

# Religion and Sustainable Development in Africa: Neo-Pentecostal Economies in Perspective

## *Research Article*

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## Abstract

The secular approach to development has treated religion as anti-developmental. However, the history of how development was part of missionary activity, such as the provision of health and educational infrastructure in some African countries, has been widely acknowledged. In this paper, therefore, we contend that the marginalisation of religion in development discourse is a result of a faulty and fractured understanding of religion. We argue that sustainable development, if attainable in contemporary Africa, would require that organised and institutional religions in Africa as well as their religious cosmologies, convictions and orientations feature and remain integral to such processes. With reference to neo-Pentecostal economies in Africa, we intend to discuss why and how religion – religious cosmologies, ontologies and institutions – is indispensable in the sustainable development process in Africa. Specifically, keeping in focus the human dimensions of development, we intend to argue that the beliefs, teachings and activities of neo-Pentecostal churches on human salvation, progress and/or transformation, such as prosperity and wealth creation, which has seen them emerge on the socioeconomic scene, indicate the potentials of neo-Pentecostals in particular, and religion in general, to contribute immensely to sustainable development. This, however, is not to gloss over some of the challenges they potentially pose to sustainable development.

## Keywords

neo-Pentecostal economies – Sustainable Development – neo-Pentecostalism – Africa – transformation – entrepreneurship

### 1 Introduction

Religion has most often, during modernity and even beyond, been considered as anti-developmental and posing impediments to development, and therefore divorced from development theory, policy and practice (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006, 352; Hoffstaedter 2011; Rakodi 2012; Marshal 2011; Jones and Pedersen 2011; Kaag and Saint-Lary 2011). Consequently, institutionalised and/or organised religion, until recently, has been largely considered problematic to development, if not “part of the development problem” (Haynes 2007, 1). Noticeably, therefore, the contributions of religion to development have been largely beholden to their secular and functionalist performative categories where religion is still largely defined in terms of its institutions with less emphasis on the role of their beliefs and norms.

In contemporary times, especially in the developing world, the development community, such as faith-based organisations and many other non-governmental organisations in humanitarian and development work, have shifted their focus and emphasis on “macro-scale economic matters” (Freeman 2015, 114) and begun problematising religion in development thinking. This came with the emerging clarity that in thinking about the role of religion in development, there is the need to go “beyond simple matrices of religion as inhibitor to development or religion as a source of development” (Hoffstaedter 2011, 5). This is due to the acceptance by most development policy makers that “development can be achieved only if people build on their resources” (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006, 353) and “the realisation that human beings are not rational economic agents and do not make their life decisions solely based on economic criteria and the soulless and lonely goal of economic maximisation” (Freeman 2015, 114).

In this paper, therefore, with a focus on neo-Pentecostal economies in Africa, we argue for the centrality of religion to sustainable development. We intend to pursue and answer the question “What contributions do neo-Pentecostal churches and their economies offer sustainable development in Africa today?” Offering what we consider a holistic conception of development and a discussion of religious resources as spiritual capital to development, we discuss how some beliefs, teachings and activities within neo-Pentecostal economies

in particular, and of religion in general, have the potential to contribute to sustainable development. These, particularly, we discuss in the light of their teachings on human salvation as progress and/or transformation, as depicted by their emphasis on prosperity and wealth creation, which has seen them emerge on the socioeconomic scene.

This article opens with a background discussion on neo-Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostal economies in Africa as the central unit of analysis of the paper. It is followed by problematising the concept of development and a discussion of the dynamics of its disconnection with religion. The background is followed by a methodology section that outlines ways in which data was gathered and analysed. We then devote the rest of the paper to analysing the contribution of neo-Pentecostal economies to sustainable development in Africa. In our analytic discussion, we offer how certain activities and practices of neo-Pentecostals can be described as their substantive and/or potential contribution to sustainable development in Africa.

## 2 Neo-Pentecostal Economies of Africa

Generally representing the third wave of Pentecostalism in Africa, neo-Pentecostal churches differ from the first two waves of Pentecostal experience in Africa. The first wave of Pentecostalism started with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles and its reverberations throughout the Christian world and is usually known as the “classical Pentecostals”; the second wave of Pentecostalism, which is believed to have started around the 1960s, were Pentecostal revival or Pentecostal-inspired movements within mainline churches, including Roman Catholicism (MacTavish 2014, 2–3). Meyer refers to neo-Pentecostal churches, the third wave, as “more recently founded Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, which are organized as global megachurches addressing masses of believers, make prolific use of media technologies to spread the message, and endorse the prosperity gospel” (Meyer 2010, 113).

By neo-Pentecostals, we refer to an eclectic category of Pentecostal-type churches “often regarded as Charismatic independent churches, including megachurches, and influenced by both classical Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement” (Anderson 2010, 19). They could be said to represent the blend of Pentecostal expressions which Miller and Yamamori (2007, 26–27) identify as the second and third waves, which are indigenous Pentecostal denominations and independent neo-Pentecostal churches respectively, and equally blended orientations to a prosperity gospel and “integrated” or “holistic” gospel (Miller and Yamamori 2007, 30–31). These churches are defined by

Togarasei as having the cumulative characteristics of “transnationalism and internationalism, association with urban areas, preaching of gospel of prosperity, spiritism and association with modernity” (Togarasei 2011, 338). In Ghana, which is the context that the authors are more familiar with, neo-Pentecostal churches, which are also generally referred to as Charismatic churches, are offshoots of the classical Pentecostal churches such as the Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church and the Assemblies of God Church. Neo-Pentecostal churches emerged in the late 1970s and saw exponential growth in the early 1990s (Matthews 2008, 168).

Distinctions between neo-Pentecostal churches and the first two waves are marked with features such as much more “modern outlook, relaxed dress codes, internationalism, innovative use of the modern media and contemporary forms of worship” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 4). However, unlike classical Pentecostal churches, a unique distinction is that these neo-Pentecostal churches usually evolve around one charismatic visionary who is the founder, leader and embodiment of the vision of the church. Examples of such churches are Nicholas Duncan-Williams’ Action Chapel International (Ghana), Charles Agyinasare’s Perez Chapel International (Ghana), Mensa Otabil’s International Central Gospel Church (Ghana), Sam Korankye-Ankrah’s Royalhouse Chapel International (Ghana), Bishop David Oyedepo’s Living Faith Church (also known as Winners Chapel) in Nigeria, Chris Oyakhilome’s Believers’ Loveworld Ministries (also called Christ Embassy Church) in Nigeria, Enoch Adeboye’s Redeemed Christian Church of God (Nigeria) and Alph Lukau’s Alleluia Ministries International (South Africa).

There is no consensual definition of neo-Pentecostal economies, and just as diverse as neo-Pentecostal churches are, so are the economies. However, in this paper, we define them as the spaces within which neo-Pentecostals functionally deploy their beliefs, norms and resources, especially fiscal and structural resources, in ways that are similar to and/or function to support neo-liberal development, in order to achieve the mission and vision of their calling. The mission and vision of their calling they largely interpret as teaching and working towards the spiritual, physical and socioeconomic redemption and liberation of oppressed humanity to enjoy and manifest “the glorious grace and love of God – including the blessing to a prosperous and wealthy life (mostly defined materially)” (Golo 2012, 350). This is largely driven by their radicalisation of the doctrine of salvation, which is defined as extending beyond inner spiritual, moral renewal and righteous living before God through Jesus Christ, and includes salvation as redemption (liberation) from the powers that induce ill health and poverty into the realisation of good life and well-being on earth (Golo 2013, 371).

This radicalised doctrine of salvation emphasises salvation as acts of deliverance, healing, transformation and empowerment (Golo 2013, 368; cf. Asamoah-Gyadu 2005) in order to partake and become both functional and beneficiary in the socioeconomic life of the society. This must be seen against the backdrop of the difficult socioeconomic conditions and underdevelopment of Africa during the late 1970s and the 1980s that saw the emergence of the prosperity gospels, which were directed at enforcing social change and transformation (Matthews 2008; Larbi 2001; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; Golo 2012). Thus, we do not use the term “economy” in the narrower popular sense in terms of an economic system of trade or exchange of services for fiscal benefits, though not entirely excluding aspects of it.

Therefore, one would dare say neo-Pentecostal economies are contexts or spaces within which “Pentecostal churches have come to function as non-state sites addressing social needs that have gone unmet by the state due to a combination of factors” (Barker 2007, 409). They are economies largely driven by the radicalised doctrine of salvation and its interactions with norms, behaviours and resources in achieving socioeconomic transformation and change as goals of salvation. We further explore neo-Pentecostal economies with recourse to Barker (2007), who suggests that “Pentecostalism has the capacity to embed neoliberal economic activities by integrating these activities into society” (Barker 2007, 409). This is because “it exists in a harmonizing, even symbiotic, relation to neoliberal capitalism. Pentecostalism provides adherents tools to respond to the vagaries of the neoliberal organization of the economy in a way that is supportive of this organization” (Barker 2007, 409). Barker further notes that “the individualist theology, charismatic practices, and the new kinds of community fostered by Pentecostal worship reinforce shifting modes of production and globalizing markets, purveying values that support the informalization of the labor market, increased labor migration, and the rapid transformation of local communities” (Barker 2007, 409). It is against these developments, which are central to neo-Pentecostal economies in Africa as well, that we engage their role in sustainable socioeconomic development in Africa.

### 3 Development – Problematising a Hydra-Headed Concept

For the purpose of this work, we offer two definitions of development. The first considers development as “nothing less than the upward movement on the entire social system or it may be interpreted as the attainment of a number of ideals of modernisation such as production, social and economic equalisation,



the resulting wealth among a country's population according to varying ideas of what is just and equitable" (Haynes 2007, 4). This reduces development largely to its economic dimensions. It is indicated how, even, the UN "used GDP per capita as the single measure, and indeed perhaps definition, of development" (Gasper 2004, 36) for a long time till the 1990s, when attention shifted to human development as an alternative (Gasper 2004). This reflected the belief and expectation that the economy will lead to the improvement of the lives of many, especially the majority poor. In contemporary times, however, it has become increasingly necessary to rethink the development paradigm that has been pursued. This is largely due to "the widespread failure of secular development trajectories to achieve widespread poverty reduction or reductions of inequality and injustice in the developing world" (Haynes 2007, 1) as well as certain obvious flaws of the modernity project, such as negative climate change and the diminishing of natural resources in the world. It is unsurprising, therefore, that by the turn of the 21st century, the concept of sustainable development had become central and critical to development thinking, policy and practice. In this development option, human and planetary well-being feature centrally, where sustainable development is defined by the report *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The need to focus on development that is sustainable and holistic has since become a global priority, culminating in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which member countries are expected to meet on an agreed schedule.

Therefore, the modernist idea of development, which was dominant until the second half of the 20th century, conceives of development not in the sense of "the holistic human development dimension" (Haynes 2007, 1). Human development, which according to Haynes (2007, 4) is understood in various ways, prioritises human well-being and social transformation in the developing world considerably and overlaps with the spiritual and religious dimensions of life. Here, the essence of religion matters and plays a vital role, such as providing "important resources for the protection of human dignity and promotion of social justice" (Atiemo 2017, 251). This holistic human development dimension reflects the visions of development from faith perspectives, which "differ significantly from those expressed historically by secular development organisations, which often appear to be singularly concerned with 'economic development' to the exclusion of other aspects of development" (Haynes 2007, 1). This human development dimension is particularly relevant to us as it hems the social and spiritual dimension of development to the discourse on development (Golo 2019). This is particularly crucial, considering that we intend to

lay emphasis on religious beliefs, values and institutions, which largely play out not in measurably quantitative terms but largely in qualitative terms.

#### 4 Religion and Development – Exploring the Relationships

While it is widely acknowledged that religion and development are not separate spheres of life (Rakodi 2012, 625), until the late 20th century, religion had been largely neglected and divorced from mainline development theory, policy and practice (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006, 352; Hoffstaedter 2011; Rakodi 2012; Marshal 2011; Jones and Pedersen 2011; Kaag and Saint-Lary 2011). This divorce especially went “increasingly unnoticed when modernization theories of development became dominant in the 1950s and 1960s” (Kaag and Saint-Lary 2011, 2). Hence “religion has been a marginal, if not a neglected topic” (Marshall 2011, 339) in development thinking. This is largely attributable to modernisation theory and the secularisation of the state and society leading to the separation between state and religion (Rakodi 2012, 638; Marshall 2011, 343).

Secularisation, driven largely by modernisation theory, “the theory that most clearly influenced development during the 1950s and 1960s and even later” (Rakodi 2009, 18), meant a faulty, fractured and narrow understanding of both religion and the idea of development (Jones and Pedersen 2011). During modernity “the notion of development was closely tied to both secularisation and modernisation” (Haynes 2007, 1), leading to the emphasis and prioritisation of the secular and rational (usually economic) perspectives in development thinking. In relation to approaching religion, a particular ingredient to look for here is the functionalist approach, which sees religion in terms of its institutions and structures, what they do, and how they affect their members and the society of which they are a part. This approach gave no central place to the supernatural or the transcendent as a central point of reference to beliefs and rituals, without which institutions and structures make no real meaning to the typically religious. This notion is partly due to secular development experts’ faulty perception of religious thoughts, norms and practices as “irrational” and also to the fact that religious authorities and powers have the tendency to induce conflicts and upheavals that curtail the process of development (Hoffstaedter 2011).

Thus, an apparent cause and effect of the secular marginalisation of religion in development thought is a functionally deficient approach to religion based on world religion’s approach to religion (largely modelled after European Christianity). This was a Eurocentric creation and an approach to understanding that “favoured textual religions, preferred religions most like Christianity



and elevated those religions that were deemed to be ‘big’ or ‘global’” (Tishken 2000, 303) into what was defined “world religion”. This is itself captive to the secular modernist understanding of religion as institutions and structures, as in Christianity and its role in society (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006). A result was a configuration of religion from perspectives not typically religious but from secular social scientific perspectives. In relation to development, therefore, it is clear that “the apparent lack of a satisfactory grasp of religion, as well as the diverse manifestations of the phenomenon (of religion), undoubtedly is a crucial factor in its exclusion in this field of endeavour” (Amenga-Etego 2016, 2). It has also resulted in leaving “large areas, some very tangible, such as religious provision of social services and religious roots of social tension, largely unexplored” (Marshall 2011, 343). It is therefore unsurprising that the connection between religion and development was lost in modern thought and “the secularisation of society has caused many to overlook the original connection between the notion of religion and the notion of development” (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006, 355).

Beyond the development community, recent scholarship on the religion – development nexus in Africa has tried to offer a corrective to this reductionist deficiency (see for instance Kaag and Saint-Lary 2011; Atiemo 2017; Myers 2015; Amenga-Etego 2016; Freeman 2015). Indeed, it remains that functional approaches to religion are seminal for a social scientific analysis of religion and, largely, its relevance within domains of development thought and practice. In the context of Africa, however, we argue that such abstract approaches to development without a clear reference to the supernatural grasped in real life with which one can have a relationship may have difficulties “if such notions are expected to make a significant and/or sustained impact” (Amenga-Etego 2016, 3). Furthermore, while we consider these functional approaches to be very important, we argue that such reductionism is fatalistic to a holistic and even healthy resourcing of religion to the sustainable development process as well as the role of religion generally in development thought and practice. It unjustifiably ignores the religious ontologies that actually lubricate religious institutional performance and seems “ridiculous” (Amenga-Etego 2016, 3).

We do not intend to suggest that Africans with a religious orientation to reality are not intelligent enough to grasp abstract ideas through the so-called scientific grid. Rather, we intend to suggest that there are many Africans with a theistic and transcendental point of reference which condition human choices and actions and to whom the interpretations of the supernatural are significant to development thought and practice. This is due to the view that many Africans are still otherworldly-oriented (Ter Harr and Ellis 2006; Amenga-Etego 2016). To emphasise such a religious dimension “does not contradict scientific

interpretations of the world; rather, spiritual power may be another means to a material end that scientific means alone cannot achieve” (Atiemo 2017, 256–257). It is to emphasise that although religion and the modern concept of development are conceptually different, their visions for the human person and the society are interconnected. Religious worldviews, with their utmost goal of salvation, have goals that correlate with the idea of development. Believers, through structural and normative frameworks, work and look forward to achieving and living out this salvation in the mundane realm as the realisation of a perfect world and good life, which is “a vision of an ideal world and of the place of humans therein” (Ter Haar and Ellis 2006, 355).

Therefore, in this paper, we pursue the claim that the subjective dimension of religion in terms of believers’ encounters and experiences with the supernatural and the spirit world (cosmology) and the effects of such encounters on the individual(s) and the society in general are worth considering as integral to any debate on the religion – development nexus, and in development practice. These are the vertical and horizontal dimensions, respectively, of the religious dimension which Atiemo (2017, 263) refers to as spiritual capital. In his point of view, this will include the spiritual and moral frameworks, convictions and orientations (religious ontology) that believers form and develop as a result of such encounters and which feature in the way they conceive reality, including the religious view of the person and the goal and vision of society, which include that of development itself. These normative frameworks, which represent the deep embers from which individual and community decision, choices and action flow, will either motivate sustainable development choices and actions of believers or frustrate them. These are the very subjective and fundamentally qualitative aspects of development that would be seen as crucial to any development that will be sustainable.

When we consider development, whether qualitatively or quantitatively or both, it becomes evident how difficult it is to think of sustainable development in Africa without the fabric of religion, especially within the contemporary context of Africa. This is driven by the view that, “Development starts with people understanding one another, and effective development can take place only if its starting point is the way people perceive the world and their place in it” (Cader 2009, 13). Thus, the religious ontology of a people has implications for development. It is with this claim and understanding we examine the religion – development nexus in Africa, with recourse to neo-Pentecostal economies. It is also important to keep in mind that the beliefs, norms and resources of neo-Pentecostal churches and/or neo-Pentecostal economies, which is our unit of analysis, are oriented towards the “fundamental aspects of the lived realities of believers and societies where neo-Pentecostal churches

claim their relevance” (Golo 2019, 253). Also, it is important to underscore that “as individuals or groups, neo-Pentecostals seem to have a different vision and goal of socioeconomic transformation and/or development” (Golo 2019, 253).

## 5 Neo-Pentecostal Economies and Sustainable Development in Africa

The contribution of neo-Pentecostalism to sustainable socioeconomic development has been debated by scholars with varying positions. While some posit a very positive contribution of Pentecostalism to socioeconomic development (CDE 2008; Myers 2015; Benyah 2019), others are more critical of such contributions (Meyer 2007; Gifford and Noguiera-Godsey 2011; Golo 2019). Some also question the contributions of neo-Pentecostals to environmental sustainability in Africa (Golo 2013; 2014). Therefore, before we examine the contribution of the neo-Pentecostal economy to sustainable development in Africa, we intend to, first and foremost, draw attention to some of the developments within these economies that have been met with scholarly critiques, thereby questioning their potentials to contributing to sustainable development and economic transformation in Africa.

First, it is suggested that the spiritualising of structural socioeconomic problems within the neo-Pentecostal economy, whereby evil forces are often accused of being the cause of every misfortune and structural hardships, contradicts the ethic of hard work and responsibility. As argued by scholars, many neo-Pentecostals spiritualise the problems of poverty, health and economic depravity such that practical avenues for solving such socioeconomic problems are frustrated (Gifford 2015; Kahl 2015; Golo 2019). Emerging out of spiritualising poverty are covenant solutions, where believers are expected to sow seed as a covenant practice or any other spiritual intervention to improve their socioeconomic fortunes. Second, it is argued there is the accumulation of capital among a few, especially leaders within the neo-Pentecostal economy, in a kind of spiritual capitalism and its negative effect on sustainable development. For instance, Golo (2019) gets curious and questions if some of the gains made towards socioeconomic transformation by these churches can be sustained when one considers the thoroughgoing prosperity messages that most neo-Pentecostal churches are noted for, with its wealth-accumulating individualism that frustrates wealth distribution. It is also suggested that some of the church investments and social ministries turn out to be run purely as private profit-oriented institutions and are privately owned by the leader (and family) of the church (Eshun 2013, 109, 115).

Third are concerns about the environmental sustainability of the neo-Pentecostal economy within a sustainable development paradigm, considering that the theologies of prosperity and the materialist attitudes and lifestyles they engender and enforce, as exhibited by many of the neo-Pentecostal leaders, are not environmentally sustainable (Golo 2013, 2014). The question whether the unrestrained material consumption that the neo-Pentecostal economy engenders is environmentally prudent and desirable in an era of global sustainable development agenda is worth posing (Golo 2013). Fourth, and finally, is the concern that many neo-Pentecostal churches spend a lot of productive hours engaged in church activities, thereby losing lots of economically productive hours to religious activities (Golo 2019). Spanning concerns about the frequency of neo-Pentecostal religious activities, averaging three times a week of about three hours, to concerns about holding services during the working hours of the day, which encourages workers to leave work to attend (Gifford 1998), these concerns appear genuine. It would, therefore, be argued that neo-Pentecostalism may be working against sustainable development in Africa, as these activities may constrain personal and household incomes, with a rippling and cumulative effect on productivity and social change and transformation. This has been consented to by one of our informants, who, however, suggests that is not the entire picture and there is more to it than meets the eyes.

Clearly, the above concerns raised about the neo-Pentecostal economy need to be addressed by Africa's neo-Pentecostals if they would unquestionably position themselves as enduring partners to sustainable development in Africa. Notwithstanding the criticisms and concerns discussed above, it is worth mentioning that those concerns are not the whole story of the neo-Pentecostal economy and sustainable development in Africa. The very fact that these concerns relate to neo-Pentecostal economies' contribution to the development processes of nations states is suggestive of the roles of neo-Pentecostal economies in the development process in Africa. We therefore turn our attention, in the following sections, to examining some of the contributions of the neo-Pentecostal economy to sustainable development.

## 6 Methodology

Analysis in this article is grounded on data collected qualitatively. Due to the need for well-informed responses and quality control of data, respondents were purposively selected, based on their position and status in their respective churches. Primary data was collected from four leaders of four different,

major neo-Pentecostal churches headquartered in Accra, Ghana, and which we code as LLG (a female church founder), LAC (a male bishop), LCG (a male district pastor/overseer) and LRC (a male associate pastor to a founder). A combination of survey and interviews, using themed open-ended questions, was used for the data collection. The surveys were used for those who opted for it, whereby the questions were sent to them, to which they responded – one in writing and the other through audio recording. The interviews and audio recording were transcribed and all data thematically analysed. The analysis is further grounded on the researchers' long-term association with, knowledge of and research into neo-Pentecostalism, with one of the researchers being a regular participant of prayer sessions and worship activities of one of the biggest neo-Pentecostal churches in Ghana. These have been augmented by secondary literature, on the activities of neo-Pentecostals in Africa. Secondary data was also sourced from the websites of churches. Thus, as indicated, the data, focus and scope were largely on neo-Pentecostals from West Africa, particularly Ghana, but not necessarily limited to it.

## 7 Neo-Pentecostal Businesses and Entrepreneurship

Positively, the contribution of the neo-Pentecostal economy is quite varied and impressive, giving reasons why one can lay claims to the neo-Pentecostal economy as a significant stakeholder in the sustainable development of Africa. The entrepreneurial zeal and focus of neo-Pentecostal churches come to the fore in this regard (CDE 2008). The quotation below explains this clearly:

Entrepreneurship and response to opportunity are central features of these churches. This is noticeable at three levels: the churches themselves have usually come about as a result of individual religious entrepreneurship; there is a considerable amount of entrepreneurship in the membership; and in some of the churches, entrepreneurship skills training features as an important intervention in the lives of congregants.

CDE 2008, 18–19

In pursuit of the now dominant prosperity gospels of the neo-Pentecostals that the children of God must lead a successful and victorious life on earth “here and now”, neo-Pentecostal prosperity leaders teach different paths to success, which include motivation, entrepreneurship and practical life skills. An informant leader noted,

So, we encourage them to start small businesses; we pray with them for the businesses to succeed, we try to lead them to places and people who can help them to succeed in business and by so doing we are trying to help development and productivity. I mean my personal experience in this field is the fact that when young people come to me that they want to start businesses, I try to link them up and connect them to people who can help them; some bank people who can give them loans; some people who can help them develop a business plan; and anything we can do to help them.

LAC

Neo-Pentecostal churches with prosperity orientations frequently organise seminars for skills in entrepreneurship and economic productivity (CDE 2008; Golo 2019). This has been corroborated by a leader we interviewed when he noted:

... do not forget the Charismatic ministries themselves are like small enterprises, [you know] the founders and those who started them started them out of nothing so they are like mini businesses, for lack of a better word. So, people who come are also encouraged to start; and do not forget that the charismatic churches, the pastors of these churches, [erhh erhh] because we teach prosperity and wealth creation, we want our people to succeed.

LAC

He further affirmed:

We also have months that are dedicated to really developing people and giving them training or for instance how to manage their finances or how to build their finances so we do have like every year, we do have a monthly programme on wealth creation; so we teach on how to save [your] money, how to get into mortgage, buy houses, how to trade on the stock exchange and all these are geared towards helping individuals to build wealth and create a balance between the spiritual life and their natural life.

LAC

The entrepreneurial focus of neo-Pentecostal churches, to some extent, orients them alongside corporate entities in Africa as they engage in various kinds of direct economic activities. The neo-Pentecostal economy and businesses employ lots of people directly into jobs in their churches and businesses, such as schools and media houses. In Ghana, for instance, neo-Pentecostal churches

provide employment through their offices, businesses, and print and electronic media such as TV and radio stations. Many others also privately and/or indirectly engage in economic activities and businesses that have emerged around neo-Pentecostal activities such as event planning and organisation and the importation and sale of diverse types of anointing oils, face towels and other material elements that have become popular in neo-Pentecostal worship.

## 8 Social Ministries

It is important to mention that the social ministry – interventions towards social transformation – of Africa's neo-Pentecostal economies have been instrumental in making them sustainable developmental partners in contemporary Africa (Myers 2015; Freeman 2015; Benyah 2019). While the doctrinal basis why neo-Pentecostals do this could be varied, according to Miller and Yamamori (2007, 22, 30), neo-Pentecostals do this as part of a holistic and/or integral ministry in response to what they see consider as following the ministry of Jesus Christ who took care of the physical needs of people while also preaching the gospel of the Kingdom to them. However, it is important to underscore that this could be case and context specific (see Miller and Yamamori 2007, 30), as neo-Pentecostal churches do these for diverse theological reasons, rather than for one particular hard theological reason. For instance, quoting Matthew 25:35–36 as the scriptural basis for their social ministry, a leader informant noted that: “The church believes that doing good to others and using the resources of the church or nation to equitably provide for the needs of the people is a godly calling and responsibility as taught by the Lord Jesus Christ” (LRC). Another leader informant quoting the same Matthew 23:35–36 and Proverbs 19:17 said,

So social intervention to us is actually ministering to Christ, whether the people are Christians or not [you know and] and, aside that, there are a lot of scriptures in the Bible that talks about Jesus doing a lot of acts of benevolence and kindness [you know] where he was moved to compassion when he saw the many that he was preaching wait and that aspect of compassion which we call compassion ministry is one of the bases for social intervention actually but there are a lot more of such scriptures that we deploy to get into social intervention.

LAC

Similarly, in Ghana, while the International Central Gospel Church's (ICGC) educational social interventions are a result of the founder's, Pastor Mensa

Otabil's, interpretation of fruitfulness and multiplication in Genesis 2:28 to mean the development of talents and skills for transformation and development, which is only achievable through education, Seth Ablorh of Manna Mission Church interpreted his involvement in the provision of health services through his Manna Mission Hospital as a continuation of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ and an extension of ministry, which he identified as holistic ministry (Eshun 2013). It is also suggested, however, that neo-Pentecostal churches engage in social ministry as their response to societal needs and their contribution to development as well as for economic reasons (Eshun 2013).

A founding leader of a neo-Pentecostal church (LLG) indicated that leaders of neo-Pentecostal churches exhibit a passion for impacting their societies, especially through helping the less privileged and some identifiable needy members of society. This comes in many forms, especially through educational, medical and economic contributions. Another leader informant (LCG) noted that though some of these contributions are targeted towards members, others are inclusive. He indicated that, for instance, he was aware that the Central Aid of the ICGC (Ghana) runs an open scholarship fund for needy students irrespective of religious affiliation, while the Royalhouse Chapel Scholarship Foundation of Royalhouse Chapel International (Ghana) has a quota of about 70% for members and 30% for non-members (including non-Christians). It is suggested that five hundred students benefited from Central Aid's scholarship scheme between 1988 and 2000, and the number increased to about two hundred and fifty annually since 2010 (Eshun 2013, 64). Gifford (2004, 115–116) corroborates this when he suggests that in the 1990s Central Aid gave scholarships worth over 200 million old Ghana cedis to 500 brilliant but needy students; many of them were Muslims. The provision of these scholarships would be regarded significant contributions to the educational and productive opportunities of many Ghanaians.

In Ghana, the provision of health services also features centrally. For instance, Eshun (2013, 127) suggests that until the establishment in 2009 of a district hospital in the municipality the Manna Mission Hospital serves, it was the only hospital that served the entire community since its establishment in 1989. An informant noted, "some of the things we do include rehabilitation centre for drug addicts. We have a rehab centre that people go to and are taken care of for free. There is an orphanage we have adopted; we try and take care of them.... [eh] a number of activities that we do to make sure that we [are] not only looking inward but we are giving back to the community" (LAC). Another submitted that the women's fellowship of his church provides "seed capital and business skills to the unskilled young ladies such as street girls and also single mothers and widows"; the church offers educational scholarships to brilliant



but needy students to attend school from the basic level through to the tertiary level; and operates a restoration or rehabilitation school for ex-convicts and drugs addicts “through love fellowship and orientation to get them [to] abandon their hurts and vindictiveness and rather accept the forgiveness of God and society to reintegrate back to society and their families” (LRC). Also, in Nigeria, the Chris Oyakhilome Foundation International (COFI), which is an NGO affiliated to the Christ Embassy Church, runs the Inner City Mission GEM Initiative, which aims at ending child poverty in the inner cities (see <https://christembassy.org/gems-initiative/>). In Africa, where social welfare systems at the national level are hardly existent, when churches extend social services and amenities to vulnerable groups of people, they contribute to the lives of people who may not have any economic means of affording such services.

## 9 **Emphasis on Personal Transformation and Empowerment for Socioeconomic Prosperity**

Beyond the obvious quantitative developmental contributions of neo-Pentecostal churches in Africa, such as those examined above, one important aspect of the neo-Pentecostal economy we intend to emphasise is the very subjective and qualitative contribution to development. Freeman (2015, 117) refers to this as “transformation of subjectivity”. A neo-Pentecostal leader informant noted that the church’s teachings give the members a sense of responsibility towards God, fellow humans and creation by motivating them “to strive towards positive achievements, knowing they are adding to creation and keeping or sustaining what the Creator has entrusted to them. It also gives a sense of achievement, judgement and responsibility towards God, the state and posterity” (LRC).

The personal transformation emphasised by neo-Pentecostals is crucial for social transformation, which is an important part of the development process. For instance, positive confession and refusal to fail and capitulate to fatalism is one of the roles the Pentecostal cosmology plays in development. This is because in Pentecostal cosmology, as noted by Myers (2015, 116), “development is understood as a war against the devil and demons, not a war against poverty or unjust social structures.” Underdevelopment, failures in life and all things that diminish life, such as poverty and economic despondency, are devil-induced. Thus, neo-Pentecostals emphasise that the good and liberating life, which are the focus of any development thinking, are within the reach of believers through Jesus Christ, if only they would overcome the cosmic battle between evil and good by positioning themselves in positive thought and

confessions and righteous living. It is this Pentecostal cosmology that motivates belief and action towards efforts at life improvement and achieving the good life. The Holy Spirit is believed to liberate and transform the individual, thereby giving him or her a transformed identity to succeed in all aspects of life. An informant noted: "... so I realize that through the teaching of faith, the word of faith, a lot of people have been challenged to take up small businesses, to become entrepreneurs, they are challenged to start things" (LAC).

Consequently, emphasised in Pentecostal transformative theology is a transformed human person who is positioned to fight and win battles against the devil and all other forces that diminish life. Indicating that Pentecostalism in general provides individuals with non-state resources to adapt to economic restructuring processes such as individual and national financial insecurity, urbanisation and migration, and the reorganisation of work ongoing for decades, in especially most developing countries, Barker underscores how "Pentecostalism fosters norms and behaviors that harmonize well with the demands of neoliberal economies" (Barker 2007, 408). A leader informant corroborates this when he said:

So, for instance, one of the things that we teach very effectively in church is developing a vision and a personal vision.... So, we teach our people that they need to develop vision, they need to know how to use time effectively, manage time effectively and use their resources effectively. So that is one teaching that is very strong within the neo-Pentecostals. Teaching on vision and how to get resources and use influence to get to where you want to get to.

LAC

Miller and Yamamori (2007) have already underscored how transformed Pentecostal identity is pro-developmental, in that previous life choices and attitudes that motivate reckless spending and other socioeconomically unhelpful lifestyles which diminish household incomes are discouraged (see Myers 2015; Golo 2019). Of particular pro-developmental importance are some post-conversion changes and moral requirements of a "born again" believer towards the breaking from their pasts, such as no drinking of alcohol and partying, no womanising, no gambling, and many other unhelpful cultural and wasteful practices (Maxwell 2005, 27; Myers 2015, 118; Miller and Yamamori 2007, 23, 33, 160–165; Novieto 2013, 107–109) and other dominant norms of masculinity (Lindhardt 2015, 256). Miller and Yamamori therefore conclude that:

Pentecostal converts who are not wasting their money on alcohol, drugs, and partying now have surplus capital that they can invest into their

businesses or the education of family members. Furthermore, their businesses gain a reputation for honest transactions, and this in itself leads to a greater volume of exchange, since customers know that they will not be cheated. Or if they are not self-employed, these hardworking people are promoted in their workplace faster than their more self-indulgent colleagues.

MILLER AND YAMAMORI 2007, 164

In most parts of Africa, where men still have authority within the household and have control over the household economy, the potential of these changes for economic advancement cannot be underestimated. Thus, the turn to the subjective in African neo-Pentecostalism draws “the issue of personal transformation into focus as an important element of social transformation” (Myers 2015, 117), when the debate of sustainable development is made in Africa. This highlights how the subjective aspects of the religious person’s life largely form part of how “individuals decide to make changes, to take on new behaviours and to transform their social relations – activities that make up some of the key aspects of the developmental process” (Freeman 2015, 114).

Furthermore, consistent with the prosperity and entrepreneurial focus of neo-Pentecostals, virtues such as self-confidence, determination, motivation, discipline, hard work, courage and living morally upright lives are the practical approaches members are encouraged to apply to their personal lives in order to be successful in life. Maxwell (2005, 28–29) writes: “A sense of positive attitude, overcoming fear, a sense of personal destiny and self-worth and self-reliance are key traits in the Pentecostal character that adherents operate at the level of individuals in a volatile labour market. And in such conditions the domesticated Pentecostal male has an advantage over his unreconstructed brethren.” Thus, we agree with Freeman that the greatest impact which Pentecostals have on development in Africa does not come from their faith-based organisations, “but from the changes instilled in ‘believers’ by the religious activities of the churches themselves. In these churches, ‘religion’ is not separated from ‘development’. Church leaders focus on the ‘whole person’ and try to bring about change socially and economically, as well as spiritually” (Freeman 2015, 116–117; cf. CDE 2008, 31).

## 10 Conclusion

In this paper, we argued for the centrality of religion to development in Africa and discussed how religion nonetheless got lost as a category in defining development. We suggested the need to re-conceptualise and/or broaden the scope

of the definition of development towards its sustainable agenda as socially transforming. With this understanding, identifying the diverse contributions of religion and religious institutions to the sustainable development agenda of Africa becomes less difficult. This brings neo-Pentecostal economies directly into the sustainable development process and agenda and nudges the consciousness of their role in the sustainable development of their societies. There remain concerns and criticisms regarding neo-Pentecostal churches' positive contributions to sustainable development in Africa, to which these churches will have to respond. Nonetheless, it remains that these churches have the potentials to and are contributing progressively in diverse ways to sustainable development and social change in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. What we could not achieve in this article and which remains a genuine question and ground for further studies is how the neo-Pentecostal economies can sustain and make holistic their contributions to sustainable development in Africa.

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