

# **The Holy Spirit and Social Justice Interdisciplinary Global Perspectives**

**History, Race & Culture**

Antipas L. Harris and Michael D. Palmer, Editors

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## Chapter 6

# “Poverty is of the Devil:” Pentecostal Worldviews and Development in Ghana

James Kwateng-Yeboah

This chapter explores how poverty is conceptualized and dealt with by adherents of the most recent form of Pentecostalism in Ghana—“Neo-Prophetism.” Ghanaian scholars, Cephias Omenyo and Abamfo Atiemo, describe Neo-Prophetism as the emergence and stupendous growth of contemporary Prophetism with specific theological emphases on the concepts of *otamfo* (enemy) and *akwankyere* (prophetic guidance).<sup>1</sup> Prophetism dates back to African indigenous religions; traditional prophetism included an intense belief in the spirit of evil with accompanying powers to contend with it. Perhaps, this explains why Pentecostalism’s Spirit-oriented brand of Christianity is attractive to many Ghanaians. Omenyo and Atiemo explain, however, the emergence of a syncretistic version of Christianity. It is a Neo-Prophetism that appropriates indigenous worldviews “while remaining supposedly Pentecostal, but with ethos and style that depart markedly from mainstream Pentecostal traditions.”<sup>2</sup> The movement is built around prophetic figures who “claim to possess answers to Ghanaians most pressing needs,”<sup>3</sup> not least, the burden of poverty. Moreover, while Pentecostalism offers Christian insights within a spiritualist society, there is a need for a nuanced Spirit-oriented theological framework that both scrutinizes Neo-Prophetism and aids Ghanaian Christians in a revised response

to poverty, one that is faithful to scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit.

This chapter draws upon an original study<sup>4</sup> at “Glorious Word and Power Ministries International” (GWPMI) in Accra, Ghana.<sup>5</sup> The report reveals that for some Ghanaian Christians the *meaning*, *causes*, and *effects* of poverty involve the spirit world (i.e., witches, demons, and evil spirits). Through these lenses, poverty is often interpreted as a malevolent, satanic scheme to oppress people. Poverty is a demonic ritualistic enchantment with socio-economic hardship as evil ritual. On the one hand, generally congregants at GWPMI believe that the demonic world influences the physical world, wreaking havoc in everyday life. On the other hand, Pentecostalism offers power over evil spirits, including the spirit of poverty. Importantly, the Pentecostalist power-over-evil theology fosters a dualistic cosmology of God and Satan as interpretive frameworks for good and evil in the physical world, a basis for theological ideals of prosperity as spiritual triumph over evil.

Theological conceptualizations of evil imaginations within the “spirit world” has been the subject of many anthropological studies.<sup>6</sup> Many of them have assumed that spiritual evil is mainly confined to pre-modern cultures and societies thus expressions of false consciousness, incorrect reasoning, or escapism.<sup>7</sup> This chapter, however, rejects the idea that imaginations of evil are neurotic attempts to escape from the realities of harsh socio-economic conditions. Quayesi-Amakye’s insights in *Christology and Evil in Ghana*,<sup>8</sup> are helpful for explaining the liberating power of God expressed in Jesus’s ministry. While the Bible leaves no doubt about the destructive powers of Satan and evil in a spiritual world, sound biblical Christology foregrounds the ministry of Jesus Christ as a

potential turning point of evil. Neo-prophetic adherents can, therefore, draw on the person, nature and work of Christ in constructing a worldview that not only describes their life worlds, but also improves their well-being.

In what follows, I first discuss the socio-religious context within which Neo-Prophetism emerged in Ghana. This section will aid our understanding of the current ethos and style of Neo-Prophetic ministries with a special focus on why and how adherents of GWMPI bring their faith in engaging with the *meaning*, *causes*, and *effects* of poverty. The next section discusses relevant religio-cultural ideas in African indigenous contexts which arguably provides a background explanation for why poverty may be conceptualized with imaginations of evil from a so-called 'spirit world.' The final section of this chapter provides a critical theological engagement of adherents' perceptions of poverty with helpful attitudes towards development in Ghana.

### **Neo-Prophetism in Ghana: A Religion for Livelihood**

Pentecostalism remains the fastest growing branch of Christianity in the world.<sup>9</sup> But there are several Pentecostal-type movements with new manifestations, doctrines, and spiritualities. For the purposes of this chapter, I refer to Asamoah-Gyadu's description of Pentecostals in Ghana as:

Christian groups which emphasize salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic [Spirit] phenomena including 'speaking in tongues', prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general [are], perceived as standing in

historic continuity with the experiences of the early church....<sup>10</sup>

Asamoah Gyadu's definition foregrounds the idea of 'spirit-phenomenon' as a defining feature of many Pentecostal-type movements. Neo-Prophetic movements are typically oriented towards the spirit phenomenon in a broader sense, seeing their significant feature of prophecies. They claim "to enter into active communication with the spirit world in order to derive information from it to further material interests" in the physical world. Gerrie Ter Haar calls this "spiritual technology."<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I define Neo-Prophetism as contemporary Pentecostal movements that emphasize prophecies, spiritual power, and charisma (divine gift), and as such, develop theologies and practices that hinge on the assurance of addressing the immediate concerns of adherents.

Particular teachings and practices related to Neo-prophetic ministries which are of relevance to our theme of poverty to include the concept of *otamfo* (enemy) and the practice of *akwankyere* (prophetic guidance). *Otamfo*, in traditional Akan<sup>12</sup> life and thought, is a person or spiritual being that is suspected of undermining other people's prosperity, health and general progress through witchcraft, evil juju, or the spread of malicious gossip.<sup>13</sup> Ghanaian Neo-Prophets appropriate Akan cultural concepts of *otamfo* in reference to evil spirits and witches (including human-beings) that believers have cause to suspect of envy, jealousy or malicious gossip. The concept of *otamfo* is of relevance to this chapter because it lays emphasis on the cause of a person's misfortune like poverty, as a result of one's "enemies" (evil spirits, witches, and human beings) believed to be agents of the devil.

In *akwankyere*, otherwise called “prophetic guidance”, the prophet renders information which allegedly explains a person’s pertinent problem in life and prescribes immediate solutions.<sup>14</sup> *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”. Pertinent problems of clients that resurface during *akwankyere* include life situations of poverty, sickness, unemployment, singleness, and lack of progress in one’s life. During *akwankyere*, prophecies are declared. Content of prophecies include vivid descriptions of one’s enemies and reasons to suspect hatred from one’s enemies. Prophecies may also range from individual lives to pertinent social, political or economic issues at the national levels including national economic crisis, national disasters, poverty, and elections results.<sup>15</sup>

Neo-Prophetic ministries tend to respond to the real needs of individuals and the society. They demonstrate a type of Christianity that professes a better alternative in Africa with their claim to deal with real life situations. Whereas earlier Western missionaries were preoccupied with philosophical issues like atheism or secularization which were not being raised in African local situations, Neo-Prophetic ministries have apparently found a fertile soil for expansion with their functional approach to religion. Consequently, many Ghanaians turn to these Neo-prophetic ministries in the event of life’s crisis. Other traditions that are unable to take up issues that are most pressing in the local settings are considered irrelevant.

Gifford identifies the late Prophet Francis Akwasi Amoako as the pre-cursor of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana.<sup>16</sup> 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.

Owusu Bempah's ministry has exerted huge influence not only on the Ghanaian religious scene, but also, on political platforms.<sup>17</sup> Field observations showed an average clientele of about 600-700 people during a typical church service at GWPMI. Two major services are held weekly: Tuesdays (from 9am to 4pm) and Sundays (from 10am to 2pm). Church services at GWPMI involve rigorous prayer sessions, believer's testimonies, sermons, and prophetic sessions often attuned to themes of prosperity and poverty. On Tuesdays and every December 31<sup>st</sup>, GWPMI attracts large crowds as a result of Owusu Bempah's special prophetic sessions.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the prophet's clientele are from various backgrounds: from the upper, middle and lower classes to politicians, media-personnel, showbiz personalities, and traditional leaders in the Ghanaian society.<sup>19</sup> Many are often attracted to GWPMI because of the prophet's controversial prophecies which have often being related to the fate of political parties, celebrities, elections, and other pertinent events.

### **Religio-Cultural Concepts for Understanding Poverty in Africa**

There are at least three relevant concepts in African religio-cultural contexts which arguably provide a common and unique framework for understanding the conceptualization of poverty in Ghanaian Pentecostal settings. These three religio-cultural concepts, which are inspired by the Akans of Ghana, include *yiedie* (well-being), *nkwa* (the dualistic view of life), and *the role of religious functionaries*. Indeed, the varied nature of the cultural groupings of Africa makes



the selection of the Akans very problematic. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, the Akans will be used as their history and culture have influenced many scholarly writings<sup>20</sup> on African philosophy and religions.

The religio-cultural concepts of *yiedie* (well-being), *nkwa* (the dualistic view of life), and *the role of religious functionaries* relates to African religious worldviews described by John Mbiti as belonging to cultures and tribes.<sup>21</sup> Such worldviews are not systematic theological systems. They are derived from an undifferentiated number of rituals and beliefs that are not embedded in “scriptures”, but expressed in oral history, in practitioner’s hearts and minds, and by traditional leaders like the elders and kings.<sup>22</sup>

Among the Akans, *yiedie* (wellbeing), comprises everything that makes life worth-living including material resources that seem to give comfort, harmony with the spirits, good health, peace and wealth.<sup>23</sup> *Yiedie* (wellbeing) in this context has psychological, spiritual, and material dimensions. Harmony with divinities assumes a prerequisite for not only the physical enjoyment of wealth, health, and longevity, but also, for spiritual protection from evil forces.<sup>24</sup>

The concept of *yiedie* has crucial implications for our theme of poverty. Firstly, as the notion of the sacred and secular complement each other in African contexts, issues of well-being, and by extension poverty, are not only perceived in material terms, but also, in a spiritual framework, making the reality of poverty a broader and more complex phenomenon in Africa. Secondly, the idea of harmony with divinities stands in direct continuity with religious practices in Ghanaian Pentecostal settings where harmony with God through believers’ faithful tithing, offering, and seed

sowing are aimed towards spiritual protection from evil forces and the physical enjoyment of wealth, health, and longevity.<sup>25</sup>

*Nkwa*, in the Akan religio-cultural worldview signifies a dualistic view of life wherein the physical/material world of existence is intricately linked to a spirit/invisible world.<sup>26</sup> Significantly, Akans, like many other African cultures, believe in a spirit world which is populated by godly and evil agents. Individuals and communities invest in their relations with both spiritual entities and material beings (humans and non-humans) to enhance the quality of their lives. Many African indigenous religions have also historically understood reality to be partly governed by spiritual forces and have considered causality in the spiritual realm. The Dutch scholar of religion, Gerrie ter Haar, therefore, defines religion in African contexts as “a widespread belief in an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, which is home to spiritual beings deemed to have effective powers over the material world”. Life here is not reduced to its visible/material form only. Thus, the concept of *nkwa* (dualistic view of life) foregrounds the inseparable co-existence of the sacred and the secular and renders life-situations of poverty as intricately linked to physical (material) and spiritual (non-material) worlds.

The spirit world of Africa is believed to be inhabited by forces, good and evil, capable of inflicting suffering or bringing success to humans in the material world. These spiritual forces range from the creator spirit, to the numerous gods and goddesses, ancestors, and several other spirit powers collectively referred to as a “community of spirits”. Consequently, the search for a power to counter-act evil forces in the spiritual world which impede the full enjoyment of human life, is a driving principle behind many

religions in Africa. As Max Assimeng affirms: “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.”<sup>27</sup>

The concept of *nkwa* evokes the need for *religious functionaries* to help counter-act evil in the spirit world. The notion of *religious functionaries* (diviners) is premised on the idea that individuals and societies can be vulnerable to malevolent spiritual forces; hence, the need for a more potent power to overcome evil. Diviners in Akan indigenous religions seek to decipher the past, present and future in order to uncover the physical and spiritual causation of evil. Akans call such “divinatory consultation or the desire to know the supernatural causalities of affairs” as *abisa*, which translates “asking.”<sup>28</sup>

This idea of *religious functionaries* among the Akans stands in direct continuity with the ethos and style of Neo-Prophets in the Ghanaian Pentecostal stream as emphasis is placed on prophet’s anointing<sup>29</sup> to combat spiritual forces of evil in the practical life situations. Indeed, Neo-Prophets perform a similar feat by using the Bible to indicate that they have a more powerful religious alternative. They claim to possess answers to individual and societal pressing needs, while reverberating their prowess in dealing with poverty, diseases, bareness, and failure in life. Against this background, biblical passages are contextualized and appropriated. A typical example would be Ephesians 6: 12 as stated in the NKJV (which is a standard translation for Ghanaian Pentecostals): “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Overall, the search for explanations to life-situations of poverty in African contexts begins in the repertory of the spirit world wherein real and effective power apparently lies. Such religio-cultural imaginations are, nevertheless, not exclusive to Africa. Ter Haar notes of a similar feature with Cicero's *religio* in ancient Roman religion which constituted "continuous revelatory messages sent from the Roman gods to the world of humans."<sup>30</sup> Robert Bellah also elucidates a similar point when he writes that in ancient Greece, religion was "simply the cultic life of the polis [society], and not conceivable outside of it."<sup>31</sup> The crucial point here is that, religio-cultural concepts of a spirit world as intricately linked to the physical world are inevitably related to specific socio-cultural contexts within which they emerge. As a result, life-situations of poverty in Ghanaian Pentecostalist settings appears to be in conversation with Akan religio-cultural concepts of *yiedie* (well-being), *nkwa* (the dualistic view of life), and *the role of religious functionaries*.

### **A Pentecostalist Notion of Poverty**

In Ghana, measures of poverty and living standards of the more than 25 million population are periodically conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) in a report called "The Ghana Living Standards Survey" (GLSS). Estimates from GSS 2013 survey, indicate 24.2 percent of Ghanaians are poor.<sup>32</sup> In other words, some 6.4 million people cannot afford to spend 3.60 Ghana Cedis (1.00 US dollars) on food daily. Between 2015 and 2016, Ghana's economic growth slowed down for the fifth consecutive year – from 3.9 percent 3.3 percent respectively. Economic experts explained the recession by pointing to technical disruptions in oil production, a three-year

(2013-2015) power crisis, rising fiscal deficit, increased cost of borrowing, depreciation of the local currency, corruption and the defective governance of politicians.<sup>33</sup>

In the wake of the economic hardships in Ghana, some Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders resonated “spiritual” causes to the country’s predicament, claiming it is “the work of the devil.”<sup>34</sup> For example, on Sunday, 2nd February 2014, a pioneer of the Charismatic Movement in Ghana, Arch-bishop Nicholas Duncan Williams, echoed the following words as he led prayer with his congregation:

I hold up the cedi with prayer and I command the cedi to recover ... I command and release a miracle for the economy... Satan, take your hands off the President! take your hands off the Central Bank and the Finance Minister...we release innovation for ... the Governor of the Bank of Ghana, ...in the name of Jesus Christ<sup>35</sup>

In another statement by Prophet Isaac Owusu Bempah<sup>36</sup>, one of the precursors of Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic ministries,<sup>37</sup> poverty was conceptualized as satanic:

Poverty is of 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 it be in our time.<sup>38</sup>

Owusu Bempah's and Duncan William's declarations attest to Ogbu Kalu's findings about some African Neo-Pentecostal groups who believe there are activities of malevolent spirits hindering socio-economic development on the African continent.<sup>39</sup> Such groups, for example, "Intercessors for Africa," claim financial institutions like International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are demonized agents of Satan, causing financial hardships on the African continent.<sup>40</sup>

Generally, many Ghanaians explain poverty as simply the lack of basic amenities for survival. As one informant remarked: "in Ghana, when you don't have food to eat, a place to sleep, or a little comfortable life, then you are poor." However, the meaning of poverty from a Pentecostalist perspective goes beyond the mere lack of basic amenities. The research among GWPMI revealed that poverty is perceived as a spiritual category designed by Satan to primarily win more souls for his kingdom. Many adherents hold the perception that a stronger or higher spirit can act negatively upon the lives of individuals, families and the nation to inflict poverty. Commenting on the reality of poverty as 'spiritual,' one pastor from 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!<sup>41</sup>

Here, personal responsibility is not entirely overlooked. Yet, the success of one's efforts are relatively dependent on the spiritual forces that enables one. Consequently, the Ghanaian Pentecostalist or Neo-Prophetic lifeworld is one of action and counteraction; it is one of spirits acting upon and influencing actions of human beings and vice versa. In the same way a medical doctor is able to diagnose the ailment of clients, Neo-Prophets, through *akwankyere*, claim to have the ability to "diagnose" the causes of poverty in the life of believers.

During *akwankyere*, the prophet reveals evil forces in the spirit world that are said to inflict poverty on believers. Observations made during church services revealed the belief in Satan as the principal cause of poverty. Satanic schemes of poverty are said to be coordinated through the operations of witches, demons, and numerous evil spirits. Witches are believed to be human beings who are possessed by evil spirits to purposely destroy the lives and properties of close relations. The Akan word *bayifo* (witch) was frequently used at GWMPI during the fieldwork to underscore the activities of witches on individual lives.

Consider this session on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2015. After his sermon, Prophet Owusu Bempah called a young woman who was helped on to the platform. The Prophet 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. Although you have been called several times for a job interview, you are always rejected right? [Woman nods.] This is the doing of this witch –Aunty Bee in your family. But because you came here [the church] today, I would reverse what she did.

Here, it is believed that one can acquire financial hardships by receiving items that are thought to be hypnotized by witches. The bewitched items may include consumables, money, beads, and clothing. The suspicion of witches is mostly feared because they are perceived to be very close relatives of their victims. Activities of witches are also considered invisible to adherents, except the prophet who has the anointing to see and combat such forces in the spirit world.

Prayers, often referred to as ‘spiritual warfare’, are performed to combat the activities of witches. These prayer sessions involve intense movements – clapping of hands, stamping of feet, and shouting and pacing to and fro.<sup>42</sup> “Prayer Warriors,” – those with the gift of effectual power – are often leaders of the spiritual warfare. Here is an example of prayer warrior’s words during church service at GWMPI:

Awuradee,	Lord
Ṣemebô mensâm bômpaεε a	When I clap my
hands and pray,	



Ôtamfo biara a, ômma me nnye yie no	May the
enemies, who work against me,	
apraana nte ngu no so	Be struck by thunder
anaa car mbômo nku no	Or be killed by a car
Sêôye me maame o,	whether it is my mother
êôye me papa o,	whether it is my father,
a naa obibiara a ô ye ma tanfo	Or whoever it is
that my enemy is	
mawontetegu.	Let them fall.

Other agents of Satan believed to be the cause of poverty are demons. During the field interview with Prophet Owusu Bempah, he explained:

Satan has assistant demons whom he plans within every generation. The demon from Satan who is in charge of money is called *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. *Mammon* then gives out money to those who will submit to him in such hardships. Those who submit to *Mammon* in situations of poverty do so by engaging in evil practices like occultism, homosexuality, and human sacrifice. When people engage in such evil practices in order to deal with poverty, *Mammon* gives them money and they become rich. In this way, Satan draws more souls to his kingdom.

Here, Owusu Bempah conveys the belief in the existence of a specific demon – *Mammon* - who takes an active role in the satanic scheme of poverty and riches. Bempah referred to the scripture in Matthew 6:24 where Jesus says - “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.”<sup>43</sup>

Other informants attributed the causes of poverty to the misdeeds of ancestors which may impose generational curses on believers. Curses are believed to be identified with continuous calamities in the life of believers, namely, bankruptcy, failures, inexplicable illnesses, child mortality, and premature deaths. It is believed that poverty can influence one to engage in morally unaccepted practices. One pastor from GWMPI explains:

It is Poverty that makes people to join occultic or secret societies ... to consult diviners or spiritualists for “blood money” ... and to engage in homosexuality. Poverty can even coerce poor nations to accept certain beliefs or practices that otherwise would have been frowned upon in the society. All these are the works of Satan to draw people into his kingdom.<sup>44</sup>

Generally, many Ghanaians believe secret societies exist to accumulate riches by wrongful means. For Owusu Bempah, Satan uses the medium of secret societies to draw people into poverty. He explains:

Many people believe that, if you join these secret societies, you can escape poverty. And Yes! It is true that

people belonging to secret societies and cults are prosperous. They have lots of money. So Satan designs and inflicts poverty on people so that they will worship him by joining these secret societies in order to become rich.<sup>45</sup>

Other informants also raised concerns that poverty may coerce individuals, groups and nations to promote or practice same-sex relations in order to receive financial support.

How should one understand evil for which there otherwise appears to be no rational explanation? Is it fantasy? Or, is there something else at work?

### **Developing a Pentecostal Worldview**

Thus far, I have presented a Ghanaian Pentecostalist notion of poverty as a form of spiritual evil, supernaturally caused by inhabitants of the spirit world – the occurrence of which necessitates rituals, namely prayers designated as spiritual warfare. A common thread is the image of Satan and cohorts (witches, demons, and ancestral spirits) in the *source, meaning, causes, and effects* of poverty. Many scholars often dismiss worldviews involving the existence of a spirit world in which evil forces exist. They argue that spiritual phenomena are non-scientific and often not a proper subject for inquiry as there are no well-established methods of investigation. Paul Gifford, for example, argues that “spiritualizing politics” distracts Ghanaians from the practical realities of inefficiency in their economic and political structures.<sup>46</sup> In his recent book,<sup>47</sup> he remarks of an enchanted Christianity (Neo-Pentecostalism) in Africa that views the world as pervaded by

spiritual forces. Gifford argues that the enchanted Christianity “perceives believers’ glorious destiny as threatened by witches, marine spirits, spirit spouses, and ancestral curses,” and this militates against development, by diminishing human responsibility, and downplaying functional rationality underpinning modernity.<sup>48</sup>

Brigit Meyer, on the other hand, maintains that “imagination of evil are not mere reflections of ill-understood social, political and economic conditions; ... [rather] they are fields within which people produce meanings, enabling them to analyze critically and thereby shape their life condition.”<sup>49</sup> For Meyer, providing believers with an image of the Almighty and dark counterpart affords Neo-Pentecostals the opportunity to explore new possibilities in explaining “why and how things go wrong in the physical world.”<sup>50</sup>

This chapter rejects the idea that imaginations of evil are neurotic attempts to escape from the realities of harsh socio-economic conditions. On the contrary, it is more appropriate to explain concepts of evil as culturally embedded. In other words, a people’s cultural understandings and experiences, to a large extent, shapes the meaning of evil in whatever form it may appear. Therefore, a Ghanaian Pentecostalist notion of poverty in relation to spirit world must be critically engaged with mainstream ideas of poverty in order to meaningfully deal with the economic lives of many Ghanaians. This critical engagement should not be intended to replace an economic approach to poverty for a spiritual one, but to complement them in ways that can help individuals to not only understand and describe their life-worlds but improve their well-being.

The Nigerian theologian, Chris Oshun, in his article, “Spirits and Healing in a Depressed Economy: The Case of Nigeria,” argued

that Nigeria's socio-economic challenges and those of African nations can be explained in terms of the activities of evil powers. He strongly advocated a "power-approach" to resolving Nigeria's crisis: thus, by countering "the powers and principalities" through the power of the gospel and the employment of "spiritual ammunition" like fasting and prayer.<sup>51</sup> Whiles Oshun's assertion may be far-fetched by development policy makers, it indicates how ideas of a spirit world are held, not only at the popular level, but also by some leading academics who identify with certain strands of Pentecostal beliefs.

The Ghanaian theologian, Joseph Quayesi Amakye, describes how the gospel writers in the New Testament present Jesus' life and ministry as one that exemplifies a miraculous character, restoration of hope, divine love and friendship, and transformation of identity.<sup>52</sup> Quayesi Amakye writes:

In Christ, humanity is able to experience the divine overturning of evil in the world ... Jesus' death ends cosmic discord and reorders human existence to align with the divine purpose and plan. Believers implement the victory in Christ through their participation in His death and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup>

Here, the ministry of Jesus typifies a concern for the world's brokenness including life-situations of poverty. The Gospel of John also presents Jesus' divine love and friendship in the ministry of Christ which enables believers to access a new and abundant life (John 10:10; John 6: 35; John 15: 13). The narratives of Luke-Acts similarly exemplifies how Jesus anoints His disciples with the Holy Spirit to persevere in the face of opposition (Luke 10: 18-20; Acts

10:38). Even though the incidences of illness, death, insanity, demonic attacks, could be attributed to the work of Satan in the Jesus days, Jesus' ministry reveals not only remedies to these situations but as the deliverance of "particular individuals and personalities from the grip or the dominating influence of Satan."<sup>54</sup> Such Christological ideas has potency in negotiating despairing situations of adherents of neo-prophetic ministries.

Quayesi-Amakye also examined ideas about the nature of Christ (nature, person, and work) in relation to human suffering and evil as expressed by Ghanaian Pentecostals. Using songs, practices and sermons administered by the Church of Pentecost (COP), which is one of Ghana's earliest Classical Pentecostal Churches, he revealed that songs composed and used extensively by Ghanaian Pentecostals exemplified "the miraculous character of Jesus, His restoration of hope, and believer's identity transformation in Christ."<sup>55</sup> For Quayesi Amakye, many Ghanaian Pentecostal songs "articulate deeply Ghanaian Christian ideas about freedom and victory" and how believers "negotiate life's negative circumstances with their understanding about Christ."<sup>56</sup>

Herein is an example of Rose Boadu's song which is often sung during COP's prayer services:

Troubles of the world are numerous  
The Lord has overcome them  
Those who wait upon the Lord  
Will Receive His Strength

*Refrain:*

Rejoice, daughter of Zion

The blood of Jesus has overcome  
All sorrows will be ended  
There will be joy for you.

Commenting on the lyrics of Boadu's song, Quayesi Amakye explains how the introduction of "daughter of Zion" suggests an Old Testament motif of messianic deliverance (Isa. 14:3; 35:10). Bodu's lyrics provides sound biblical theology in response to the despairing life-situations of poverty.

Despite the prevalence of a sound Ghanaian Pentecostal Christology on evil through some Pentecostal songs, practices, and sermons,<sup>57</sup> there still remains certain spiritualities among the Pentecostal stream in Ghana that tend to create a devil in constant warfare with God. Such uncritical views, which are difficult to sustain biblically, tend to place huge emphasis on the power of evil forces unceasingly at war with believers. In effect, a false dualism is created by prioritizing the "spirit phenomenon" over adequate biblical hermeneutics. Interviews during the fieldwork showed how many adherents often identified with the power of Satan to inflict evil and suffering on a believer, rather than the power of God to revert such sufferings. To assume that one's destiny is completely ruled by an unseen evil power robs believers of their agency.

While the bible leaves no doubt about the destructive powers of Satan and of evil, this chapter argues that the turning point in the power of evil is inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. As explained above, biblical theology points out that Satan and his cohorts have been defeated through Jesus Christ, "who disarms powers and authorities, and makes a public spectacle of them, triumphing over the cross" (Col. 2:15).<sup>58</sup> Jesus gives authority to His

disciples in the Bible, and to all believers “to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10: 19). While believers ought to be concerned about the works of Satan and his cohorts in life-situations of poverty, I argue for the theological potential for adherents to focus on the liberating power of God exerted in Christ. Thus, for a successful attitude towards poverty alleviation among Neo-Pentecostals, two dimensions must be in balance: adherents must critically engage their beliefs in helpful ways and appreciate pragmatic interventions to the reality of poverty. Critics of religion in development discourses should appreciate the critical use of existing religious resources in specific contexts to inspire helpful attitudes towards developmental goals.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored a Pentecostal view of poverty among adherents of Neo-Prophetic ministries in Ghana. Overall, the research findings indicate that poverty is not entirely a socio-economic condition for the Neo-Prophetic adherents. Principally, the meaning(s), causes and effects of poverty are enchanted with the image of the devil and cohorts (witches, demons, and evil spirits). Here, a Pentecostalist notion of poverty as a spiritual category is sustained as the devil’s scheme to win souls into the satanic kingdom. This perception of poverty provided the ritual context within which evil, suffering and socio-economic hardships were confronted. It also afforded adherents a glimpse of the realm of the powers of darkness from a safe distance, making visible what happens unnoticeably.

Considering the testimonies of adherents as eye witness accounts of a spiritual world, one can postulate how Ghanaian Pentecostals present themselves as purveyors of true knowledge,



insisting that things which are seen are made of things which are unseen. However, an imaginary and spiritual framework of poverty may produce a false dualism which creates a devil in equal power and majesty with God. This false dualism has potency to distract believers from their practical responsibilities as some may be negligent of their voluntary will and autonomy in transforming their individual life situations. The crucial factor is to critically engage perceptions of spiritual evil in helpful ways so as to improve the believer's well-being. Rather than relegating spiritual ideas to the realms of fantasy, false consciousness or incorrect reasoning, the chapter argues for the theological potential for Neo-Pentecostals to draw insights from the liberating power of God exerted in Christ in the spirit world.

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