

**A Re-appraisal of the Prosperity Gospel in African Neo-Pentecostalism:
The Potency of “Multiple Modernities” Paradigm.**

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Master’s Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
The Degree Master of Arts in the School of Religion at
Queen’s University

August, 2017

ABSTRACT

The role of African Neo-Pentecostalism in effecting modernity through its widespread “prosperity gospel” remains inconclusive. Scholars have persistently invoked Weber’s *Protestant Ethic*; yet findings reveal the prosperity gospel in Africa challenges dominant conceptualizations of modernity. On one hand, the phenomenon inspires entrepreneurship and individual autonomy. On the other hand, so-called “enchanted” forms of prosperity refute Weber’s central claim of modern societies. Does the prosperity gospel demonstrate distinctively modern and anti-modern (or anti-western) themes? Drawing insights from the Akan cultural concepts of well-being, dualistic view of life, and the role of religious functionaries, this essay develops a sustained critique of the classical Eurocentric and unilinear view of modernity used in assessing the prosperity gospel. Showing that modernity is mediated by historical and cultural backgrounds of the society it encounters; the essay argues for the potency of the “multiple modernities” paradigm as a better analytical framework for the prosperity gospel in Africa.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

But for the grace of Christ, this work would not have been materialised. To Him be Glory! My heart-felt gratitude to Dr. Pamela Holmes, who graciously agreed to supervise this essay. I am especially grateful for your time, expertise, advice, encouragement and mentoring, all of which ensured the success and final outcome of this project. And to Dr. Richard Ascough, I am equally thankful for recommending Dr. Pam as my supervisor.

I also owe an enormous intellectual debt to Professors Forough Jahanbaksh, Ellen Goldberg, Heather Shipley, James Miller, Ian Cuthbertson and Villia Jefremovas. Having you all as my instructors enabled me to develop my own research capacity. I also want to recognise the immense contribution of Cheryl O'shea and Dr. Pamela Dickey Young, for being on the front line of my graduate study application and transition into Queens.

I am also grateful to Daniel Boamah Asante and Edwin Eshun for their support and prayers. And to my fellow MA students; Jake, Jenna, Ruth, Leah, Alissa, Caelen, and Emily, I richly enjoyed all the good times we shared together.

And finally, to my loving wife and supportive friend Diana, I appreciate you and God for bringing us into each other's lives. God bless you all!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Debates over the role of the prosperity gospel in effecting modernity in Africa has been the subject of many works under Pentecostalism (Gifford 2016: 46-68; Berger 2008:69-75, 2010:3-9; Maxwell 1998: 351; Martin 2002: 152). The underlying theory of the prosperity gospel is that, Christians are rewarded with wealth, good health and financial success for their faith in God, demonstrated by hard work and giving (Asamoah Gyadu 2005: 202). Proponents tend to argue that the prosperity gospel replicates the Protestant Ethic made famous by the German sociologist Max Weber (1930 [1920]) in his essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Scholars of such persuasion suggest, the doctrine fosters a modernising work ethic; hence, a catalyst for socio-economic change (Berger 2008:69-75; Maxwell 1998). Critics however view the doctrine as an impetus for delusion (Dada 2004: 95-195; Gifford 2016). Their main objection is that the prosperity gospel in Africa places much emphasis on spiritual forces and fosters an “enchanted religious imagination” that downplays “functional rationality” underpinning modernity (Gifford 2016: 55).

Rather than arguing for or against the prosperity gospel, this essay develops a sustained critique of the classical view of modernity used as an analytical framework for the prosperity gospel. Classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber assumed that structural differentiation and the growth of institutions (such as capitalism, a bureaucratic state and liberal democracy) would naturally be accompanied by individualism, rationalization and a secular worldview in all modernizing and modern societies (Fourie 2012: 54). The modernizing effect of the prosperity gospel in Africa refutes this assumption. On one hand, it defies the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of the Western program of modernity by its pervasive “enchantment”

or emphasis on spiritual forces (Gifford 2016). On the other hand, it shares modern traits of entrepreneurship, optimism and individual autonomy (Togarasei 2011: 344, Maxwell 1998, Martin 2002). Such ambivalent patterns of modernity effected by the prosperity gospel are greatly influenced by specific socio-cultural premises and historical experiences of Africa.

Using the cases of Ghana (Gifford 2004), Nigeria (Dada 2004), Zimbabwe and Botswana (Togarasei 2011; Maxwell 1998), this essay argues for the potency of the “multiple modernities” paradigm as a better analytical framework in unravelling the ambivalences of modernity associated with the prosperity gospel in Africa. The contribution of the multiple modernities paradigm lies in the thesis that cultural and historical backgrounds lead different civilizations to have sufficiently different interpretations of the core features of modernity, so as to result in various distinctive “modernities” (Eisenstadt 2000; Fourie 2012: 55). As Elsje Fourie notes, “modernity around the world is and always has been highly contingent on the socio-cultural backgrounds of individual societies, hence, its ideological and institutional manifestations are bound to vary greatly” (Fourie 2012: 55).

Research Background

For the purposes of this essay, I refer to Pentecostals as defined by the Ghanaian scholar of Pentecostalism, Asamoah-Gyadu:

a group of Christians who emphasize salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit ... in which the “Spirit phenomenon” (including speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, healing and miracles) are perceived as a historic continuity of the experiences of the early church ...” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 12).

Among Pentecostals in Africa, some beliefs are more prominent in particular sections of the movement than others. This essay groups the different trends of Pentecostalism in African contexts

into two: *Classical Pentecostal Churches* and *Neo-Pentecostal (or Charismatic) Churches*. Even though differences between them cannot be neatly divided, Jane 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/Charismatic] ... churches are most definitely of "this world" and express frequent concern for health, wealth and general success of adherents in this life time (Soothill 2007: 37).

Thus, the recurrent emphases among Neo-Pentecostal adherents are on "success, wealth and status" (Gifford 2004: 44). In this study, I use the term "African Neo-Pentecostal(s)" to embrace the various new Charismatic churches in Sub-Saharan Africa 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.

In recent decades, the global explosion of (Neo-) Pentecostal religiosity has caught scholarly attention, especially on its relation to development (Berger 2008; Ter Haar 2009), modernity (Martin 2002; Gifford 2016) and globalization (Wilkinson 2006). David Martin's *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (2001:1) posits that one in eight Christians are Pentecostal, amounting to at least 250 million. He further demonstrates how Pentecostalism, in its most receptive areas – Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia – is thriving in the context of increasing cultural and religious pluralism, global capitalism, and rapid urbanization (Martin 2002: 1). For Peter Berger, "Pentecostalism is much too diffuse, spontaneous and frequently unorganized beyond its local groups" to be quantified (2008: 71). Regarding its modernizing impulse, Berger argues that "Pentecostalism exhibits precisely the features of the 'Protestant ethic' which are functional for modern economic development" (ibid). He asserts:

To be sure, Pentecostals are not Puritans. They are far too exuberant, and they have characteristics that would have appalled the Puritans (beginning with the speaking in tongues). But they do correspond to ... elements of an "inner-worldly asceticism"—hard work, frugality, "delayed gratification", and so on. Because of this, I will venture the following, simple but far-reaching, proposition: Pentecostalism should be viewed as a positive resource for modern economic development (Berger 2008: 71).

Much earlier, David Maxwell (1998: 350) had found the growing influence of Pentecostalism and its prosperity gospel on capitalist attitudes and political activism in Zimbabwe. In the case of Zimbabwe, Maxwell (1998: 351) argues that the prosperity gospel “provides a pattern for coming to terms with ... modernities’ dominant values and institutions”.

But other scholars have been very sceptical of this positive affinity between Pentecostalism and the so-called dominant values of modernity. Chief amongst them is Paul Gifford. In *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, Gifford argues, “the claim that Charismatic [or Neo-Pentecostal] Churches of themselves or as such must be fostering socio-political reform has not been proved”, at least in contemporary Accra (Gifford 2004: 197). Using Weber’s “Protestant ethic” as an analytical framework, Gifford argues that Pentecostalism’s overemphasis on the miraculous and low valuation of work counters the modern work ethic needed for Ghana “to join the modern world economy” (Gifford 2004: 197). A major exception is however presented in Gifford’s findings: the socially and politically conscious “cultural adjustment theology” of Mensa Otabil (Gifford 2004: 113). Accordingly, Otabil presents a case for education, responsible leadership, productive entrepreneurship, and cultural transformation in Neo-Pentecostalism (ibid). But in Gifford’s recent book *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (2016), he re-echoes that African Pentecostalism, unlike African Catholicism, continues to reinforce an “enchanted religious imagination” that does not further participation in the modern world.

Drawing insights from some of the scholarly attention given to Pentecostalism and modernity, one can observe a specific analytical framework: one that is primarily derived from an intellectual framework shaped by the historical conditions of Western Europe. Modernity and socio-economic development is often distinguished, at least in the works cited above, with the

development of modern capitalist systems, free market economy, science and technology, functional differentiation, and the primacy of reason (rationalization). African Neo-Pentecostalism, quite the reverse, challenge these dominant paradigms of modernity (Swidler 2013: 680). When discussing African realities, it is apparent that the role of religion with respect to modernity is particularly complex and multifaceted (Swidler 2013: 681). Harvey Cox (2006: 21) affirms that, Pentecostals assert a remarkable interface between pre-modern spiritual beliefs and practices (like exorcism with spirits of folk religion); while embracing features of modernity through their mass capitalist culture, which motivates members towards upward social mobility.

How then, does the practice of the prosperity gospel in Africa diverge from or converge with the dominant approaches of modernity as inherited from classical sociological analyses (e.g Weber's Protestant Ethic)? Can the social impact of the prosperity gospel articulate strong anti-modern or anti-western themes and yet remain distinctively modern? For Schmucl Eisenstadt, "... the best way to understand the contemporary world – indeed to explain the history of modernity – is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (Eisenstadt 2000: 2). Herein is lies the definition of multiple modernities.

To that end, this essay aims to understand better, how religious movements and modernity are invariably shaped by their historical, social and cultural contexts within which they emerge. The overarching goal is to demonstrate that in African contexts, modernity is part of rather than antithetical to religion.

Research Questions

Three main questions are the driving focus of this essay:

- What are the content(s), histories, and origin(s) of the prosperity gospel?

- What are the key traits of the Protestant Ethic as discussed by Weber?
- How does the practice of the prosperity gospel in Africa diverge from or converge with dominant approaches of modernity, as inherited from classical sociological analyses?

Theoretical Tools & Approach

This essay draws theoretical insights from the concept of “multiple modernities”, first developed by the Israeli sociologist, Schmucl Eisenstadt. The essay challenges the assumption behind the central idea of development in the latter part of the 20th Century – that former colonized lands would “modernize” and take their place alongside nations earlier industrialized in the process (Rostow 1962). Classical sociological analyses of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, assumed that the cultural program of modernity as it developed in Western Europe and the institutional patterns (e.g a bureaucratic state, democracy, capitalism) that emerged there would eventually follow in all modernizing and modern societies. The reality that has emerged after the so-called beginnings of modernity fails to bear out these assumptions. As Eisenstadt asserts:

While a general trend toward structural differentiation developed across a wide range of institutions in most of these societies in family life, economic and political structures, urbanization, modern education, mass communication, and individualistic orientations, the ways in which these arenas were defined and organized varied greatly, in different periods of their development, giving rise to multiple institutional and ideological patterns. Significantly, these patterns did not constitute simple continuations in the modern era of the traditions of their respective societies. Such patterns were distinctively modern, though greatly influenced by specific cultural premises, traditions, and historical experiences (Eisenstadt 2000: 1-2).

The theory of multiple modernities, thus, rejects a single overarching narrative like Western modernization and posits that modernity is mediated by the historical and cultural backgrounds of the society it encounters. Put differently, societies have their own way of being modern without becoming ‘occidentalized’ (Eisenstadt 2000). Drawing insights from Eisenstadt (2000), the essay develops a critique of a key theme of modernity captured by the German term *Entzauberung* – the

disenchantment or de-magicking of the world. The study interrogates analyses by scholars like Paul Gifford (2004; 2016), who create a dichotomy between a supposed scientific rationality of modernity and the so-called “religious enchantments” of the prosperity gospel.

In approaching this task, I first explore the content of the prosperity gospel, outlining its historical origins in the USA and in African contexts, particularly, in Ghana and Nigeria. Here, I show how the prosperity gospel in Africa displays elements of continuity and discontinuity with the North American account, as a result of the socio-cultural and historical milieu within which the phenomena emerges in both societies. The next chapter compares the prosperity gospel in Africa with the Weberian Protestant Ethic, showing the former’s divergence in its wealth accumulation, conspicuous consumption, and enchanted imagination and its convergence in entrepreneurship values, individual autonomy, and optimism. I then explore debates on the role of the prosperity gospel in effecting modernity in Africa, using the scholarly works of Paul Gifford (2004, 2016), Peter Berger (2008, 2010), David Maxwell (1998), David Martin (2002) and Lovemore Togarasei (2011). Here, I will demonstrate how analyses of the prosperity gospel is primarily derived from an intellectual framework of modernity shaped by the historical experiences and socio-cultural conditions of the West. The essay posits the concept of “multiple modernities”, as a better analytical framework in unravelling the ambivalences of the modernizing effect of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

Chapter 2

The Prosperity Gospel: Content, History and Contexts

Introduction

This chapter explores the content of the prosperity gospel, outlining its historical origins in the USA and in African contexts, particularly, in Ghana and Nigeria. The aim of the chapter is to show that the prosperity gospel in Africa displays both elements of continuity and discontinuity with the American account, as a result of the socio-cultural and historical milieu within which the phenomenon varyingly emerged. This differential pattern is crucial for unravelling the ambivalent modernizing effects of the prosperity gospel in Africa, and its contradistinction from Weber's Protestant Ethic.

What is the Prosperity Gospel?

The prosperity gospel is not a monolithic theological system. Any attempt to define it, according to Stanley M. Burgess (2006: 393), entails a risk of distorting or oversimplifying it. In efforts to minimise such risks, I refer to four different sources. *The Encyclopaedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* defines the prosperity gospel 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 (Burgess 2006: 393).

Paul Gifford similarly writes:

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 (Gifford 1998: 62).

Asamoah-Gyadu, from a Ghanaian perspective, also asserts:

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) (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 202).

In *A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, Kate Bowler notes that the prosperity gospel centres on four interrelated themes: *faith*, “a power that unleashes spiritual forces and turns the spoken word into reality”; *wealth* and *health*, both of which demonstrate the success of faith; and a totalizing *victory*, which marks believers’ life impervious to any “political, social, or economic impediment to faith” (Bowler 2013: 7).

All definitions above demonstrate believers’ emphases on a perceived *right* and *power* to plunge into “spiritual resources” in Christ in order to control their physical well-being, financial fortunes, and material progress. Several biblical texts are cited in support: 3 John 2ff (God’s will for believers is to prosper and to 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) (Togarasei 2011: 339).

The term *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 spiritual redemption but more so, to material success in this life (Stiles-Ocran 2013: 73) thereby, rendering the label “prosperity gospel” as salvific. 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). This essay uses the designation “Prosperity Gospel” because of its familiarity in African contexts (Asamoah Gyadu 2005: 202).

What are the Historical Origin(s) of the Prosperity Gospel?

The origin(s) of the prosperity gospel is a highly debated issue among scholars. For instance, whereas Gifford (1990: 373) traces it to American roots, others like Matthew Ojo (1990: 106) insist that the doctrine in Africa is original to African soil. This chapter will not concern further arguments over the origins of the phenomenon. Instead, it asserts that despite the significant influence of American Neo-Pentecostalism in shaping the prosperity gospel in African Neo-Pentecostal settings, the primal worldview and the socio-cultural matrix of African indigenous societies played a crucial role in the formation of the prosperity gospel in Africa (Anim 2010: 66). Religious movements are invariably shaped by the socio-cultural and historical contexts within which they emerge. Hence, to portray the prosperity gospel, and as this essay aims to demonstrate, modernity, as (Euro-) American export, is to overlook the unique and equally significant contexts within which these phenomena emerge globally.

The American History

The American prosperity gospel, according to Kate Bowler (2013: 11), can be traced to “certain ways of thinking about spiritual power that emerged and competed for attention, early twentieth century”. This thinking about spiritual power took on different labels: “mind cure, success literature, positive thinking, self-help, and prosperity theology” (Bowler 2013: 11). The core conviction was; “adherents, acting in accordance with divine principles could rely on their minds to transform thought and speech into heaven-sent blessings”. Within this realm of New

Thought¹, the prosperity gospel emerged in conversation with (American) Pentecostalism and “an American gospel of pragmatism, individualism, and upward mobility” (Bowler 2013: 11). Essential to Bowler’s narrative is the figure of Essek William Kenyon, a Pentecostal evangelist, who rejected New Thought yet appropriated its “focus on mind, spirit, and universal laws to show that Christians could look to the cross not as a promise of things to come, but as a guarantee of benefits *already* granted” (Bowler 2013: 17). E.W. Kenyon’s theological legacy helped in shaping the prosperity gospel in 20th century America (Anderson 2014: 65). Other figures including Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Gordon Lindsay, and A. A. Allen advanced the concept of a materially efficacious faith as part of the prosperity gospel. Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003), for example, was said to have received a revelation in 1934 on the biblical text Mark 11: 22ff, and emphasized that “prayer for health and wealth is infallibly answered” (Shorter & Njiru 2001: 32). In 1974, Hagin established the Rhema Bible College and mentored other prosperity preachers including Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, and Joel Osteen.

The American type prosperity gospel emerged in a period described by the New Testament Scholar, Dan Liroy (2007: 4), as “the days when living standards were visibly increasing ... and success through a positive mental attitude” was the creed. It was in “an economy of superabundance where the craving for material rewards became a fatal addiction for which there was no cure” (Bonk 2006: 18). For Brouwer et al (1996: 2), the popularization of the prosperity gospel in America was intertwined with the homogenizing influences of consumerism, mass communication, and production. It was a period when “desire obtained a legitimate and constructive force that should [always] find fulfilment, when expressed in faith” (Stålsett 2006:

¹ According to Kate Bowler (2013: 14), New Thought represents a cluster of thinkers and metaphysical ideas that emerged in the 1880s as the most powerful vehicle for mind power. It hinges on three aspects: a high anthropology, the priority of spiritual reality, and the generative power of positive thought.

203). Over time, the doctrine turned an axial moment with the globalization of Pentecostal Christianity (Coleman 2000: 49). Inspirational books, pamphlets, audio tapes, and televangelism of American prosperity preachers were accessed by African Neo-Pentecostal preachers, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana.

But in Africa, the prosperity gospel emerged in situations of poverty (Togarasei 2011), among struggling economies (Gifford 2004), and, I argue, in conversation with the indigenous socio-cultural milieu.

African Trajectories

One of the earliest promoters of the prosperity gospel in Africa was the late Nigerian Archbishop, Benson Idahosa (Anderson 2014: 66). Idahosa was trained in the Rhema Bible College of Kenneth Hagin in Oklahoma. When Idahosa returned to Nigeria, he started his own Bible school and later established the “Church of God Mission International”, headquartered in Benin City (Anderson 2014: 133). Idahosa’s ministry led to the training of several African Neo-Pentecostal pastors, including Archbishop Nicholas Duncan Williams, the founder of Ghana’s first Charismatic Church – “The Christian Action Faith Ministry International” (CAFM) (Asamoah Gyadu 2013: 64).

Other Nigerian prosperity gospel preachers include Bishop David O. Oyedepo who 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). The motto of the 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 ... it gives you a sense of conviction, that you are heading for something positive” (Maier 2000: 264). Oyedepo’s prosperity messages are published as books with titles like *Understanding Financial Prosperity*, *Success*

Systems, Winning the War Against Poverty, Walking in Dominion, Possessing Your Possession, Success Strategies, Understanding Your Covenant Right, Exploring the Riches of Redemption, Breaking Financial Hardship, and Showers of Blessing.

The Ghanaian Archbishop Duncan Williams has been a chief advocate of the prosperity gospel since the 1980's (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 205; Gifford 2004: 194). 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, spurred people to gamble for it (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 205). He further contends that the donkey on which Jesus rode to Jerusalem was probably the most expensive means of transport in Jesus' days (ibid). For Duncan Williams, the principal message of the prosperity gospel is that God wants his children to flourish and to have the best of everything.

Mensa Otabil, another pioneering prosperity gospel preacher in Ghana, is the founder of the "International Central Gospel Church" in Accra (Anderson 2014: 66). Otabil's ministry which started in February 1984, attracts adherents of high socio-economic class in Accra (Anderson 2014: 66). 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 transforming culture" (Gifford 2004: 113-139).

At the other end of the Ghanaian Neo-Pentecostal stream are "Neo-Prophetic" ministries whose orientation to Pentecostalism is deeply rooted in the African primal world view (Omenyo & Arthur 2013). 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 Glorious Word Power Ministries International (Gifford 2004: vii). Neo-Prophets in Ghana attract huge clientele that aspire socio-economic success by religious means. Their huge clientele base

can be attributed to: (1) “the basic fear of malevolent forces [and their perceived “power” to address them], (2) a dependence on the [prophet’s] “anointing”, and (3) a belief that the blessing of God will remain upon adherents, so long as they remain faithful [to God, to the church, and to the prophet]” (Lartey 2001: 13). For many adherents of this Pentecostal stream, the prosperity gospel is enacted through the principle of “sowing and reaping” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013: 81).

Principles of the Prosperity Gospel

In keeping with prosperity, African Neo-Pentecostals assert three main principles: *hard work*, *prayer* and *giving* (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013: 79-104; Togarasei 2011: 340). In Zimbabwe and Botswana, Lovemore Togarasei (2011: 340) found that Neo-Pentecostals are “taught to use their hands for survival”. Here, adherents are encouraged to engage in profitable ventures or activities in the midst of the choices or resources available to them. David Maxwell also observed that adherents of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA), engage in petty trading or small scale enterprises, which he describes as “penny capitalism: the vending of cheap food stuffs and clothes initially within the religious community but later outside it, to finance the expansion of that community” (Maxwell 1998: 355; cited in Martin 1990: 206).

But hard work alone does not yield prosperity. The practical outworking of the prosperity gospel includes various forms of giving: *offering*, *tithes*, and gifts to men and women of God termed *sowing and reaping* (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013: 81). Sowing and reaping comprises the giving of money, land, cars, time, abilities, and one’s possessions for God’s work (evangelism, missions, and church projects) and to God’s servants in expectation for divine blessing. Thus, Pentecostal giving, Asamoah-Gyadu (ibid) argues, is reciprocal and “transactional” as adherents are taught to expect appropriate redemptive uplifts (e.g. money, jobs, promotions, good health, and breakthroughs) from God when giving obligations are faithfully fulfilled.

Neo-Pentecostals also engage in prayer for prosperity. It is believed that believers' thoughts, words and actions possess performative effects which can determine what believers receive as prosperity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 214). In Accra, it is common to observe in Neo-Pentecostal settings, the use of authoritative words such as *command*, *decree*, and *declare* during prayers for prosperity.

Africa and America: Continuities & Discontinuities of the Prosperity Gospel

The prosperity gospel described above displays elements of continuity and discontinuity with the American account. The continuity is discernible in that, some African prosperity preachers like Duncan Williams and other Neo-Prophets replicate the North American elements of conspicuous consumption, extreme materialism, and an extravagant lifestyle (Gifford 2016: 31; Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 202). They teach adherents that “God wants his children to be rich, He wants them to be buoyant, and so He blesses with prosperity, not poverty” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005: 202). More so, like the North American televangelists, African prosperity preachers also privilege the use of modern media of social communications. But the African type of the prosperity gospel exhibits a discontinuity with the American version in that, it is deeply anchored in the primal world view; thus, in the African religio-cultural concepts of *wellbeing*, the *dualistic view of life*, and the *role of religious functionaries*. These three cultural concepts arguably provides a common and unique language for the prosperity gospel in Africa and therefore, has crucial implications for analysing its modernizing effect.

African Cultural Concepts: A Differentiated Path to Prosperity

In this essay, cultural concepts of prosperity in Africa are drawn from the Akan culture of Ghana. Indeed, the varied nature of the cultural groupings of Africa makes the selection of the Akans of Ghana problematic. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this essay, the latter will be used

since they command a rich culture and history and have exerted influence in African religions and African philosophical writings (Mbiti 1969; Gyekye 1995; Wiredu 1980). The Akan religious worldview fits those described by the John Mbiti (1969: 1) as belonging to tribes. Such religious worldviews are not captured by systematic theological concepts. Instead, they are undifferentiated number of rituals, articulating beliefs that are not embedded in sacred scriptures, but expressed in oral history, in practitioner's hearts and minds, and by religious functionaries like the elders and kings (Mbiti 1969: 3-4).

Among the Akans, *yiedie* translates prosperity or well-being (Omenyo and Atiemo 2013: 56). Accordingly, *yiedie* (or wellbeing), “comprises everything that makes life worth-living ... good health, peace and harmony with the spirits ... to the material or physical resources that seem to give comfort” (Amoah 2009: 111). *Yiedie* in this context has both internal (psychological and spiritual) and external (material) dimensions” (Amoah 2009: 111). Harmony with divinities assume a prerequisite not only for the physical enjoyment of success, good health, and longevity, but also, for spiritual protection from evil forces (Omenyo & Arthur 2013: 56). The concept of *yiedie* has crucial implications for our themes on the prosperity gospel and modernity. First, it demonstrates no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular in African societies. Thus, issues of prosperity and by extension, modernity, are not perceived only in material/physical terms, but also, in a spiritual frameworks, making both realities a more broad and complex phenomena. The concept of *yiedie*, stands in direct continuity with the prosperity gospel in African contexts as the latter echoes that harmony with the God through faithful *tithing*, *offering*, and *seed sowing* is a pre-requisite not only for spiritual protection from evil forces but also for physical enjoyment of financial success, good health, and longevity (Asamoah Gyadu 2013: 81).

Nkwa, in the Akan culture, translates life. The Akan worldview of life is expressed in two intricately linked forms – the visible (material/physical) and the invisible (spiritual) (Gyekye 1995: 69). Significantly, Akans, like many Africans, 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 (Amoah 2009). The concept of *nkwa* therefore evokes the need for *religious functionaries* (like diviners, chiefs, elders) to help counter-act evil in the physical world. This stands in direct continuity with the prosperity gospel as emphasis is placed on pastor’s anointing to combat spiritual forces of evil in Neo-Pentecostalism (Gifford 2016: 38).

The notion of *religious functionaries* is premised on the idea that adherents can be vulnerable to malevolent spiritual forces; hence, the need for a more potent power to overcome evil. Diviners, for example, seek to decipher the past, present and future in order to uncover the physical and spiritual causation of evil. Akans call this “divinatory consultation or the desire to know the supernatural causalities of affairs” *abisa*, which translates, “asking” (Nyinah 2002: 115). Neo-Pentecostal pastors in Africa perform a similar feat by using the Bible to indicate that they have a more powerful religious alternative (Omenyo & Arthur 2013: 60). They claim to possess answers to pressing needs, while reverberating their prowess in dealing with life’s problems such as poverty, diseases, bareness, and failure in life, often attributed to evil forces in the spiritual realm (Gifford 2016: 13). Against this background, biblical passages are contextualized and appropriated. Chief amongst them is Ephesians 6: 12: “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” (New King James Version).

Overall, the search prosperity among African Neo-Pentecostals begins in the repertory of the African socio-cultural concepts, wherein real and effective spiritual power is translated into the material or physical world (Marshall 2009: 17). It is within these African cultural concepts of well-being (*yiedie*), dualistic view of life (*nkwa*), and *the role of religious functionaries*, I argue, analysis of prosperity gospel and modernity in Africa should begin.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the content of the prosperity gospel by presenting its historical origins in the USA and its subsequent influence in Africa, particularly, Ghana and Nigeria. The chapter underscored that the prosperity gospel expressed in Africa displays both elements of continuity and discontinuity with the North American account. Whiles some African Neo-Pentecostal pastors replicate American culture of conspicuous consumption and materialism, the African type prosperity gospel remains deeply anchored in the African primal world view, thus, in the Akan indigenous concepts of wellbeing (*yiedie*), in the dualistic view of life (*nkwa*), and the role of religious functionaries. This renders analytics of the prosperity gospel and modernity in a broader and more complex approach. The next chapter begins comparative study of the African type prosperity gospel with the Weberian Protestant Ethic. This further comparison will help demonstrate the inadequacy of the classical view of modernity in capturing realities of the prosperity gospel in African contexts.

Chapter 3

The Prosperity Gospel versus the Protestant Ethic

Introduction

Peter Berger (2010: 3) identifies four approaches to discussing Weber's famous essay, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. The first approach, explored by scholars like R.H. Tawney, is to examine the validity of Weber's historical argument. The second, familiar with the works of Antonio Gramsci, is to place the essay in a larger context of a debate with Karl Marx on the role of ideas in the processes of social change. The third approach is to treat *The Protestant Ethic* as a sociologically inspired philosophy of history, in terms of unintended consequences of action. The fourth, Berger's choice, is a more practical and empirical investigation of how Weber's notion of *Protestant Ethic* inspires understanding of new developments in the world today (Berger 2010: 3).

This chapter follows the latter line of inquiry by comparing the Prosperity Gospel in African contexts with Weber's Protestant Ethic. In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber argues that the religious ideas of 17th and 18th Century Protestants in parts of Europe, played a role in creating the modern capitalistic spirit: one that saw profit and material success as an end in itself (Weber 1930: xi). Peter Berger (2010), David Maxwell (1998), and David Martin (2002) argue that Pentecostalism, with its prosperity gospel, replicates Weber's Protestant Ethic. They posit that Pentecostalism fosters a modernising work ethic by encouraging capitalist entrepreneurship, upward social mobility and economic development (Berger 2008: 69-75; Martin 2002: 152). Critics view prosperity gospel as an impetus for delusion (Dada 2004: 95-195; Gifford 2016). Their main objection is that the prosperity gospel in Africa, places emphasis on spiritual forces and fosters an "enchanted religious imagination" that downplays "functional rationality" underpinning modernity (Gifford 2016: 55).

The aim of this chapter is to critically compare the key traits of Weber's Protestant Ethic with the practice of the prosperity gospel as discussed in the earlier chapter. It will be argued that the prosperity gospel in Africa, on one hand, diverges from Weber's Protestant Ethic by its wealth accumulation, conspicuous consumption, and enchanted imagination. On the other hand, the prosperity gospel also converges with Weber's thesis in terms of entrepreneurship and individual autonomy. This ambivalent pattern reveals the inadequacy of the classical sociological analyses of modernity as inherited from, for example Weber, in capturing realities of the prosperity gospel in non-Western contexts.

Why the Protestant Ethic versus the Prosperity Gospel?

Debates over the prosperity gospel centres on modernity (Gifford 2016; Berger 2010, 2008; Martin 2002; Maxwell 1998). The history of modernity, however, finds its origins in the Protestant Reformation (Bruce 1996: 9). By maintaining that all people had a responsibility for their own spiritual state, the Protestant Reformation, Steve Bruce argues, ignited in various ways, "the origins of modern rationality, the rise of individualism, the foundations of modern science, and the collapse of a unitary Christendom" (Bruce 1996: 9).

Weber devoted much of his scholarly life exploring the modernizing effects of the Reformation (Bruce 1996: 10). He argued that the Reformation was "not the elimination of the Church's control over everyday life but rather the substitution of a new form of control ..." which inadvertently, stimulated Western Capitalism (Weber 1930: 36). More than a century after Weber's thesis, Protestantism has changed dramatically; yet scholars continue to examine to what extent Weber's analysis is still evident in the world today. Such is the case with the prosperity gospel and modernity.

The Weberian Thesis

Max Weber used the expression *the Protestant Ethic* to advance his argument that Protestants, in contrast to Catholics, were keener to emphasize hard work, thrift, the value of time, and a disciplined lifestyle. Using figures gathered from his contemporaries like W. Sombart (1913), Lujo Bretano (1916), and Martin Offenbacher (1901), Weber observed:

A glance at the occupational statistics of any country of mixed religious composition brings to light with remarkable frequency...the fact that business leaders and owners of capital as well as the higher grades of skilled labour, and even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant... But among the Catholic graduates themselves the percentage of those graduating from the institutions preparing, in particular, for technical studies and industrial and commercial occupations...middle class business life, lags still farther behind the percentage of Protestants (Weber 1930: 35-38).

Weber sought to investigate what peculiarities gave impetus to the differences in socio-economic behaviour between Protestants and Catholics. Herein was his discovery of the term “economic traditionalism”. Capitalism, for Weber, was distinct from “economic traditionalism”. The latter denotes the ordinary pursuit of wealth or earning enough to satisfy traditionally established needs (Weber 1930: 59ff). But the spirit of (modern) capitalism implies an “attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically” (ibid: 64ff). This capitalistic spirit, Weber argues, is demonstrated by a disciplined labour force, the regularised investment of capital, and a calculated administration within continuously functioning enterprise (Weber 1930: 64ff).

For Weber, what distinguished Catholics and their pre-capitalist societies from Protestants and their capitalistic industrial cultures, was the latter’s emancipation from “economic traditionalism”, displayed in their attitude to work and to wealth accumulation (Weber 1930: 59). Pre-capitalist societies, Weber explains, hallowed custom and tradition, and lacked innovation (ibid). He writes: “a man does not by nature wish to earn more and more money, but simply to live

as he is accustomed to live and earn as much as is necessary for that purpose” (Weber 1930: 60). But the modern capitalist man works to increase the productivity of human labour by increasing its intensity (Weber 1930: 60). For the modern capitalist, labour “is performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling”, and this, Weber (1930: 62) echoes, “is by no means a product of nature”. Such attitudes require the ability of mental concentration, the absolutely essential feeling of obligation to one’s job, self-control, frugality, and a strict economy which calculates the possibility of high earnings (ibid: 63). For Weber, the chances of acquiring this economic behaviour were greater on account of religious upbringing (ibid: 63). Weber, thus, connected capitalism with religious factors. Rather than investigating the “temporary external historico-political situations” between Catholics and Protestants, Weber paid attention to “the permanent intrinsic character of their religious beliefs” (Weber 1930: 40). He found that *The Protestant Ethic* is motivated by two key theological ideas: Luther’s concept of calling (vocation) and Calvin’s doctrine of predestination.

Luther’s Conception of the Calling (Vocation)

In Pre-Reformation Christianity, religious professions were reserved for the clergy and considered of higher value than secular professions of the laity (Weber 1930: 79ff). Worldly activity, as Thomas Aquinas advocated, was a thing of the flesh, though willed by God (Weber 1930: 80). Monastic ascetism was considered the only acceptable way of living toward God (ibid: 80ff). With the advent of the Reformation, Martin Luther introduced the concept of “calling” which emphasized that all professions, whether religious or secular, were ordained by God and were of high value (ibid 80).

The monastic life, Luther argued, was rather selfish since it ignored worldly duties. Luther taught that one’s labour in his/her calling is an outward expression of brotherly love (ibid: 81).

The English Puritan, Matthew Perkins, similarly advanced the idea of vocation as “a certain kind of life imposed on man by God for the common good” (cited in Bruce 1996: 15). For Weber, Luther’s concept of calling “brought the valuation of the fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form of moral activity” (Weber 1930: 80). It renounced worldly morality in monastic ascetism and asserted the fulfilment of one’s obligation or duty based on one’s position in this world (Weber 1930: 80). This new understanding of work sacralized the pursuit of secular professions, particularly, business entrepreneurship. It introduced labour as a call to duty and piety towards God (Weber 1930: 83). Consequently, the Reformation severed the prevailing division of labour between monks and the laity. It created a significant change both in terms of work ethic and with regard to power relations, as power shifted from religious professionals to ordinary believers in the church.

Calvin’s Predestination

John Calvin taught that Christ’s redemption is not for all but only the elect and that, not everyone was going to be saved (Weber 1930: 103). His doctrine was based on his interpretation of a biblical passage in Romans 9:9-24 which led to his conclusion that God not only has foreknowledge of an individual’s salvation or damnation, but he actually predestines some to eternal salvation and others to eternal damnation. Calvin’s doctrine, according to Weber, not only rejected salvation through the church and sacraments; it also inclined believers to individualism (Weber 1930: 104). Weber maintained Calvinism created a salvation anxiety among the faithful, as each believer was concerned, whether h/she was part of the elect or not (Weber 1930: 110).

Amid such anxiety, the clergy taught that the signs of election included honest, disciplinary living and material success. This inspired the duty to attain one’s certainty of election and justification (*certitudo salutis*) in the daily struggle of life (ibid: 110), which ultimately led

Protestants to embrace what Weber calls “this-worldly asceticism” (ibid: 149). Believers sought to demonstrate their conviction of being part of the elect by living a life of systematic self-control, not losing sight of the inexorable alternative: *chosen* or *damned*. “In its extreme inhumanity”, Weber writes, “this doctrine ... had one consequence for the life of a generation which surrendered to its magnificent consistency ... a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness” (Weber 1930: 104).

Two developments occurred with Calvinism. First, it became obligatory to regard oneself as “chosen” since lack of certainty became indicative of insufficient faith. Second, the performance of good works in worldly activities like business entrepreneurship became accepted as the medium whereby such surety could be demonstrated (Weber 1930: 104)

Luther & Calvin: The Spirit of Modern Capitalism

From the theological ideas of Luther and Calvin, the spirit of Western Capitalism emerged. As Anthony Giddens writes, “the desire for wealth existed in most times and places...but only in the West... [was] capitalistic activity associated with rational organisation of formally free labour” (cited in Weber 1930: xi). Thus, *the Protestant Ethic* discussed by Weber became associated with Western historicity, along with its capitalistic activities. Giddens explains further: “the accumulation of wealth was morally justified in so far as it was combined with sober, industrious career” (Weber 1930: xiii). Wealth was condemned only if employed to a life of idle luxury or self-indulgence (ibid).

In their “this worldly ascetism”, Protestants worked diligently in their calling, while avoiding temptations of the flesh such as drinking, sexual promiscuity, gambling and other frivolous behaviours that waste away money. Calvinists looked to their success in worldly activity for clues on salvation. They came to value profit and material success as signs of God’s favour. Other religious groups, such as the Pietists, Methodists, and the Baptists had similar attitudes in

varying degrees. But it was the Calvinists, Weber (1930: 179) argues, that broke down the traditional economic system paving the way for modern capitalism.

Peter Berger aptly summarises the four key behavioural traits of Protestants of the 17th and 18th Century that inspired modernity and development:

- a disciplined attitude to work (not just hard work, which one finds in many very un-Protestant places, but what Weber understood as the rationalization of work)
- an equally disciplined attitude to other spheres of social life, notably the family (Weber's notion of life-discipline)
- a deferral of instant consumption, resulting in saving and, eventually, capital accumulation and social mobility (what psychologists call "delayed gratification");
- a worldview relatively free of magic (Weber's "disenchantment of the world" (cited in Berger 2010: 4)

Weber's Modernity

Much earlier, Weber famously coined the term *dieEntzauberung* which translates "disenchantment" in a lecture entitled "Science as a Vocation" delivered in Munich in 1917. In this lecture, Weber described the disenchantment or more literally the de-magicking of the world (*dieEntzauberung der Welt*). According to Weber, in the modern world, "one need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service", meaning the world is "disenchanted" (1930: 221). Weber (ibid) associates disenchantment with the twin modern processes of rationalization (in which spontaneous human action is replaced by instrumental rationality and bureaucratic structures) and intellectualization (which involves the prioritization of technical modes of thinking).

The "disenchantment" of the world, Weber argues, is an inevitable accompaniment of the rise of modern states and modern capitalist economies. Although he posited a positive role for

Protestant Christianity in the development of Western Capitalism, Weber also suggested that other religions such as Hinduism, hindered economic and technological revolution, not because their beliefs and practices posed insuperable obstacles, but because they infused the whole society with a “spirit” that was not conducive to economic transformation (cited in Rakodi 2007: 7). Weber’s thesis was controversial, yet many development theorists and contemporary sociologists accept his view that religion would eventually be an obstacle to modernity – in particular, the structural and behavioural changes necessary for socio-economic transformation.

Weber’s Protestant Ethic Versus Prosperity Gospel

Generally, the prosperity gospel in Africa as discussed in the earlier chapter partly departs from the Protestant Ethic by:

- encouraging conspicuous consumption instead of delayed gratification
- emphasizing an extravagant lifestyle
- an insistence on material rewards of prosperity here and now than in the afterlife
- emphasizing spiritual forces than rationality in pursuit of prosperity (Gifford 2016: 55).

In spite of these divergent effects, some scholars have also found that the prosperity gospel in some parts of Africa demonstrates an entrepreneurial impulse, a sense of self-belief, and motivation towards upward social mobility (Swidler 2013: 682; Togarasei 2011; Maxwell 1998). Both findings point to the fact that the prosperity gospel produces paradoxical modernizing effects. In what follows, I draw attention to the research findings of Paul Gifford (2004; 2016) on Ghana, Adenkule Dada (2004) on Nigeria, as well as Lovemore Togarasei (2011) and David Maxwell (1998) on Zimbabwe and Botswana to indicate ambivalences in the modernizing effect of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

The Praxis of the Neo-Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel in Africa

Findings from Ghana

Paul Gifford (2004) sought to identify key features of new Charismatic Churches in Ghana and to assess their role in effecting modernity. He employed David S. Landes' (1969:6) definition of modernization:

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's study was limited to Ghana's capital city, Accra. He selected six churches² which he considered of importance on the Ghanaian religious scene. With ethnographic data collected through interviews and personal observations for over nineteen months, Gifford established the following traits as part of what he terms, "Ghana's New Christianity":

- A pervasive emphasis on perceived success in one's economic life (otherwise known as prosperity gospel).
- The seed faith element – "Give and you will receive" – as the underlying theory required for economic success.
- Strict verification of biblical promises is not a priority.
- Personal status of the pastor is enhanced while the upward social mobility of members is said to "delay" (Gifford 2004: 80 -82)

² Gifford selected six 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.

Gifford 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 some reasons as follows:

- “Giving” is much more important than hard work in achieving prosperity.
- Ordinary economic theories or factors seem unimportant in comparison with spiritual forces.
- Harsh circumstances in Ghana renders personal motivation and determination of no effect in the midst of the bad political and economic structures in the country (Gifford 2004: 196).

For Gifford, “spiritualizing politics [modernity]” distracts Ghanaians from the practical realities of inefficiency in their economic and political structures (Gifford 2004: 161).

In his recent book *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*, Gifford (2016) remarks of a diversity of Christianity in Africa: on one hand, an enchanted Christianity (African Pentecostalism) that views the world as pervaded by spiritual forces, and on the other hand, a disenchanted Christianity (African Catholicism) that discounts such forces. The enchanted Christianity, Gifford (2016: 55) argues, perceives believers’ glorious destiny as threatened by witches, marine spirits, spirit spouses, and ancestral curses. Churches with this worldview lay bare the workings of the spirit world, deliver those suffering from spirit attacks, and equip members to combat these forces. This “enchanted imagination”, Gifford insists, is associated with the prosperity gospel.

In assessing the modernizing effect of African (Neo-) Pentecostalism through its prosperity gospel, Gifford (2016: 48) argues that although the prosperity gospel instils motivation and entrepreneurship among believers, the enchanted religious imagination militates against modernity by diminishing human responsibility and downplaying functional rationality underpinning modernity. For Gifford (2004: 197), if Africa 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 studies rejects the inclusion of African socio-cultural elements earlier discussed, to the modern discourse. As stated earlier, the African type prosperity gospel exhibits a discontinuity with the American version and with Weber’s Protestant Ethic in that, it is deeply anchored in the African primal world view; thus, in the Akan cultural concepts of *wellbeing (yiedie)*, *the dualistic view of life (nkwa)*, and *the role of religious functionaries*. These three cultural concepts arguably provides a common and unique language for the prosperity gospel in Africa and therefore, has crucial implications for analysing its modernizing effect. Hence, to think of development or modernity in Africa, as a distinct economic event, separate from the socio-cultural concepts aforementioned is woefully inadequate, seeing that the primal concepts of well-being, a dualistic form of life, and of the role of religious functionaries, are deeply interwoven in fabric of African societies. More to the point, to envision modernization as a single overarching narrative where former colonized lands would “modernize” in like manner of Western societies is deeply inadequate. Rather than secularising the modernization process, are there methods of unravelling how modernity appears mediated by socio-cultural influences of the society it encounters?

Findings from Zimbabwe and Botswana

Lovemore Togarasei (2011) also analysed the prosperity gospel in the context of the poverty experienced in Zimbabwe and Botswana. With insights from his previous studies of Pentecostal churches, informant observation of Pentecostal teachings and practices, and the extant literature on the phenomenon, Togarasei (2011: 339-340) found that “poverty is attributed to the work of the devil [and] ... seen as a type of disease from which Christians should endeavour to be

healed completely”. More to the point, some Pentecostal groups like the Intercessors for Africa, perceive the activities of “territorial spirits” as hampering development of the African continent.

In spite of the emphasis on spiritual forces, Togarasei (2011: 340) found that Pentecostals encourage hard work on the part of believers if they are to escape poverty. Unlike Gifford, Togarasei (2011) found that: (1) teachings on entrepreneurship by prosperity preachers motivate Neo-Pentecostals to start their own businesses like poultry farming and candle making in Botswana; (2) 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); (3) the element of giving in the prosperity gospel enables Neo-Pentecostals to respond to the needs of the less privileged in society; (4) prosperity gospel contributes to a positive mind-set that addresses structures of mediocrity, non-achievement and backwardness in Africa (Togarasei 2011: 344).

David Maxwell, in his article, “Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?: Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe”, also focused on a particular version of the prosperity gospel propounded by the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA). According to Maxwell (1998: 351), while ZOAGA’s leadership do draw upon various American versions of the prosperity gospel to legitimize their excessive accumulation, “its [ZAOGA’s] own dominant prosperity teachings have arisen from predominantly southern African sources and are shaped by Zimbabwean concerns”. Based on over a year’s ethnographic and archival research, Maxwell found that the prosperity gospel provides a means of “enabling Pentecostals to make the best of rapid social change, to engender social mobility, to provide a code of conduct which guards them (Pentecostals) from falling into poverty and destitution, to come to terms with, and benefitting from, modernities’ dominant values and institutions” (Maxwell 1998: 351). Maxwell observed

further that new Pentecostal converts, once born again, are brought into “a community of saved” believers “where h/she strives to maintain a state of inner purity necessary to receive empowerment from the Holy Spirit” (Maxwell 1998: 352). He points out that “the new believer is captured and remade ... through continuous involvement in religious, social and welfare activities centred upon the church (and) ... through abstinence from what are popularly described as “traditional” rituals and practices and by means of participation in Christian alternatives. Overall, the findings from Gifford, Togarasei, and Maxwell’s demonstrate a major argument in this paper: prosperity gospel and the path to modernity are affected by a specific historical and socio-cultural milieu.

But elsewhere in Nigeria, Adekunle O. Dada (2004), designates the prosperity gospel as an impetus for delusion. Using the theory of cognitive dissonance, Dada (2004) conducted interviews with fifty church members in ten churches pastored by prosperity preachers in Ibadan, Nigeria. 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; and (3) that they are responsible through failure to sow “seeds of prosperity (cited in Togarasei 2011).

Comparing all the findings above, one is faced with a complex phenomenon, one that involves numerous factors of variable weights working in changing combinations. Does the prosperity gospel demonstrate distinctively modern and anti-modern (or anti-western) themes? Certainly, regarding religion and modernity, one can argue that same ideas cannot always produce the same outcomes irrespective of the historical and socio-cultural circumstances or context.

Placing the problem of poverty and the quest for prosperity in the historical, economic, and socio-cultural contexts of Africa reveals pre-colonial situations of wealth garnered from natural resources, colonial invasion and its impact on the African regions, and the post-colonial situation where religion continues to interact with existential needs.

Using the cases of the prosperity gospel in Ghana (Gifford 2016), Nigeria (Dada 2016) Zimbabwe and Botswana (Togarasei 2011; Maxwell 1998), the modernizing effect of the prosperity gospel needs to be substantiated by a notion of “multiplicity”. On one hand, it refutes the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of Weber’s Protestant Ethic by its so-called pervasive enchantment, which are arguably socio-cultural influences accounting for a differentiated view of modernity. On the other hand, the prosperity apparently shares modern traits by stimulating business entrepreneurship, optimism and individual autonomy. Since socio-cultural ideas and historical factors can account for a differentiated path to modernity; it makes more sense re-consider the classical sociological analyses of modernity (e.g Weber) persistently used in the analytics of the prosperity gospel.

Conclusion

This chapter critically compared key traits of Weber’s Protestant Ethic with the practice of the prosperity gospel in Africa. It was argued that the prosperity gospel in Africa, on one hand, diverges from Weber’s Protestant Ethic by the former’s wealth accumulation, conspicuous consumption, and enchanted imagination. On the other hand, the chapter also demonstrated that the prosperity gospel converges with Weber’s thesis in terms of entrepreneurship and individual autonomy. Showing these ambivalent patterns of modernity engendered by the prosperity gospel reveals the inadequacy of the classical sociological analyses inherited from, for example Weber, in capturing realities modernity in non-Western contexts.

Chapter 4

Prosperity Gospel: From “Modernity” to “Multiple Modernities”

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the concept of modernity as inherited from classical sociological analyses. My concern is not to give a comprehensive account of the development of the term, but rather, to focus on Weber’s underlying themes of modernity in *The Protestant Ethic*. Weber predicted that the development of western capitalism as a historical process tied to *rationalization*, *bureaucratization*, and *intellectualization* would lead to the *disenchantment* (Die Entzauberung) of the modern world (Weber 1930: 21-27; Larrain 2000: 13). The question as to what extent Pentecostalism has engendered Weber’s prediction is not the focus of this essay.

Instead, this chapter will show that dominant conceptualizations of modernity, as expressed by Weber’s *Protestant Ethic*, legitimizes worldviews of Western historicity and frameworks, while discounting alternative hypotheses of modernity based on the socio-cultural frameworks of non-Western societies. With the findings of scholars who have analysed the prosperity gospel in Africa, I argue the inadequacy of the Weberian analytical framework which instigates a dichotomy between rationalization and enchantment. This dichotomy, I argue, is purely based on socio-cultural influences that accompany modern or modernizing societies. An argument is made for the “multiple modernities” paradigm as a better framework in unravelling the ambivalent modernizing effects of the prosperity gospel in Africa.

Classical Sociological Analyses of Modernity

The concept of “modernity” is not ideologically homogenous in meaning. With its wide usage in the humanities and social sciences, “modernity” appears general and inclusive; but the term often evokes more specific mechanisms, processes, and directions of change. The British

sociologist Gerard Delanty (2007) begins a scholarly account of modernity with an inquiry into the word *modern*. Accordingly, *modern*, from the Latin *modus*, was first used in the fifth century early Christian Church to distinguish the Christian era from the pagan age (Delanty 2007). From this meaning emerged an association of the term *modern* with the renunciation of the recent past for a new beginning. *Modernity*, as opposed to *modern* did not arise until the nineteenth century, with the works of culturally oriented thinkers: Charles Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, and Georg Simmel (Frisby 1985; Delanty 2007).

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) the French poet, is said to have coined the french description *modernité* (modernity) (Delanty 2007). In his 1864 essay “The Painter of Modern Life”, Baudelaire famously defined modernity as “the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent” (Baudelaire 1964: 13; cited in Delanty 2007). Baudelaire’s idea of modernity centred on cultural currents in Europe which captured a sense of “renewal and cosmopolitanism” with a particular relationship to time; one characterized by intense historical disunity or rupture between ancient and modern societies (Delanty 2007; Kompridis 2006: 36). For Walter Benjamin, the core of modernity was in the quality of “the new” (Delanty 2007). Benjamin’s idea of “the modern” (*die moderne*) sought to understand the ways modern society is experienced in the highly mediated modes of modern life (Delanty 2007). Following Benjamin, the category “modernity” gained scholarly attention in classical sociological thought.

Georg Simmel is generally credited as the first sociologist of modernity who gave a more rigorous sociological interpretation of the term, with an account of social life in Berlin City (Frisby 1985: 1; Delanty 2007). Simmel’s intellectual framework on modernity was significantly conditioned by the socio-cultural and political milieu in Berlin in the early 1900s (Scaff 2003). Having been a close observer the dynamic social life in his city, he commented in one of his

autobiographical statements: “Berlin’s development from a city to a metropolis in the years around and after the turn of the century coincides with my own strongest and extensive development” (cited in Frisby 1992: 19).

In *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel (1978 [1900]) argues that the “new” in modern society is experienced in two modes: “the metropolis” and “money” (Frisby 1985: 1). He sought the meaning of “money”, its exchange, use values and effects “upon the inner world – upon the vitality of individuals, [and] upon culture in general” (Simmel 1978: 54). For Simmel, what ignited the modern imaginary was the replacement of the barter system with money as the principal medium of economic exchange (1990: 60ff). Money, Simmel argues, ushered into the metropolis, instrumentality and a calculative view of the world (Frisby 1985: 448). According to Simmel, “the preconditions for the modern economy are found in the depersonalizing norms of calculation and efficiency that stimulates a view of the world “simply as an ‘arithmetical problem’ having definite solutions” (cited in Scaff 2003). In “The Metropolis and Mental life”, Simmel (1903: 12) further elucidates certain social-psychological features of modern cities: individuals are removed from the emotional ties and social bonds and the individual’s mental life is predominantly intellectualistic, rational and calculative.

The works of the founding fathers of sociology – Marx, Durkheim, and especially Weber – resonated with that of Simmel’s. All three classical sociologists sought to explain the social changes (immense industrialisation and urbanization) that were occurring in Europe in the late nineteenth century. Karl Marx, for example, conceived modern societies in terms of production relations, with capitalism as its main feature. He explained capitalism as an economic system where “great numbers of workers who own little, produce commodities for the profit of small numbers of capitalists who own ... the commodities, the means of producing the commodities,

and the labor time of the workers ...” (cited in Ritzer 2011: 56). Capitalism, for Marx, instigates alienation, exploitation and oppression as both economic and non-economic phenomena (e.g. religion) are commoditized (Giddens 1971: 11-13). This commoditization in modern societies promotes rationalization of social relationships and individualism (Kellner 2003).

Emile Durkheim, in his famous work *The Division of Labour* (1893), also argued that modern societies are generally held together by what he calls organic solidarity: “a form of social cohesion based on the differences among the members, which makes them interdependent” (cited in Robertson 1989: 319). For Durkheim, people in modern societies play a variety of economic roles, have quite different experiences, hold different values, and have different patterns of socialization. This increases specialization and differentiation in modern societies, and ushers a degree of individual freedom (Rawls 2012: 479).

For Max Weber, modernity is closely associated with the processes of *rationalization*, *bureaucratization*, *intellectualization* and the *disenchantment the world* (Weber 1930: 21-27; Larrain 2000: 13). Central to Weber’s preoccupation in *The Protestant Ethic* is his notion of rationalization. By rationalization, Weber (1930: xi) meant “routine, calculated administration within functioning enterprises”. “Rational organisation of formally free labour”, argues Weber, is what sparked off modern capitalism in the West (Weber 1930: 21-22) He explains:

Now the peculiar modern Western form of capitalism has been, at first sight, strongly influenced by the development of technical possibilities. Its rationality is to-day essentially dependent on the calculability of the most technical factors ...it is dependent on the peculiarities of modern science, especially the natural sciences based on mathematics and exact and rational experiment (Weber 1930: 24).

Weber predicted that the rationalization of labour, so eminent in Western capitalism would eventually lead to the *disenchantment of the world*. With disenchantment, traditional and religious meanings are supplanted on an intellectual level (Lee 2010: 182). This results in paradigmatic shift

that renders human understanding of the natural world, a calculable phenomenon (Scaff 2014: 142).

To sum up, the concept of modernity as explored above, arguably reflects an intellectual framework that has been shaped primarily by the historical and socio-cultural conditions of the West, notably Western Europe. With respect to Marx, Durkheim and Weber, it can be said that they were deeply concerned with cultural as well as structural aspects of modernity. Their theoretical works were largely attempts to explain the social changes (e.g. industrialization, urbanization, political democracy) occurring in Europe in the mid nineteenth century. All three classical sociologists assumed that, in modern societies, structural differentiation and the growth of institutions (liberal democracy, capitalism and a bureaucratic state) would naturally be accompanied by: a questioning or rejection of tradition; human autonomy; individual freedom; rationalization and intellectualization; legitimation of scientific and technological progress; and a secular worldview (Fourie 2012: 54).

Following this classical sociological analyses of modernity, scholars have debated, to what extent the prosperity gospel in Africa replicates this modern framework. There have been advocates for and against, but the evidence is inconclusive. On the one hand, critics argue that the prosperity gospel refutes the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of Weber's analyses of modernity by its pervasive enchantment or emphasis on spiritual forces (Gifford 2004; 2016). On the other hand, advocates insist that the prosperity gospel shares modern traits by stimulating business entrepreneurship, optimism and individual autonomy (Berger 2008:69-75; Maxwell 1998; Togarsei 2011). The question then is: Can the prosperity gospel in Africa articulate strong anti-modern or anti-Western themes and yet, remain distinctively modern? Regarding religion and modernity, socio-cultural and historical factors account for a differentiated path of modernity;

hence it makes more sense to speak of modernity in plural varying contexts. Schmucl Eisenstadt makes a relevant observation that modernizing patterns that did not constitute simple continuations of the so-called beginnings of modernity can be “distinctively modern, though greatly influenced by specific cultural premises, traditions, and historical experiences” (Eisenstadt 2000: 1-2). Thus, if specific cultural premises, traditions, and historical experiences can accompany modern and modernizing societies, then multiple forms of modernity can appear, being similar and yet distinct from the Western cultural and/or structural program. As Rosati and Stoeckl (2012: 2) indicate, religions account for a differentiated pathway to modernity. In what follows, I clarify the idea of “religion” in Africa and show how that appears somewhat divergent from the framework of Western Christianity, but convergent with African Pentecostalism.

Concept of Religion in Africa: A Differentiated Pathway of Modernity

“Religions of Africa, historically, have understood reality to be governed primarily by spiritual forces and have considered causality principally in that realm” (Gifford 2016: 13). The Dutch scholar of religion, Gerrie ter Haar (2009: 1) defines religion in Africa 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”. In Africa, an invisible world is intricately linked to the material world. The world is not reduced to its visible/material form only (Ellis and Ter Haar, 2004: 14). Herein lies an inseparable co-existence of the sacred and the secular (Amoah 2009: 116).

The spiritual 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” (Amoah 2009: 116).

Consequently, the search for a power to counter-act evil forces in the spiritual world which impede the full enjoyment of human life, is apparently the driving principle behind religiosity in Africa. 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” (Assimeng 1989: 64).

With the influence of European Colonial and Christian mission, some scholars of religion dismiss these elements of a spiritual world in African indigenous contexts and use prejudicial terms like “superstition”, “idolatry”, “animism” or even enchantment (Ter Haar 2009: 1). Such categorisations by scholars occur because of their continuous reliance on a Western Christocentric framework, which often equates religion with its “organised or institutional” expression. For this reason, intellectual antecedents of modernity and secularization often measured religion in terms of church attendance and dominance of belief, while indicating the separation of church and state, a secular self-identification, and low rates of church attendance as key features of secularization (Wallace 1966; Wilson 1966). Religion, as constituting a continuous relationship between an invisible world of spirits and the material world of human existence, is hardly identified in such analytics of modernity and secularization. But this is the very framework upon which African Pentecostalism is built. It is problematic, in this regard, if analytics of religion and modernity in non-Western contexts are modelled only after Western Christocentric frameworks and histories.

The African religious imagination explained above is nevertheless, not exclusive to Africa. Ter Haar (2009: 1) notes of a similar feature with Cicero’s *religio* in ancient Roman religion which constituted “continuous revelatory messages sent from the Roman gods to world of humans”. Robert Bellah (2006: 110) 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”. The crucial

point here is that, concepts of religion, and for that modernity are inevitably linked to specific historical and socio-cultural contexts within which they emerge. Serious conceptual difficulties therefore arise, when these terms are applied as universal categories.

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 a spirit world as anti-modern. Modernity, Eistentadt (2000) echoes, is mediated by historical and socio-cultural backgrounds of the society it encounters; so it makes more sense to speak of the concept in the plural. Scholars have been pessimistic of the modernizing effect of the prosperity gospel because of its "enchanted" nature (Gifford 2016).

Indeed, African Neo-Pentecostals resort to religious ideas or spiritual phenomena to comprehend difficult situations of life. These frameworks appear to provide theological concepts for adherents to play out their fears. But the Neo-Pentecostal lifeworld is one of action and counteraction, of human agency and of potent spiritual forces. How then do we approach such understandings of modernity 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? Using the "multiple modernities" paradigm, this essay rejects a single overarching narrative like Western modernization for the prosperity gospel in Africa and posits that all knowledge is valid in its own context; no viewpoint should be privileged over another.

Multiple Modernities

The theory of multiple modernities, though being of recent origin and of diverse forms, is neither fully developed in form nor homogeneous in content. Coined in the late 1990s by Israeli sociologist Schmucl Eisenstadt, the term has attracted a range of theorists (e.g Johann Arnason

2002, Bjorn Wittrock 2005) with a variety of interpretations from societies wherein modernity is said to diverge from the traditional ‘norm’. As explained above, classical sociological analyses assumed that structural differentiation and the growth of capitalism, bureaucracy and liberal democracy will naturally be accompanied by individualism, rationalization and a secular worldview (Fourie 2012: 54).

Multiple modernity theorists, despite their differences, take particular exception. They reject this traditional theory of modernization for its two fundamental teleological assumptions: (1) that modernity is a single, unified homogenizing process, and (2) that the West is the yardstick by which modernity is measured (Eisenstadt 2005; Kaviraj 2005; cited in Fourie 2012: 54). Many multiple modernity theorists write of the need for a third way between Fukuyama’s (1992) ‘end of history’ thesis (the logical endpoint of homogenization) and Huntington’s (1996) ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis (which views modernity as uniquely Western) (Cassanova 2011; Eisenstadt et al., 2002: 2). Replacing these theories with “multiple modernities”, scholars demonstrate that all modernization should be seen in the light of its historical and cultural context. Following, Eisenstadt (2005: 2) defines multiple modernity as “a process of ‘continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programmes”. In locating the spatial beginnings of modernity, multiple modernities thus accords the European experience as important, albeit not homogeneous or hegemonic.

Exponents of modernity have however remarked on the potential erosion and loss of meaning that the multiple modernities approach can entail (Göle, 2005: 91). In response, there has been an attempt to define the core of modernity – “a conception of human agency that was radically new at the time that it developed two centuries ago – a conception of humans as autonomous and able to exercise control over their environment through rational mastery and

conscious activity” (Eisenstadt 2005; cited in Fourie 2012: 55). This core of modernity, as defined by Fourie (2012: 55) is not “institutional or organizational, but it is situated at a far more abstract level of ontological and cultural orientations”. Multiple modernities therefore allows one to explain the evolution of political and economic forms around a fixed principles within cultural and ontological orientations. Societies have been able to participate actively in some of the practices of modernity whilst actively rejecting others. As Eisenstadt (2005: 14) puts it, it has been “possible for these groups to incorporate some of the Western universalistic elements of modernity in the construction of their own new collective identities, without necessarily giving up specific components of their traditional identities”.

Prosperity Gospel: The Potency of Multiple Modernities

Comparing the prosperity gospel in Africa with Weber’s *Protestant Ethic* brings to bear a complex phenomenon, one that involves numerous factors.

First, the prosperity gospel in Africa displays elements of continuity and discontinuity with the North American account, as a result of the socio-cultural and historical milieu within which the phenomena emerges. Thus, while some African Neo-Pentecostal pastors replicate American culture of conspicuous consumption and materialism, the African type prosperity gospel remains deeply anchored in the African primal world view, thus, in the Akan indigenous concepts of wellbeing (yiedie), in the dualistic view of life (nkwa), and the role of religious functionaries.

Second, regarding the prosperity gospel and modernity, one can argue that same ideas do not always produce the same outcomes. The research findings of Paul Gifford (2004; 2016) David Maxwell (1998), and Lovemore Togarasei (2011) reveal an ambivalence in the modernizing effect of the prosperity gospel in Africa. This ambivalences can be unravelled in recognising the socio-cultural and historical milieu within which societies take on the modern condition. Put differently,

analyses of the prosperity gospel and modernity brings to the fore a so-called enchanted religious imagination combined with functional rationality in the name of “multiple modernities”. As Massimo Rosati & Kristina Stoeckl (2012: 2) affirm:

whereas the western program of modernity includes, at least ideologically, ...secularization – with its functional differentiation, privatization of religion, and decline of religious beliefs (Casanova 2011) – modernization in non-Western settings often incorporates or even thrives on religion rather than excluding or diminishing it (Rosati & Stoeckl 2012: 2).

Rather than secularising or westernizing the modernization process, emerging and evolving connection of cultural elements and modernity can provide a common ground for an adequate epistemology of modernity in a wider context.

Conclusion

Despite every effort made by modern theorists to compartmentalise phenomena into as many segments as there are pure disciplines, it remains an undeniable fact that reality continues to be unavoidably already mixed up – culture and nature, humans and nonhumans, religion and science. Recurrent debates about the relationship between religion and modernity are usually presented as notions disconnected from each other. It is often assumed that the modern cultural program is objective, rationalistic, and empirical; religion is subjective, irrational and non-empirical. This dualistic distinction is only a fiction. As Ian Barbour (1990: 16) writes: “we do not experience life as neatly divided into separate compartments; we experience it in wholeness and interconnectedness before we develop particular disciplines to study as aspects of it”.

The multiple modernities paradigm may help to meaningfully understand the conflicting modernizing effects of the prosperity gospel in Africa. This critical engagement argued here is not intended to replace a scientific and autonomized approach to modernity for a cultural one, but to

complement them in ways that can help individuals to not only understand and describe their lifeworlds, but improve their well-being.

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