of Prophet Elijah by providing him a cup of water and a small cake – “her last *seed* she had for herself and for her son unto death” (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra). Upon sowing her last handful of flour and little oil to the prophet, Bempah believes the widow reaped even more food, as she and her household ate for many days, and eventually, had her son revived to life by Prophet Elijah.

#### **4.9.4 Elisha serving Elijah - 2 Kings 2:3-5; 3:11**

Referring to 2 Kings 3: 11, Bempah contends that “Elisha sowed seed in the life of his Prophet Elijah by “pouring water on the hands of Elijah” (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra). The phrase

“pouring water on the hands of Elijah”, according to Bempah, depicts an act of service. Thus, “service to God’s servants is a form of seed sowing that attracts blessings or material rewards. In the case of Elisha, Bempah argues that the former reaped a “double portion of Elijah’s anointing” (2 Kings3:11).

#### **4.9.5 Joshua serving Moses: Exodus 24: 13**

Bempah postulates that Joshua’s *assistance to* Moses’ ministry (Ex. 24:13) was a also a form of seed sowing. For him, Joshua received his reward when he became the successor to Moses (Numbers 27:18-23).

#### **4.9.6 Mary Magdalene serving Jesus Christ**

Bempah interestingly narrates how Mary Magdalene also became the first Apostle by sowing seed:

Mary Magdalene sowed seed in the life of Jesus by using heavy sums of money to purchase expensive perfume to wipe Jesus’ feet. That perfume could have been thousands of pounds. But Jesus said her name will be mentioned wherever the gospel is preached. And for her reward, she became *the first apostle* to see the resurrected Christ, a blessing she received even before the rest of the apostles (July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra).

Thus for Bempah, “everyone who sows seed attracts God’s attention for blessings”. He also referred to Mark 12:41, suggesting: “Jesus Christ even sat beside the offering bowl because he wanted to observe how people offer money in church”. Jesus’ gesture, for Bempah, shows that he was concerned about how people sow seeds in hope of blessings.

#### **4.10 Reaping**

Seed Sowing is done in expectation for material reward. As one female adherent in GWPMI said; “When I give, I expect God to grant me long life, and an increase in productivity and stability in the work I do” (July 9<sup>th</sup> 2015, Accra). Even though none of our informants could not concretely identify material rewards received that could be directly attributed to particular situations of seed sowing, the common belief strongly held is that “if you give, no matter the situation, God will bless you”<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Information acquired in field interviews with informants.

In explaining the nature of reaping after seed sowing, one informant gave this testimony:

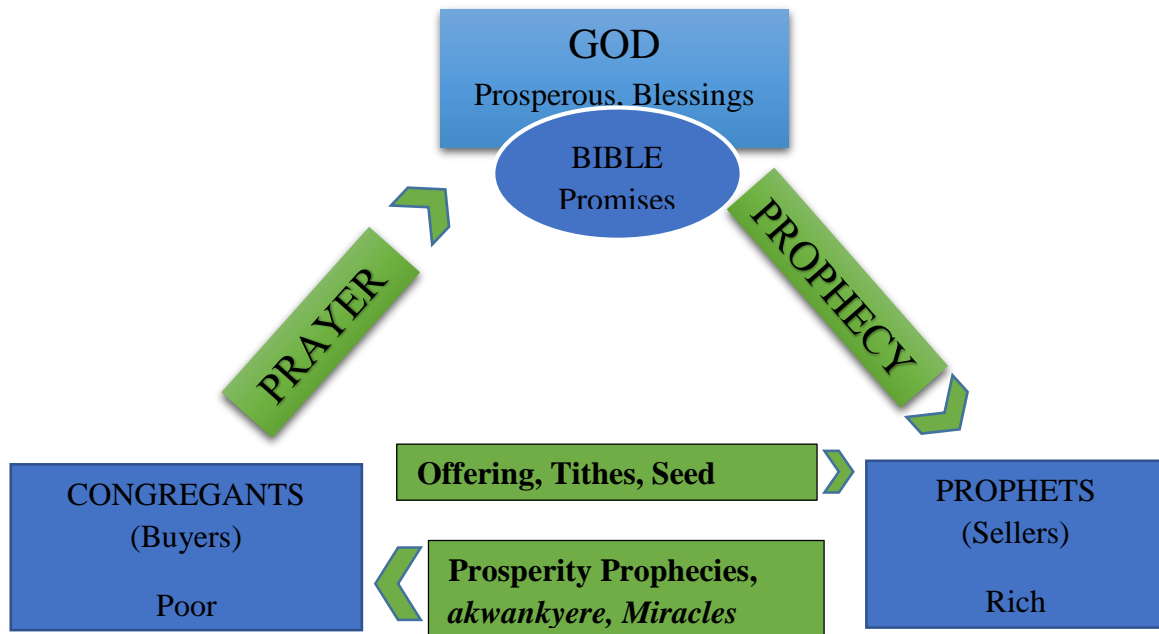
Every work man does under the sun attracts a reward. You can receive your earnings at the end of the month, but for it to increase [to be used fruitfully], you will need the blessing of God. So the bible says in Malachi 3: 10 that bring your tithes and I will destroy the devourer of your wealth. When you give to God, He blesses you more than your work can earn you. If you receive 300 cedis as monthly salary, you cannot tell me that at the end of month you spend strictly 300 cedis. So where does the rest of the money come from? We Charismatic Christians believe that it is only God who can provide sufficiently for us. So we give to Him so that he may look on our giving and multiply our reward (July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Accra).

Here, God is portrayed as one who rewards givers unnoticeably. This notion was found to be very common with all of our informants.

#### **4.10.1 Seed-time, But Not Harvest-time**

The field interviews showed that while seed sowing is explained in easily identifiable terms, the purported reaping for adherents is more often loosely explained and frequently intangible. As mentioned earlier, all informants believe that one cannot be definite in clearly spelling out the time or manner of reaping. Referring to Genesis 8: 22 9 (NRSV) which states: “while the earth remains, *seedtime and harvest*, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease”, one informant placed emphasis on the phrase *seed time and harvest* to mean that there is a precise *time* for sowing seeds, but just as the scripture did not clearly associate *time* with harvest, believers cannot be definite as to the time of reaping. Indeed, this ambivalent relationship that exists in the phenomenon of *sowing and reaping* among Neo-Pentecostals in general complicates a more coherent analysis of the concept.

**The Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic Gospel – A Transactional Theology (Figure 7)**



**4.11 Analysing the Neo-Prophetic Prosperity Gospel**

Thus far, I have outlined the content of the prosperity gospel, with special emphasis on Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic believers. This Neo-Prophetic prosperity gospel, unlike other versions, discounts oral positive confession of faith and emphasises commitment to particular actions – *hard work, prayer* and *giving*. The undergirding theory of prosperity here is what I call *a transactional theology*. By transactional theology, I refer to theology in ritual exchange of goods and services, played out in the lives of church members in contact with God, men of God (prophets) and the church. It involves a literal understanding of a *give-to- get* phenomenon rather than what Harvey Cox (1995: 318) designated as “name-it-claim-it”.

This notion of a transactional theology can also be related to insights from the Norwegian theologian Berge Furre (2006) who sees elements of “Neo-liberalism” reflected in the profile of Neo-Pentecostalism. In his study of the Brazilian church – “Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus” (IURD). Furre writes:

Those who come to IURD are more like consumers or customers than members of a community...Those who come and are helped are expected to pay...The most important bond to the church is the tithe, and the backbone of the organization is the dizimistas- those who pay tithe...the system of IURD works in a way like a market system, buying and selling

services...the aim of life is largely to obtain economic success (Furre 2006: 48).

Many scholars and commentators have undertaken various analyses of the prosperity gospel from different perspectives: theological, biblical, pastoral and socio-economic. This chapter will undertake a biblical, theological and pastoral analysis of the phenomenon. Our major analysis on the social effect of the prosperity gospel on attitudes towards poverty reduction will be advanced in the subsequent chapter.

#### **4.11.1 Biblical Critique**

Firstly, the general approach to and use of scripture employed by prosperity gospel preachers is largely problematic. What preachers engage in is “proof texting”. Proof texting is “the practise of using selected biblical texts to support arguments, regardless of the literary or historical context” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 215). As shown in our interview excerpts, believers select texts in isolation, treating them almost exclusively as propositional truths. For example, as proof texts for material wealth and health, 3 John 2 is often quoted in King James version in Ghana: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth”. This verse is a conventional letter writing formula in antiquity, wishing for the recipient’s “good health” and for “things to go well” (Fee 1984: 1). The author, John, intended such well wishes for his recipient, Gaius. However, to select such a text as evidence of financial prosperity, material wealth and good health willed by God for all believers is biblically inadequate.

Secondly, the hermeneutical methods employed by prosperity gospel preachers are inadequate. Questions of origin of the text, time of writing, identity of authorship, circumstances of composition and reception of text are all issues which our informants remain largely unconcerned about. Prosperity teachings can be developed, for example, on single words or phrases in the Bible. A typical example is the use of the phrase *seedtime and harvest* in Gen. 8: 22 to explain delay in receiving rewards after seed sowing. In this way, leaders and adherents undertake literal reading of the bible and underscore passages that confirm familiar ideas and prejudices, whilst ignoring the context therein.

Proof texts for sowing and reaping are also used uncritically. Owusu Bempah, for instance, referred to the story about Prophet Elisha and Shunammite woman. Whereas Bempah

contends that giving one's possessions to a prophet or man of God attracts blessings as believers supposedly meet their existential needs, a closer look at the story in 2 Kings 4: 8- 37 reveals marked differences. The behaviour of the Shunammite woman when her child falls ill and dies, for example, is noteworthy. In her laying of the child on the prophet's bed and her dialogue with Elisha, opening with the words: "Did I ask my Lord for a son?" (v.28), it appears the woman's so-called "seed sowing" towards Elisha was not in expectation for material reward. In fact, it is Gehazi's hint in verse 13 that caused Elisha to initiate a miraculous birth by a woman who seemed content as childless.

#### **4.11.2 Theological Critique–**

##### **4.11.3 The Nature of God**

The theology of the prosperity gospel expressed by our informants also creates a problematic understanding of the nature of God. It seems to portray God as a servant to the insatiable desires of men. This is seen explicitly when believers loudly proclaim in their prayers for material wealth: "I command, I demand, I refuse". Here God is reduced to a servant that can be manipulated; his promises are binding and once the right procedures are followed, he is obliged to produce the desired results. There is no denying the fact that God can and does give believers material wealth, but this doctrine, when overstretched, makes no room for the sovereignty of God, nor His grace, rendering a new kind of Christianity that appears to be anthropocentric, rather than theocentric.

##### **4.11.4 An Erroneous Concept of Faith**

One of the more problematic aspects of the prosperity gospel expressed here is its view of faith. In this type of Christianity, material wealth and financial success are the only genuine marks of faith. Biblical personages like Abraham, as shown earlier, are extolled by preachers as examples of faith to be emulated in everyday living. "Abraham, a man of faith, rich in cattle, sheep and gold" (Gen. 13:2) is frequently cited, with special emphasis on his willingness to pay tithes to Melchizedek. The preachers argue that since Apostle Paul says "the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles" (Gal.3:14), "why shouldn't Christians walk in similar wealth and influence?" Such concepts of faith leave little theological room for engaging critical issues like the cost of discipleship, persecutions in the life of Christians, as



well as pain and suffering, as mentioned in the lives of faithful believers espoused in the letter of Hebrews<sup>43</sup>.

#### **4.11.5 Worship as Transactional**

The message of prosperity resonates with indigenous African religious ideas. Prayers, offering, tithing and seed sowing become ritual actions that are done in exchange of meeting one's material needs. When prosperity is lacking, the explanation given is failure to pay tithe or infrequent seed sowing. Lack of prosperity is also linked to demonic forces, curses, and witchcraft perpetrated by envious family members. This ritualised exchange of, as it appears, Christian actions in return for blessings, sounds very similar to indigenous orientation of religious sacrifices in African societies. A typical example is the specific amounts of money demanded by prophets for seed sowing in exchange for financial miracles. Selfless or sacrificial giving seems missing from the principle of sowing and reaping. The preoccupation with one's own material needs as the rationale for giving also seems un-Christian. This uncritical appropriation of transactional worship as influenced by indigenous religious ideas, undermines the difference within Christianity, which hangs on the themes of God's gift of justification through His grace.

#### **4.11.6 Pastoral Assessment**

Most leaders of the Neo-Prophetic churches seek to be counted among the religious, social and politically powerful in Ghanaian society. Consequently, their model of leadership cannot be likened to that of the meek and lowly Christ, who identified with the poor and was marginalised, but of some political elites who amass wealth at the expense of the masses. The relationship between Neo-Prophetic leaders and politicians has become counterproductive as politicians take advantage of a phenomenon with a large following to achieve political ends, while religious leaders receive fame and financial support from political figures for their so-called prosperity prophecies and visions about the nation. Others never pause to ask about the source of the abundant money they expect their church members to sow. No wonder the greatest beneficiaries of the prosperity gospel are perceived to be ultimately, the preachers<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> See Hebrews Chapter 11.

<sup>44</sup> Information acquired from general observation in Neo-Pentecostal Accra

Despite the demerits associated with the phenomenon, there exists underlying factors that also show the appeal of the phenomenon, as it seemingly fits the context of the quest for individual well-being and societal development in Ghana. In the Ghanaian society, it needs to be acknowledged that the Neo-Prophetic strand have been able to articulate a message that addresses people's situations and circumstances in a relevant manner. The principle of hard work, for example, has ignited entrepreneurship and self-motivation of adherents. A more critical elaboration on the social effect of the phenomenon on poverty reduction will be undertaken in the next chapter.

#### **4.12 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the content of the prosperity gospel by presenting its evolution in USA and its subsequent influence in Africa, particularly, in Ghana and Nigeria. A common influence by the American preachers on Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal leaders is the stress on acquiring abundant wealth for God's work and His servants. Significantly, leaders and members of GWPMI emphasise offering, tithing, seed sowing and hard work as principles requisite for prosperity. Most believers of the doctrine seem uninterested in interrogating the clear social inequality between the lives of pastors who preach the message and adherents who remain committed to the practice. What is more, most prosperity gospel preachers appear politically mute on the structural injustice that surrounds many situations of poverty in Africa. The next chapter explores the prosperity gospel and its effect on poverty related actions of adherents.

## **5 CHAPTER 5 -**

### **The Social Effect of the Prosperity Gospel in Neo-Pentecostal Accra**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The ambition to improve the socio-economic conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa remains a universal concern. This chapter seeks to introduce religion into the development debates. In that attempt, we explore the concept of development by tracing its genealogy from a religious worldview. The chapter then investigates how religious ideas inspire individual attitudes that impede or enhance socio-economic transformation. In particular, we focus on how the prosperity gospel practiced in GWPMI interacts with believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation.

#### **5.2 Rethinking Development as a Concept**

The concept of development, as stated by Carole Rakodi (2007: 26), generally “implies a vision of progressive change and measures to achieve that vision”. But there are several alternative conceptualisations of what kind of progress is desirable and by what means it should be achieved. Most development theorists however, express this vision of progress in economic terms, emphasising growth in per capita income or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When setbacks are encountered on the road to such economic transformation, social attitudes, which often include religious beliefs and practices, are often identified as obstacles to progress. This realisation is what gave rise to an alternative view of development as “social and cultural modernization”, implying that “peoples’ values needed to be changed in order to achieve development” (Rakodi 2007: 26). In both conceptualisations of development, economic growth or modernisation, religion is considered irrelevant, though the idea of progress and how it could be achieved remains the underlying theory.

Ironically, the belief in progress inherent in development thinking has been argued by Ter Haar (2009: 76-77) as being religiously inspired. According to Ter Haar (2009: 76), “the modern idea of development has a genealogy in Western Christianity and can be perceived as a secular translation of a millenarian belief whereby the kingdom of God is no longer projected in heaven but can be created on earth”. Most Christians believe in a new and perfect world that will come into existence with the second coming of Christ unto the earth. This belief creates the aspiration to eliminate all forms of evil and suffering in this world. Ter

Haar contends that historical states in Europe assimilated or co-opted this originally religious idea of perfection as a model for creating an ideal society (Burleigh 2005; cited in Ter Haar 2006: 354). Nonetheless, there are religious worldviews that, contrarily, accept human imperfection and believe that life will never be perfect. The real change, as Ter Haar (2009: 77) notes, is to “balance the powers of good and evil in such a way that evil will not prevail”.

This chapter attempts to emphasise that religious notions of human progress have been apparently secularised in modern development theories, leading to the perception of religion being irrelevant in the development debate. Drawing insights from Ter Haar, there is a need to shift away from a narrowly economic paradigm of development to a more holistic view of human progress that explores all human resources, both material and non-material. This argument is even more relevant in Africa, as religious beliefs and practices in the region show no sign of disappearing. This is not to say, however, that conforming to religious notions will lead to better development results, but for effective development cooperation in Sub Saharan Africa, it is necessary to consider peoples’ own construct of the world.

### **5.3 Exploring Religious Resources for Development**

Introducing religion into the development debate with specific reference to Ghana, is not without controversy. The major question is: how can a religious vision solve the concrete and complex issues facing the country? Whereas critics of religion consider religious beliefs and practices as incompatible with modern scientific knowledge, robbing religious adherents of their autonomy needed for development, advocates of religion emphasise the powerful motivation religious ideas exert on individual attitudes that sometimes, enhance the development process. The ongoing debate reveals that development is a technical process that cannot be approached by conventional methods alone.

Human development, according to the United Nations Development Programme, “is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests”<sup>45</sup>. People are the real wealth of a nation. Fundamental to enlarging people’s choices are building their own resources and capabilities as needed for a decent standard of living. In this regard, Ter Haar (2009: 78) posits that developing people’s full resources should go beyond the purely material and intellectual aspects. This undergirding principle is what leads us into exploring religion as a

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<sup>45</sup> See UNDP website <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev> (accessed 07.02.2015)

potential resource for development. Ter Haar categorises “religious resources” into four: *religious ideas* (what people actually believe), *religious practices* (ritual behaviour), *religious organization* (how religious communities are formed and function), and *religious or spiritual experiences* (such as the subjective experience of inner change or transformation) (Ter Haar, 2005: 22–27). All these dimensions of religion can be usefully explored in terms of development theory and practice.

While development actors have worked with religious organisations in many fields such as education and health, far less attention has been devoted to the religious ideas that underlie attitudes of believers towards developmental issues like poverty alleviation. For our analytical purposes, we will emphasise, but not limit our discussions on religious resources to a combination of religious ideas and religious practices, as this forms the core of the prosperity gospel.

#### **5.4 The Influence of the Prosperity Gospel on Attitudes Towards Poverty Alleviation**

We have argued in previous chapters that in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, the invisible world is an integral part of the physical world. Put differently, the spiritual dimension precedes the material one in the construction of a Neo-Pentecostal worldview. Prosperity, allegedly, cannot be achieved without creating the spiritual conditions and performing the religious rites (hard work, prayer, and giving) conducive to that goal. Poverty, likewise, is not only a socio-economic condition, but primarily, a form of spiritual evil, mystically brought about by inhabitants of the spirit world.

The major research question then is; how does the interaction between Neo-Pentecostal notions of poverty and prosperity gospel impede or enhance believers’ attitudes towards poverty alleviation? Although the issue of poverty in Ghana will need critical interrogation on the overarching and broad matters of the economic and political structures in the country, this thesis will concern itself with individual attitudes of leaders and adherents in the Neo-Prophetic strand. Undeniably, debates over the role of the prosperity gospel in African economies have been the subject of many scholarly works on Pentecostalism. Proponents of the doctrine tend to demonstrate that the prosperity gospel replicates the Protestant Ethic made famous by the influential German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) in his thesis *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Scholars of this persuasion such as Peter Berger (2008), David Martin (2002), and Lovemore Togarasei (2011) suggest that the prosperity

gospel fosters a modernising work ethic in Africa, and hence is a catalyst of socio-economic change. Critics of the doctrine however, do not see the phenomenon as effecting any socio-economic change in Africa. Scholars who hold such opinion include Paul Gifford (2004) and Adekunle O. Dada (2004). Their main objection is premised on the fact that the prosperity gospel in Africa tends to place a great deal of emphasis on miracles and the influence of malevolent spiritual forces, which does not foster interrogation of the defective political and economic systems that underlie the problem of poverty in the region.

In this study, our field data revealed an ambivalent relationship between the praxis of the prosperity gospel and the reality of poverty. On the one hand, the prosperity gospel in GWPMI appears to demonstrate some elements of optimism, entrepreneurial impulse, self-reliance and self-supporting attitudes among believers. These factors apparently have the potential to influence believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation. On the other hand, religious rites espoused by the prosperity gospel preachers seem to be embedded with the exploitation of adherents, individualism, and an emphasis on a "miraculous economy" which impedes the poverty alleviation believers themselves seek.

In what follows, we first review the responses given by Gifford (2004), Togarasei (2011), and Dada (2004) and then proceed into detailed discussions on our findings for this thesis.

#### **5.4.1 Reviewing Gifford's "Ghana's New Christianity"**

Paul Gifford (2004) sought to identify key features of new Charismatic Churches in Ghana and to assess their socio-political roles. His study was limited to Accra, comprising six churches<sup>46</sup> which he considered of importance on the Ghanaian religious scene. With ethnographic data collected through interviews and personal observations over a nineteen month period, Gifford (2004: 80 -82) established the following traits as part of what he terms "Ghana's New Christianity":

- i. The pervasive emphasis on a perceived success in one's economic life (otherwise known as prosperity gospel).

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<sup>46</sup> Gifford selected five churches leading the Charismatic scene in Ghana: Duncan-Williams' Christian Action Faith Ministries, Mensa-Otabil's International Central Gospel Church, Heward-Mills' Light-house Chapel International, Agyin Asare's Word Miracle Church (now Perez Chapel) and Winners Chapel. Regarding the Neo-Prophets, Prophet Elisha Salifu Amoako's Alive Chapel was the primary focus though Gifford admits he might have well selected others like Owusu Bempah's GWPMI.

- ii. The seed faith element – “Give and you will receive” - is the underlying theory required for economic success.
- iii. Strict verification of biblical promises is not a priority.
- iv. Personal status of the pastor is enhanced while the upward social mobility of members is said to “delay”.

In evaluating the socio-political role of “Ghana’s New Christianity”, Gifford (2004: ix) related the function of these churches in effecting modernisation, as particularly defined by David S. Landes’ (1969: 6): - “that combination of changes - in the mode of production and government, in the social and institutional order, in the corpus of knowledge, and in attitudes and values - that makes it possible for a society to hold its own in the century; that is, to compete on even terms in the generation of material and cultural wealth, to sustain its independence, and to promote and accommodate to further change”.

Gifford (2004: 196) found that although the prosperity gospel often instils motivation and self-belief among believers, Ghana’s New Christianity fails to make concrete changes in the political and economic institutions for the following reasons:

- i. “Giving” is much more important than hard work in achieving prosperity.
- ii. Ordinary economic theories or factors seem unimportant in comparison with spiritual forces.
- iii. Harsh circumstances in Ghana renders personal motivation and determination of no effect in the midst of the defective political and economic structures of the country.

For Gifford (2004: 197), if Ghana is to join the world’s modern political and economic system, “the greatest need is the development of transparent and accountable structures, systems, procedures and institutions to regulate all aspects of society”.

Gifford’s study discounts the inclusion of a religious element to the development discourse in Ghana, a major concern in this thesis. For him, “spiritualizing politics” distracts Ghanaians from the practical realities of inefficiency in their economic and political structures (Gifford 2004: 161). As we argued earlier, to envision development in Africa as a distinct economic event, separate from religious beliefs and practices, is deeply problematic, seeing that religion is deeply interwoven in fabric of African societies (Mbiti 1999). Rather than secularising the development process, are there methods of integrating religious notions of prosperity and

poverty in ways that encourage positive developmental attitudes, whilst discouraging unhelpful behaviours towards poverty alleviation?

Furthermore, to conceptualise development in terms of practical results to be achieved only in a set period of time is inadequate. Gifford writes: “this is a case study of Ghana, and the years that have seen these new churches flourish are also the years of Ghana’s structural adjustment to bring the country into the modern world economy” (Gifford 2004: ix). He adds: “How many years must we wait until the transformation effected by the flourishing born-again churches and deliverance ministries cause it [the economy] to rise up the scale (Gifford 2004: 72)?” Even though development may be seen as project interventions set to be achieved over a fixed number of years (e.g. Structural Adjustment Program, MDG’s, SDG’s), is it favourable to re-construct development as *an ongoing process of change* that seeks to create conditions allowing individuals to use their own life’s resources to flourish? These questions have proved necessary because, whereas development practitioners frequently emphasise goals to be achieved in a set period of time, believers articulate ways to achieve such goals in religious terms, as an ongoing activity or a continuous way of life. There is therefore the need to re-examine all conditions of human life that are vital in the human development process.

Let us consider insights from Zimbabwe and Botswana on the transformative role of the prosperity gospel.

#### **5.4.2 Reviewing Togarasei’s Observations on the Prosperity Gospel**

Lovemore Togarasei (2011) analysed the prosperity gospel in the context of the poverty experienced in Zimbabwe and Botswana. The research took insights from his previous studies of Pentecostal churches, informant observation of Pentecostal teachings and practices, and extant literature on the prosperity gospel phenomenon. Togarasei, unlike Gifford, is convinced that the “prosperity gospel is contributing and has the potential to contribute further to poverty alleviation in Africa” (Togarasei 2011: 344). Characterising poverty as a lack of basic human needs like food, water, and good health, the African theologian argues that:

- i. Teachings on entrepreneurship by prosperity preachers motivate Neo-Pentecostals to start their own businesses like poultry farming and candle making, in Botswana.



- ii. The prosperity gospel creates employment opportunities as churches recruit their members for their building projects (e.g. church auditoriums, administrative works, and media broadcasting crews)
- iii. The element of giving in the prosperity gospel enables Neo-Pentecostals to respond to the needs of the less privileged in society.
- iv. Prosperity gospel contributes to a positive mind-set that addresses structures of mediocrity, non-achievement and backwardness in Africa.

For Togarasei, although the prosperity gospel in Botswana and Zimbabwe is well placed to address poverty in these practical ways, the doctrine must also respond to women's empowerment and other socio-political issues like corruption, bad governance, and conflicts.

Comparing Togarasei's findings with those of Gifford reveal that we are faced with a complex phenomenon, one that involves numerous factors of variable weights working in changing combinations. Certainly, regarding religion and development, we can argue that the same ideas cannot always produce the same outcomes irrespective of circumstances or context. Nevertheless, since religious ideas are embedded with consequences, it is relevant to critically examine which ideas and values motivate which attitudes and actions, and in which context.

### **5.4.3 Findings from Nigeria**

For Adekunle O. Dada (2004), the prosperity gospel in Nigeria is an impetus for delusion. Using the theory of cognitive dissonance, Dada conducted interviews with fifty church members in ten churches pastored by prosperity preachers in Ibadan. He found that although "the concern that inspired the birth of prosperity gospel in Nigeria is genuine, the teaching appears to be a half-measure panacea for the socioeconomic and political crises" facing the country (Dada 2004: 95). He argues further that many Pentecostals who were attracted to the churches by the prosperity gospel had their economic statuses unchanged. Rather, they were deluded in three ways:

1. that they should wait patiently for the day when wealth will manifest
2. that they are personally responsible for lack of prosperity through sin
3. that they are responsible through failure to sow "seeds of prosperity".

Dada's study reveals insights into the paradox resulting from the differences between the rich life of prosperity teachers and the poverty of their followers, confirming preachers of the prosperity gospel as the ultimate and only beneficiaries of the doctrine.

We shall now proceed to our findings in Neo-Pentecostal Accra.

## **5.5 Prosperity Gospel and Its Relationship to Poverty Alleviation in Accra.**

The investigation conducted in this thesis reveals inconsistencies in the role of the prosperity gospel in relation to believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation. Thus, whereas the prosperity gospel in GWPMI seemingly introduces an economic ethos that reveals insights for pro-poor social change, the doctrine, at the same time, disempowers the poor, influencing attitudes that undermine any socio-economic transformation among believers. These rather paradoxical findings define the ambivalent role of the phenomenon in combating poverty.

Let us now examine both sides of the argument.

## **5.6 Options for Pro-Poor Social Change**

### **5.6.1 Self-Supporting Initiatives**

The prosperity gospel in GWPMI presents itself as a movement that offers new insights for mobilising home-grown economic efforts by individuals towards developmental projects in local communities. Very often in Accra, funds for developmental projects are raised and mobilised through foreign aid or external donors. However, the practice of the prosperity gospel in GWPMI reveals new areas of developmental fundraising, which are contrary to conventional methods. Through the faithful tithing and generous offerings of church members, the church building (auditorium) at GWPMI is under construction, salaries for pastors are being paid, modern equipment for mass media is purchased, and welfare schemes for the bereaved as well as the sick congregants are administered. While present in a country amidst economic crisis, GWPMI epitomises the struggles depicted by the Ghanaian government, but believers, on the contrary, show their potential to become self-reliant and self-supporting towards their daily financial requirements and projects. In other words, the principles of giving or seed sowing in GWPMI reveal the potential of a religious vision inspiring individuals and societies to become self-reliant and self-supporting as a means to alleviate poverty. For example, participant observation during one church service on 21<sup>st</sup> July,

2015, showed how congregants were exhorted by the resident pastor to adopt an attitude of giving that can facilitate church projects. The pastor voiced the following words:

I need fifteen people who will rise up and come forward to sow 300 cedis [approximately 100 US Dollars] in support of our church building. You know how long it has taken us to secure this land and to start this project. But I believe that God is ready to shower blessings on those who will give in support of His church. Don't sit down if God has blessed you with something to give. Sow, and you shall reap bountifully (July 21 2015, Accra).

Two of our informants interviewed appeared to be very committed to these projects embarked on by the church, as they indicated, like “good stewards”, what amounts they give to the church each month for tithe, seed sowing, and offering. Among them was one male adherent who narrated:

I earn about 500 Ghana cedis (150 USD) per month from my business. But, at the end of the day, I give almost half for tithes, seed sowing and offering. I do this because I see myself as part of this church. If the church develops, I will benefit, but if it collapses, I will also be affected (July 19, 2015, Accra).

These testimonies, as later revealed by our field interviews, were common to more than half of our informants, who were of varying socio-economic backgrounds. However, two particular female adherents showed their reluctance in giving their tithes and in sowing seeds to the church. Through the semi-structured interviews, it was discovered that these two female adherents, who were givers in the past, apparently, had a bad experience with the church and its leadership on the way some other individuals with higher social status received “special treatment” during *akwankyere*<sup>47</sup> (prophetic guidance) sessions. This preferential treatment, according to our informants, referred to the priority given to clients of higher social class during the one-on-one sessions of *akwankyere* with the prophet. One narrated: “such rich church members are always made to see the prophet first whiles the rest of us wait for so long in queues”. Based our field observations in Accra, it will not be misleading to present this matter as representative of the Neo-Prophetic strand. Congregants who are able to donate huge sums of money in church as seed sown towards projects are usually esteemed by leaders, whiles those with little amount to donate are side-lined. This unfavourable experience, according to our two female informants, made them pull back on their donations.

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<sup>47</sup> See Chapter 1.

That notwithstanding, the affiliation other members ascribe to the church seemed to motivate them in thinking about how to use their money to aid developmental projects in the church in hope for God's blessings. In mainstream approaches to development, funds for projects are rather seen as the preserve of rich countries. However, the principle of seed sowing espoused by our believers at GWPMI appears that fundraising for developmental projects can be undertaken by all, both rich and poor. The important factor however is to appreciate and honour donors regardless of their social class. Over all, these self-supporting initiatives among believers can be further explored to pave way for new methods of poverty alleviation in local communities.

### **5.6.2 Entrepreneurial Impulse**

The field data revealed that exposure to prosperity gospel serves as a stimulus for entrepreneurial attitudes among believers. Invariably, although the unemployment rate is high in Ghana, the principle of hardwork espoused by the prosperity gospel tends to have stimulated our informants in GWPMI to participate in competitive business ventures with a view to prosper. After I conducted a field interview with one female informant on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2015, I later observed her, after church services had closed, engaged in the sale of groceries and food items on the church premises. These observations were made on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 2015, consecutively. Being drawn by her trading activities, I probed further on how long she has been engaged in that business and as to whether it yields. She replied:

Life has been difficult for me. I am a single parent. I struggle to afford my wards' fees and to provide enough food for the family. So I spoke to the church pastors on about my situation, and they allowed me to sell some drinks, biscuits and meat pie for the church members after church service is over. The meat pie costs 3 cedis (1 USD). I am able to earn roughly 100 cedis (26 USD) on Sundays. But on Tuesday, since many people attend the prophetic ministration, I do make more sales of about 250 (65 USD) cedis.

This story is not be representative for all our informants, however, it presents insights as to how some believers who are affiliated to large Neo-Pentecostal congregations in Accra are taking advantage of their settings to engage in businesses to earn a living. Being informed by this case, I was particularly interested as to the economic activities of other informants. The field interviews confirmed that five out of the eleven informants that were sampled were self-employed. Some engaged in video editing, photography, and hairdressing, while others were involved in taking catering orders from church members for weddings, engagement and

funeral services. In fact, business ownership is now an established trend among many Africans (Nwankwo and Gbadomosi 2013). But it may be argued that this entrepreneurial impulse of members may not be significantly created by the practice of the prosperity gospel, seeing that the harsh circumstances alone in Accra, compels many residents to work with their hands for survival. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the competitive advantage and the social network that believers derive from their affiliation with their religious organizations, beliefs and practices. In such contexts, the power of social networks among members is tapped into as a key strategy for achieving competitive advantage. These networks have been expressed by scholars like Volery (2007) as social, cultural and religious capital. Among the five informants who were engaged in their own businesses, one other female informant, who rendered catering services, remarked:

When my husband abandoned me with my two children, not only did the church stand by me through prayer. I was also encouraged by the prophet's guidance (*akwankyere*) to start some business. The prophet gave me some money to start catering services. It is this catering business that has enabled me to be self-sufficient and able to look after my children (July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, Accra).

Here, we discover the paradox presented by believers on the material and spiritual notions of prosperity and poverty respectively. Based on the narrative above, prayer alone was not enough for prosperity. Thus, prosperity was sought in one's socio-economic condition, unlike poverty, which is more identified with spiritual evil. Overall, our findings on entrepreneurial attitudes in a context where prosperity gospel is hugely emphasized confirms Togarasei's (2011) argument that the prosperity gospel may motivate Africans to alleviate poverty.

### **5.6.3 Optimistic Attitude**

The prosperity gospel in GWPMI instils, to an extent, a sense of optimism in church members. This optimism, which almost all our informants showed, appears to be a mental attitude that creates hopefulness about the future and inspires confidence about facing the economic hardships in the country. Consider for example what ensued in the field interview with one male congregant in GWPMI, who we will name here as John.

John, aged 28 years, has been a member of GWPMI for close to four years. He tells of his life which was deeply rooted in poverty prior to his conversion to Neo-Prophetism:

If we say poverty, then my life from infancy is a testimony about what it means to be poor. I was literally born in poverty. I used to sell water and mangoes on the streets of Accra before my mum and I could get money to buy food to eat for the day. Even when I decided to travel to Accra to seek “greener pastures”, I journeyed on women’s sandals which belonged to my grand mum. God is my witness! I slept in kiosks infested with mosquitoes, hawked on the streets of Darkuman, Lapaz, Tabora, Kwashieman and Odorkor till midnight. At the end of the day, all I could only earn was about two Ghana cedis (less than one dollar). This money could sustain me for only few days (July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Accra)

But John interjected his testimony with a crucial point: “In such hardships, I neither knew God nor the principles of Christianity. I had not yet become an ardent believer”. By principles of Christianity, John referred to what Gifford (2004: 62) discussed as the seed faith element – “Give and you will receive” – which is supposedly, the underlying principle in “Ghana’s Christianity” required for economic success. John’s testimony depicts how the prosperity gospel in GWPMI helps to nurture an otherwise afflicted and downtrodden congregant to reframe his own existence. When asked how he dealt with the harsh economic conditions, he responded: “After I became born again, life in Ghana continues to be difficult; but now, I do not live by Ghana’s economy. I live by “heaven’s economy”. When I say heaven’s economy, I mean the principles of heaven regarding money”. For John, “God’s blessings involve seeing the times and seasons from Gods perspective and how the principle of sowing and reaping operates”. He continues: “the bible says cursed is the one who puts his trust in man, so rather than placing my hope in a president to change the economy, I would place my hope in Jesus Christ who created all things and promised me all things if I seek him first”.

Even though Gifford (2004: 140) contends that strict verification of such biblical promises is not a priority in this kind of Christianity, John’s apparently optimistic attitude, by virtue of the prosperity gospel, may create hope, determination and persistence for him, in overcoming his difficulties. He is also self-employed as a trader and deals in merchandised goods. John is convinced that his rites of seed sowing during church services is what “moved” God to reward him with rented apartment and to purchase land to start his business.

Many of such testimonies from all of our informants confirm that any encouragement to self-belief is likely to have positive effects on attitudes towards poverty alleviation. Gifford (2004: 140-141) attests to this point by stating the motivational function of the prosperity gospel: “If one is convinced that spiritual forces [principles] are holding one back, a conviction that these spiritual forces [principles] have been defeated [employed] might release wells of energy crucial for success”. Similarly, Asamoah-Gyadu (2005: 351) confirms that Pentecostalism

addresses structures of oppression that consign Africa to backwardness and non-achievement. Although a lot more needs to be done regarding poverty alleviation, a religious message that underscores an optimistic worldview can be tapped into as a resource conducive to poverty alleviation in Ghana.

But our research findings also showed shortcomings of the prosperity gospel. We found attitudes inhibit poverty alleviation. This finding lends credence to our argument that the version of the prosperity gospel practised in GWPMI inhibits significant change in the poverty of believers. What then are these areas that indicate the weakness of the practice of the doctrine?

## **5.7 Attitudes Undermining Poverty Alleviation**

### **5.7.1 Exploitation of Believers**

The major finding revealed in this study which undermines poverty alleviation is the economic disparity observed between the prophet and his followers, largely created by the praxis of prosperity gospel. Comparatively, while the prophet seems enriched by receiving money from believers as seed sowing, the majority of the church members experience insignificant change in their economic conditions. However, five of our informants sustained an unrelenting hope “that wealth will manifest “one day” in their lives”. This may attest to Dada’s (2004) proposition of the prosperity gospel as a delusion.

The widely differing economic situation of exponents and followers of the prosperity gospel is what lends credence to the idea of exploitation. With the desperation faced by our informants in dealing with the current economic crises, they readily resort to the so-called “miraculous financial breakthrough” allegedly mediated by the prophet. Waiting for a miracle in the Ghanaian economy may perhaps not be an incorrect evaluation of the situation, for even Ghanaian economic experts have consistently criticised government for being clueless as to how to reverse the worsening situation (Appiah-Adu & Bawumia 2015).

“In an endless mine of desperate souls in search of spiritual [and material] nourishment” as Gifford (2008: 287ff) aptly describes the situation, neo- prophet(s) have become “reapers of diamonds and gold”. They keep receiving money from members as they prophesise miraculous breakthroughs, encouraging members to wait patiently for God’s time: “Your

miracle is still on the way, if you only remain faithful to God, He will surely bless you”<sup>48</sup>. Being faithful here means being persistent in giving cash to God’s representatives in return for your financial miracle.

Three out of the eleven informants raised critical questions concerning their experiences of the unfulfilled financial miracles they were expecting. Let us see below how one male informant queried rhetorically:

How come this seed sowing works for some people but it does not work for me? Is it not the same principle? Gravity is a rule, a force which keeps us walking so we don’t fall. Gravity works for everybody. The word of God is supposed to work for everyone. Why is it that when some people give, money does not flow? (July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Accra)

One other female informant also seemed very disappointed on a miracle she was expecting in the previous year. She narrated: “Sometimes, I feel God is delaying in giving me a breakthrough in my business. But just as Abraham waited for 25 years before God gave him a son, I believe no situation is permanent”. Even though biblical narratives are sometimes quoted to address this issue of delay, we can postulate that a kind of gullibility persists on the part of our informants despite receiving signs of being exploited. Thus, believers appear to have either too much confidence in the prophet or lack any other means, other than religious, to obtain economic success. This is what ignites the disproportionate result of wealth accumulation between leader(s) and members of GWPMI. Such class relations or economic disparities further trap the poor in the poverty cycle, as many congregants seem deluded by unfulfilled promises of prosperity.

### **5.7.2 Individualism**

Even though Togarasei (2011) reviewed the prosperity gospel in Botswana as influencing believers to be generous to the less fortunate, our field observations in GWPMI contrarily showed that giving is not primarily of generosity or of a Christian social responsibility. Rather, such actions are embedded with the individual’s search for his own wealth and success without any awareness of communal sharing of resources. This apparently modernising economic behaviour, tolerable in the context of a capitalist economy, stands in sharp contrast to the traditional features of African or Ghanaian societies which Stephen

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<sup>48</sup> Quotation taken from a church service on July 19<sup>th</sup> 2015 at GWPMI.



Hymer (1970: 34) described as one where “a fair share of the available land was the right of every member of the community”. Traditionally, most Africans have values that emphasise caring for extended families and the wider community (Meyer 1995: 248). But with the praxis of the prosperity gospel, the individual’s pursuit of wealth and the indifference to the family has heightened. Congregants are not necessarily inspired by the prosperity gospel to share their material possessions or resources among their fellow believers or the wider community.

The religious vision here is for each member to construct his or her own prosperity by offering money to God in expectation of his or her own “miraculous” financial reward. Biblical ideas of Christian charity that prevailed for example, in the Book of Acts Chapter 2 verses 42-45 showed that believers had all things in common and distributed proceeds to all who were in need. However, the praxis of the prosperity gospel seems to espouse believers’ personal gratification and luxury more than sharing with the needy. With no emphasis on the sharing of resources, it will be difficult for the prosperity gospel practiced in GWPMI to significantly alleviate poverty.

### **5.7.3 Over-Emphasis on Miraculous Interventions**

The prosperity gospel in GWPMI gives much credit to supernatural powers like demons and Satan that hinder the prosperity of believers. This undue emphasis on the supernatural looms large on the psyche and attitudes of believers. For example, one male informant who considered himself a hardworking person but constantly in need of money explained his challenge in terms of the works of *atamfo* (the enemy) or evil spirits. Even though Pentecostalism is founded on the transformative power and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005), all of our informants seemed much more focused on the so-called destructive forces of the devil in the spiritual realm.

As stated in chapter three, this uncritical attention on mystical evil largely disempowers believers, reducing many to objects controlled by external forces. This disempowering attitude, created by the interaction between the notions of poverty and prosperity appears to stand in conflict with the idea of optimism earlier discussed, and further confirms the ambivalent relationship of the prosperity gospel to attitudes towards poverty alleviation.

The over-emphasis on the supernatural has also made many believers in Neo-Pentecostal Accra overlook practical matters of “efficiency, competence and professionalism” in their economic life (Gifford 2004: 189). A typical example can be seen with Duncan-Williams’

assertion in our introductory chapter when he attributes the fall of the Ghanaian currency to satanic orchestration<sup>49</sup>. The effect is that the individual's autonomy or incentive to take control of circumstances of poverty by planning and strategizing is diminished.

## **5.8 Concluding Remarks**

I posit therefore that the praxis of the prosperity gospel in GWPMI depicts ambivalent characteristics with regard to believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation. On the one hand, it embodies some facets that have the potential to drive positive individual attitudes towards poverty alleviation. On the other hand, the prosperity gospel expresses elements that are clearly counterproductive to poverty alleviation. Moreover, the doctrine in GWPMI seems not to directly confront the on-going inefficient administrative or institutional issues in the country like corruption, which are also relevant in the fight against poverty. This ambivalence suggests that the prosperity gospel in GWPMI is not adequate in engendering a remarkable socio-economic transformation by alleviating poverty.

All in all, our analysis on the notions of prosperity gospel and poverty is not to make judgments about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role of religion in achieving developmental objectives. My aim as a researcher has been to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world in which believers and development actors operate. Our general summary on the study follows in the next chapter.

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<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 1.

## 6 CHAPTER 6 - GENERAL CONCLUSION

This research sought to explore the prosperity gospel expressed among Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic adherents and its interaction with believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation. The study categorised Neo-Prophetism as the most recent form of Pentecostalism in Ghana, which has specific theological emphases on the concepts of *yiedie* (prosperity), *atamfo* (enemies), and *akwankyere* (prophetic guidance) (Omenyo and Arthur 2013). With their tendency to take up issues that are most pressing in their local contexts, not least, the burden of poverty, Neo-Prophetism increasingly attracts larger clientele who seemingly aspire socio-economic success by religious means. Three main questions were the driving focus of this research among leaders and members at our research site: (1) how is poverty conceptualised? (2) What constitutes the prosperity gospel? And (3) how does the prosperity gospel influence believers attitudes towards poverty alleviation.

The study was qualitative in nature, supported by ethnographic methods including semi structured interviews and informant observations. Believers' attitudes towards poverty situations were analysed by drawing insights from their testimonies and relating these narratives to theoretical perspectives of Gifford (2004), Togarasei (2011) and Dada (2004). This chapter summarises key findings on our research questions and concludes with recommendations relevant for policy and for further academic research.

### 6.1 Findings on Neo-Pentecostal Notion on Poverty

Based on the data collected, we argued that the notion of poverty, from a Neo-Pentecostal perspective, is not entirely a socio-economic condition; thus, poverty is also a category discerned in the spiritual realm and believed to be designed by Satan to primarily win souls for his kingdom. It was shown that the image of the devil and the imagination of evil is incorporated with the meaning, as well as causes and effects of poverty. Many informants for the study agreed that poverty constitutes a spiritual dimension; a stronger and higher spirit acting negatively and influencing the lives of individuals, families and even the nation.

Rather than relegating these ideas of a spiritual phenomenon to the realms of fantasy, false consciousness or incorrect reasoning, an attempt was made to critically engage these religious worldviews in the development process. Our position was based on the notion that "religion cannot be treated as a force destined to retreat from public sphere", and more especially in African societies (Ter Haar and Ellis 2009: 352). The study also found it inadequate to merely

reject imaginations of supernatural evil associated with poverty, citing the argument that concepts of evil are culturally conditioned. Thus, people's understandings and experiences, to a large extent, shape the meaning of evil, in whatever form it may appear. Our attempt to critically engage these religious worldviews was however, not intended to replace a socio-economic approach to poverty for a religious one. Our aim was to complement them in ways that can help believers to not only understand and describe their lifeworlds, but to also improve their well-being.

By so doing, we stated that the Neo-Pentecostalist notion of poverty provided believers both the belief and ritual context within which evil, suffering or hardships can be mystically explained and dealt with. It also afforded them an image not only of the Almighty God, but also of a dark counterpart, which eventually, provides believers the opportunity to explore new possibilities in explaining why and how things go wrong in their lives (Meyer 1995: 248). That notwithstanding, we underscored that such understandings, stressing an imaginary and invisible framework, tends to produce a "twisted" dualism which creates a devil who seems to be in equal power and majesty with God. This twisted dualism, we contended, sometimes distract believers from their practical responsibilities as some assumed that their destinies are ruled by unseen powers, being apparently negligent of their voluntary will and autonomy in transforming their poverty situations. Rather than stressing the power of Satan and his cohorts as the mystical cause of poverty, we suggested the theological potential for Neo-Pentecostals to draw insights from the liberating power of God exerted in Christ in the spirit world.

Thus for a successful developmental attitude to poverty alleviation, we advocated the balance of two dimensions – first, religious adherents critically engaging their beliefs in helpful ways while appreciating secular or practical interventions to the reality of poverty; and second, critics of religion and development practitioners, recognizing existing religious resources as they embark on socio-economic approaches to poverty alleviation.

## **6.2 Key Findings on Prosperity Gospel in Neo-Propheticism**

Our second research question explored theories and principles underlying the prosperity gospel from a Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic context. The investigation of the doctrine from such a context was premised on the notion that the prosperity gospel is not a monolithic theological system; it comprises various perspectives. Historically, it was stated that despite the

significant influence of North American Neo-Pentecostalism in shaping the prosperity gospel in Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal Churches, the primal aspirations of *yiedie* (prosperity) which already existed in the cultural matrix of the indigenous religions played a crucial role in formation of the doctrine in the Ghanaian settings. Put differently, the prosperity gospel expressed among Neo-Prophetic adherents displays both elements of continuity and discontinuity with the North American account.

The continuity is discernible in that some of the Ghanaian preachers replicate the North American concepts of conspicuous consumption and materialism. They teach their adherents that God wants his children to be rich, he wants them to be buoyant, and so he blesses with prosperity, and not poverty. Additionally, just like the North American televangelists, some Ghanaian prosperity preachers privilege the use of modern media of social communications to propagate their teaching. The study however underscored that the Neo-Prophetic version of the Prosperity Gospel exhibits a discontinuity with its North American counterpart in that, it is deeply anchored in the primal world view. It is very much engrossed in the Akan indigenous concepts of wellbeing (*yiedie*), the dualistic view of life (*nkwa*), and the role of religious functionaries. Also, the biblical texts and narratives used for theologizing on prosperity in Ghanaian Neo-Propheticism are usually centred on the genre of prophetic legends (e.g. Elijah, Elisha) in the Bible. This differs from what earlier research on the phenomenon (Asamoah Gyadu 2005; Gifford 2004) had found.

In keeping with the concepts of well-being (*yiedie*), the Neo-Prophetic prosperity gospel asserts that harmony with the God through faithful *tithing*, *offering*, and *seed sowing* becomes a pre-requisite not only for spiritual protection from evil forces but also for physical enjoyment of financial success, good health, fertility and longevity. In continuity with the dualistic view of life, the Neo-Prophetic version of the prosperity gospel demonstrates that the notion of the sacred and the secular complement each other, as far as the realities of prosperity and poverty are concerned; thus, prosperity and poverty are perceived in both material and spiritual terms, making both realities a broad and complex phenomena. In keeping with the role of religious functionaries in the primal worldview, the Neo-Prophetic prosperity gospel evokes the need of “prophets”, who claim to have the power to deal with malevolent forces blocking prosperity in the lives of believers. As such, believers are made to sow seeds – money, cars, houses and other material goods – to these prophets in order to reap the prosperity anticipated in their individual lives.

This ritual exchange of goods and services, played out in the lives of church members in contact with God, religious functionaries (prophets) and the church is what we termed as *transactional theology*. It involves a literal understanding of a give-to-get phenomenon rather than a name-it-claim-it designation, as it was referred to in North America. This convergence with indigenous worldviews, as we noted, contributes to the popularity of the prosperity gospel among many Ghanaians.

The chapter on the prosperity gospel undertook a biblical, theological and pastoral analysis of the phenomenon. A biblical critique was stated, in that, the biblical texts selected and the hermeneutical methods employed were to a large extent, proof texting. Thus, questions on the literary and historical contexts such as place of origin of the biblical text, time of writing, identity of authorship, circumstances of composition and reception of text are usually ignored. Theologically, we stated that the Neo-Prophetic prosperity gospel seemingly creates a problematic understanding on the nature of God as it raises questions on God's sovereignty, His grace and His worship. It appears to reduce God to a servant that can be manipulated; his promises are binding and once the right procedures are followed, he is obliged to produce results desired. Pastorally, the study raised concerns about the model of leadership espoused by the Neo-Prophetic prosperity gospel which is probably distant from the meek and lowly Christ, who identified with the poor and marginalised as opposed to some neo-prophetic leaders who amass wealth at the expenses of the masses.

### **6.3 Finding on Believers' Attitudes Towards Poverty Alleviation**

The last research question sought to analyse how the prosperity gospel influences believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation. It was stated that the Prosperity Gospel has prompted debates about its influence on the religious and socio-economic lives of believers, and the society at large. Some scholars who advocate this doctrine have seen it as religious tenet that can inspire socio-economic transformation in the context of the poverty in Africa (Lovemore Togarasei 2011; Peter Berger 2008; David Martin 2002). They maintain that, unlike the historic earlier Western missionaries who did not engage themselves with the pressing issues within the local contexts, Neo-Pentecostals, through the prosperity gospel, attempts a response to the burden of poverty prevailing within their societies. Thus, the doctrine appears to be extolled as a form of religious movement that fosters a modernizing work ethic in Africa, and hence a catalyser of socio-economic change.

Critics, however, have not seen the phenomenon as engendering any a remarkable socio-economic change (Paul Gifford 2004; Adekunle O. Dada 2004). They have pointed out its tendency to privilege miracles and to emphasize the intervention of malevolent spiritual forces as a drawback to socio-economic development. They have underscored the propensity of adherents to desist from addressing unjust social structures such as corruption which they claim, are actually the underlying causes of poverty in Africa.

Taking leaders and members of Glorious Word Power Ministry International (GWPMI) as a study case, this research targeted the believers' attitudes towards poverty alleviation. My overarching conclusion is that the practice of the prosperity gospel in GWPMI is embedded with ambivalent characteristics. On the one hand, it portrays the potential of combating poverty. This is particularly evident in its inspiring tendencies of entrepreneurship, optimism, self-reliance and self-supporting initiatives among believers. Some members of GWPMI and probably other Neo-Pentecostal adherents may find these aspects advantageous for poverty alleviation. Were these positive components the only dimensions the Neo-Prophetic Prosperity Gospel fosters, the doctrine could be rightly seen as a fostering poverty alleviation in Neo-Pentecostal Accra. However, such is not the case. These positives sides are eclipsed by other serious shortcomings.

The study also found that religious rites espoused by the prosperity gospel seem to be embedded with exploitation of believers, individualism rather than communal sharing, and a disproportionate emphasis on miraculous expedients and magical interpretations towards poverty alleviation. It was found that the practice of the Prosperity Gospel also tends to ignore the interrogation of other social factors and the unjust structural systems in Ghana like corruption, poor management and administrative decisions of government which are similarly part of the factors that also impinge on believers' aspiration to prosper. That being the case, the Prosperity Gospel that is practised in GWPMI is fraught with ambivalence. Based on this characteristic feature of ambivalence, I posit therefore that, contrary to what its advocates argue, the Prosperity Gospel in its current form in GWPMI does not contribute significantly to poverty alleviation.

Despite the above evaluation, the popular appeal of the prosperity gospel in Ghana suggests the need for the following recommendation in regard to policy initiatives and to further academic research.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

If Ghana is to develop, it is not so much of programmes or policies that are needed but rather a rethinking of what development means and how it should be implemented. This study recommends that peoples' full range of resources should be explored as the foundation of any development strategy. Among the many resources in Ghana, are, as we earlier stated, religious resources which have been far less explored. Development actors need to change their conventional methods of giving foreign aids and loans to governments and begin to explore how best they can capitalize or collaborate with the local or home-grown efforts of individuals towards eradicating poverty in their lives. Based on the unique strengths of entrepreneurship and the self –supporting attitudes emerging among believers of the prosperity gospel, collaboration schemes ought to be implemented directly with individuals in these local communities who seem optimistic in the midst of crises.

Pentecostalism has been described as a religion “made to travel” (Cox 1995: 6). Recently, many Africans migrate to Europe or North America, and bring along their religious beliefs and practices, forming religious networks that assume a global outlook. For example, some Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal churches now have their branches in Norway, Netherlands and in the USA. The development potential of these African religious networks abroad has been hardly explored. This study recommends further academic research on how such religious networks of migrants constitute social, cultural and religious resources in their effort to empower individuals and communities.



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# Appendix A - Interview Guide for Pastors

**Project: I Wish You Prosperity; Analysing the Social Effectiveness of Prosperity Gospel in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Ghana.**

Date: .....

Time of Interview: .....

Place: .....

Interviewer: .....

Interviewee.....

**Questions:**

**Investigating Pastor’s Socio-Economic Background**

- Please, what is your educational Level? (a)Primary/JHS (b) Secondary (c)Tertiary
- How long have you been a Neo Pentecostal? .....
- Can you share with me, if there were any economic hardships you faced before you entered into ministry as a pastor?

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- Did you notice sin, evil spirits, ancestral curses, demons and witches playing significant roles in these economic hardships? Please explain further.

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- What did you do in dealing with these hard economic situations? How did you respond? (For eg tithing more, prayers /deliverance, job seeking, self- employment)

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- .....  
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- Do you presently face these economic hardships at times? Please explain how?

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- Can you briefly narrate to me how you entered into ministry as a pastor?

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Were you employed before you entered the ministry? (If yes,) What was your occupation?

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- Do you consider your pastoral work as an occupation with monthly salary? .....

- Do you have any part time work apart from your pastoral duties? .....

- How would you describe your ministry in terms of God’s blessings to you?

Can you name or testify to me some of the material or tangible blessings God has showered on you?

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- Do you sometimes receive material gifts like cars, lands, and houses, from church members as an appreciation for your pastoral work? .....

## **POVERTY**

- Can you share with me your views on poverty?

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- Do you consider poverty as spiritual or having a spiritual dimension? (I usually hear from Neo-Pentecostal prayer sessions- the “spirit of poverty”)

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- Is it possible that God sometimes allows people to be poor? Please explain.

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- Do you consider poverty as linked to the devil? Please explain.

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- Do you consider a prosperous life as the result of (1) faithfully paying tithes (2) rendering financial supports to the church and (3) giving money frequently to support pastor’s ministry? Please explain further

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**Neo Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel**

- What is your general idea on prosperity or a prosperous life?

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- Can you please share with me your idea on “sowing seeds” and “reaping”

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- Are there any obstacles that can prevent a believer from “reaping” what he or she has sown?

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- What must a believer do to be prosperous? Or do you have any principles in keeping with prosperity or a prosperous life?

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**Analysing Poverty Related actions**

- As a pastor, do your church members approach you with life stories on any financial difficulties or economic hardships (E.g unemployment, low finances, huge debts, low income, inability to pay wards fees, rent, bills, etc.?)

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- Are such members usually many or few, men or women? Can you guess their educational levels, age group, or employment status?

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- What do you practically tell such members to do in order to come out of poverty in their lives?

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- Can you share with me any case of church members you have counselled in such situations?

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# Appendix B -Interview Guide For Congregants

**Project: I Wish You Prosperity; Analysing the Social Effectiveness of Prosperity Gospel in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Ghana.**

**Date:** .....

**Time of Interview:** .....

**Church:** .....

**Interviewer:** .....

**Interviewee:**.....

**Questions:**

**Investigating Congregants Socio-Economic Status.**

- Please, what is your educational level? (a)Primary/JHS (b) Secondary (c)Tertiary
- How long have you been a Neo Pentecostal? .....
- Can you share with me, if there any economic hardships (e.g. unemployment, debts, unpaid bills, inability to pay ward’s fees, number of meals a day) you are presently facing? For how long?

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- Do you notice sin, evil spirits, ancestral curses, demons and witches playing significant roles in these economic hardships? Please explain further.

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- Reflecting on your economic hardships, did you consider whether you were (1) unfaithful in paying tithes (2) reluctant in rendering financial supports to the church and (3) not frequently give money to the church or to pastor’s ministry as likely causes?

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• What do you do in dealing with these hard economic situations? How do you respond? (For eg tithing more, prayers /deliverance, job seeking, self- employment )  
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• Can you briefly narrate to me how you were attracted to this church?  
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• Do you sometimes approach your pastor on some financial or economic hardships you face? What response do you usually receive? What actions do you take after consult?  
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.....

• How would you describe your life in terms of God's blessings to you? Can you name or testify to me some of the material or tangible blessings God has showered on you?  
(money, cars, buildings, land, business)  
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**Poverty as a Neo-Pentecostal Concept**

• Do you notice sin, evil spirits, ancestral curses, demons and witches as playing significant roles in an individual's life of poverty? Can you please explain further?

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- Do you consider Neo-Pentecostal Christians who are (1) unfaithful in paying tithes (2) reluctant in rendering financial supports to the church and (3) do not frequently give money to the church or to pastor's ministry likely to suffer from economic hardships?

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- Can you share with me any biblical views you have on poverty?

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- Do you consider poverty spiritual or having a spiritual dimension? (I usually hear from Neo-Pentecostal prayer sessions- the "spirit of poverty")

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- Is it possible that God allows people to be poor? Please explain.

.....

.....

- Do you consider poverty as linked to the devil? Please explain.

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### **Neo Prophetic Prosperity Gospel**

- What is your general notion on prosperity or a prosperous life?

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- Do you consider (1) faithfully paying tithes (2) rendering financial supports to the church and (3) giving money frequently to support pastor's ministry as playing any role in individual's life? Please explain further



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- Can you please share with me your notion on “sowing seeds” in church and “reaping”?

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- Do you personally sow seeds in church? Can you share with me your experiences on why you sowed, what determines the amount you sow, and testimonies on how you reap what you have sown?

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Can you mention, if there any obstacles that sometimes prevents you from “reaping” what you have sown?

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- Do you see a change in you economic life (employment or entrepreneurship) when you tithe, sow seeds, give money to the church, or to the pastor’s ministry. Can you narrate your experiences?

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- How many times are you in church in a week? What motivates you to church or away from church?

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# Appendix C - Consent Form

UiO : **University of Oslo**  
The Faculty of Theology

Prof. Marius Timmann Mjaaland  
Faculty of Theology  
University of Oslo  
PO Box 1023 Blindern, 0315 Oslo  
NORWAY

Date: 22 June 2015

## Dear Participant,

The research project "I Wish You Prosperity" will analyse the social effectiveness of prosperity Gospel in Neo-Pentecostal Accra, Ghana. Your information is most valuable for a good analysis of this significant issue in theological and social studies. The following information is for you to decide whether you wish to participate. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with your church, with this department, the instructor, or the University of Oslo.

Data will be collected from informants in two parishes in Accra, Ghana, in the period July-September 2015. Data will involve documents, sermons, and interviews. All the field work and interviews will be conducted by James Kwateng-Yeboah, MPhil. student in Inter-Contextual Theology at the University of Oslo.

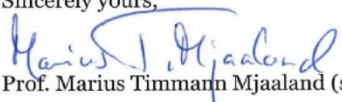
Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating. We would be happy to share our findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will be known only to the researchers.

There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits from your participation are the information about experiences from everyday life, with economic and social hardships and prosperity, and the way your participation in the congregation influences your social, economic, and spiritual life.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

-----  
Signature of Participant

Sincerely yours,

  
Prof. Marius Timmann Mjaaland (sign.)

-----  
Place and Date

  
James Kwateng-Yeboah (sign.)



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