

A Critique of African Neo-Pentecostal Conception of Power, Poverty and Prosperity in Contemporary Christianity

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Abstract

Emerging issues from African neo-Pentecostal conception of power, poverty and prosperity have serious effects on the social, political, economic, cultural and moral life of individuals and groups in Africa. Therefore, this study critically analyzed the African neo-Pentecostal conception of power, poverty and prosperity with a view to underscoring their implications on the social, political, economic and moral life of the adherents of neo-Pentecostal Christianity in contemporary Africa. Data were gathered through non-participatory observation, recorded sermons, textbooks and journal articles, and subjected to historical, content, and critical methods of analysis. This study revealed that African neo-Pentecostal conception of power, poverty and prosperity is centered on three fundamental beliefs. First, the belief that ultimate power belongs to God who bequeaths it to believers to subdue the forces of darkness and triumph in every areas of life. Second, the claim that poverty is an anomaly that every believer must strive to overcome. Third, the notion that adherence to prosperity principles as outlined by neo-Pentecostal leaders lays the foundation for riches and good health. The study further showed that there are some pastors who genuinely intend to utilize the conception of power, poverty and prosperity in neo-Pentecostalism to address the socio-political and economic challenges in Africa. Howbeit, the approach of some pastors to the issue is promoting elitism, greed and other unethical behaviours. Therefore, neo-Pentecostal leaders should approach this subject with sincerity of purpose in order to promote the Christian values of integrity, truthfulness, diligence and hard work.

Keywords: African neo-Pentecostal, Power, Poverty, Prosperity, Christianity

Introduction

The dynamics in the conception of power, poverty and prosperity in various human institutions and societies is a fundamental social issue that cannot be ignored in contemporary scholarly discourse. There is no doubt that this issue has serious effects on the social, political, economic and cultural life of individuals and groups in various societies globally. Over the years, different individuals and groups have conceived power, poverty and prosperity in various ways depending on the social, political, economic and cultural realities of a particular society at a given time. In recent years, many African societies have witnessed new dimensions of the conception of power, poverty and prosperity. One of such dimensions is that of the African Neo-Pentecostals. African Neo-Pentecostals are believers of a Christian movement within the larger Pentecostal denomination in Africa that some scholars regard as the new age churches. This category of Christian denomination believes that the socio-economic quagmire bedeviling many

African states can only be addressed through divine power which will eradicate poverty and usher in prosperity among believers (Dada 97; Atoi 1; Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye 112). African neo-Pentecostals believe that the numerous problems in Africa can only be solved through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and the manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit. It is imperative to note that African neo-Pentecostalism has continually emphasized the need for believers to employ divine powers in order to overcome the powers of darkness that have continued to cause ill health and poverty in the human society. This movement has continued to preach the message of health and well-being, deliverance from the powers of darkness, acquisition of material wealth and the realization of physical comfort and spiritual salvation.

Based on the foregoing premises, this study critically analyzed the African neo-Pentecostal conception of power, poverty and prosperity with a view to underscoring the implications of this religious notion on the political, economic and social life of the adherents of neo-Pentecostal churches in contemporary African societies. Data for this research were gathered through non-participatory observation, the review of recorded sermons of neo-Pentecostal leaders, Christian literature and other scholarly textbooks and journal articles. Historical, content, and critical methods of analysis were utilized for data interpretation. Apart from this introductory segment, the remaining parts of this essay is divided into the following sub-sections: Conceptualizing Power, Poverty and Prosperity, Understanding African Neo-Pentecostalism, Elitism and the Quest for Power and Wealth in the Midst of Mass Poverty in Africa, Critiquing African Neo-Pentecostal Notion of Power, Poverty and Prosperity, and Conclusion.

Conceptualizing Power, Poverty and Prosperity

Power, poverty, and prosperity are the three most essential concepts in this study that need to be systematically delineated and carefully analyzed. The conceptualization of the aforementioned concepts are absolutely necessary because such an exercise will provide adequate background information about the main issues involved in this research for a better understanding of the subject matter.

Power

The concept of Power has been delineated in various ways by different scholars in the humanities and social sciences. According to Oluonye, "Power refers to the ability of a person to make another person to do his will whether that person wants to do it or not" (8). He further asserts that there are many forms of power, namely; political power, physical power, economic power and military power. For Oluonye, political power is the one exercised by the government. Physical power is exercised through physical strength. Economic Power is wielded through the use of money and other materials resources to force someone to do another's will. Military Power involves military force to impose one's will on another (9). However, Oluonye did not mention divine or spiritual power which is another very important form of power, especially in theological discourse.

Wink cited in Kalu sees power as referring to heavenly, divine, spiritual, invisible forces as well as earthly, human, political and structural manifestations. The Pentecostals see God as the ultimate power. To them, the name of Jesus designates his office, dignity, and power of God in him. The biblical text often cited by neo-Pentecostals that recounts the power of Jesus and his position in the God-head is 1John 5:8. This explains why the Pentecostals use command and the power of word and name in the deliverance process (Kalu 181). Johari observes that power is a concept describing a relationship between two or more individuals. It is not a substantive thing but a relational concept, it may take many forms, of which brave force is only one. Power may also take the form of superior knowledge, wealth, reputation, and others (12).

Poverty

There is difficulty in conceptualizing poverty in a specific manner. According to Atoi, the meaning and scope of poverty as a socio-economic concept have been greeted with different scholarly perceptions and ideological approaches in the various fields of humanities and social sciences (8). Ajakaiye and Adeyeye maintain that different criteria have been used to conceptualize poverty. Most analyses follow the conventional view of poverty as a result of insufficient income for securing basic goods and services. Some others view poverty, in part, as a function of education, health, life expectancy, and child mortality, among

other issues (13). Some other scholars have suggested that poverty is a condition of not having sufficient resources or income (Adeyanju and Kaduna 294; Corbett cited in Atoi 8; Mveng 156). Poverty in its most extreme form denotes the lack of basic human needs, such as adequate and nutritious food, clothing, housing, potable water, and good health services (Atoi 167).

Ajakaiye and Adeyeye observe that poverty as lack of access to basic needs/goods is essentially economic or consumption oriented. In this line of thought, poverty is seen in material terms and specifically employs consumption-based categories to explain the extent and depth of poverty, and establish who is and who is not poor (14). Ajakaiye and Adeyeye further assert that poverty can be structural (chronic) or transient. The structural kind of poverty is delineated as persistent or permanent socio-economic deprivations and is linked to a host of factors such as limited productive resources, lack of skills for gainful employment, endemic socio-political and cultural factors and gender. The transient kind of poverty on the other hand, is said to be transitory or temporary and is linked to natural and man-made disasters. Transient poverty is more reversible but can become structural if it persists (15).

According to Mveng, poverty is basically a lack and deprivation of goods judged to be useful or necessary for the normal life of a human person living in a given society situated in space and time. Mveng further articulates that "want or lack" is not restricted to material goods alone. He contends that there are spiritual, moral, cultural, and sociological poverty. In addition, he says these kinds of poverty are just as devastating for human beings as material poverty (166). Kalu observes that in the Old Testament book of Proverbs, poverty is linked to laziness, sloth, drunkenness, a wasteful life-style, extravagance, disobedience to parents, immorality, sexual orientation, and fraudulence (257). Gary identifies poverty typology to include family turmoil, chaotic households, anxiety, limited educational opportunities, environment that do nothing to stimulate young minds, unhealthy living conditions, over-crowding, noise, and parents who tend to be uninvolved in their children's activities (218). From the foregoing discussions, it is obvious that poverty can be viewed from various perspectives.

Prosperity

The generally narrowed understanding of prosperity is that of success relating to material wealth. However, some scholarly works have proven beyond reasonable doubt that prosperity is far more than material wealth. According to Atoi et al, the meaning of the word prosperity is far more than material wealth; it includes good health, bearing children, having good friends, a good name, spiritual wealth, and general well-being (117). Similarly, Legatum Institute maintains that prosperity is far more than wealth, it is when all people have the opportunity and freedom to thrive. It is said to be driven by an open economy that harnesses the ideas and talents to create sustainable pathways out of poverty (n.p.). From the Christian perspective, Kalu contends that the idiom of Prosperity goes beyond material well-being to embrace such matters as Spiritual renewal of the relationship with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, the rebuilding of all forms of brokenness, the provision of health, the reversal of economic desolation and the political and social well-being of individuals and communities (213). Kalu further argues that the concept of prosperity can be understood from five main domains namely; Rebuilding the Land, Redeeming the Land, Building a beloved Community, Intercession as Political Praxis, and Recovering Adam's Chair (213-223). It is pertinent to state that each of the aforementioned dimensions of the concept of prosperity addresses specific area of human life.

Elitism and the Quest for Power and Wealth in the Midst of Mass Poverty in Africa

This study is anchored on the philosophy of elitism in relation to the quest for power and wealth in the midst of mass poverty in Africa. The principle of elitism refers to a system whereby a few self-serving and powerful individuals or groups take control of the powers and resources as well as the decision-making process of a particular society for their own selfish interests and benefits at the expense of the general populace. According to Tola and Bamidele, elitism presupposes differentials on the basis of either ascribed or assumed power or authority. It demarcates individuals and groups in the society into at least, two distinct categories, although, there are also sub-categories underneath the broad categorization (125). A more fundamental image of elitism is the salient relationship between politics and economics (126). Reflecting on the Hobbesian political philosophy, Johaki observes that the search for power is the root cause of competition among individuals. In most cases, interests collide in the race to acquire more and

more riches, honours, and commands, and for this reason, the competitors resort to the unethical means of subduing, supplanting, repelling, and even attempting to take the life of their opponents (519).

Many elites in Africa are seriously competing among themselves in a bid to acquire power and wealth for self-aggrandizement at the expense of the overwhelming majority of the populace who are wallowing in abject poverty in different African societies. Most of these African elites have continued to involve themselves in various unethical practices in order to amass wealth for selfish purposes. According to Adeyanju and Kaduna, African leaders embezzle and swindle monies meant for national development to the banks of Western world and the poor on the streets of African countries are left in their poverty unabated (85). Igwe contends that past African leaders have indeed built the road to mismanagement of African economies and embezzlement of their countries monies and abuse of office to perpetuate their leadership (81). In addition, Igwe posits that African countries have become the personal estates of official criminal gangs whose aim is not the development of their countries, but rather the siphoning of national resources into foreign banks (23). Atoi maintains that African politicians and military administrators are greedy and selfish; they fight to get themselves into power, amass the wealth of the nation to themselves at the expense of the populace, hence the increasing rate of poverty among the poor masses in many parts of the continent (2).

Moreover, most African political elites have continued to play the kind of politics that is commonly refers to as "money politics" in a bid to acquire power and wealth in many African countries. According to Hagher, politics depends on how much money an individual can afford to play with and political power in Africa is the chief means of getting money (55). In the African political system, government controls all economic activities and is the only major avenue for the enrichment of politicians in the continent (56). Hence, the rapid increase in the incidence of political corruption in many African countries. Some of the political corruption that most African elites, especially those in public office, are involved in include; vote buying, embezzlement, money laundering, and drug trafficking, among others. It looks as if the motivation for aspiring to the public offices, both elective and appointive, appears to be the craze for ill-gotten wealth. Omosor (2013) has equally pointed out that politics in Nigeria is nothing but an instrument for the oppression of the poor, when it is supposed to be a means of addressing their welfare. The most lucrative vocation in contemporary African societies is politics. This can be seen in the various news media reports of the large scale looting of public treasury by those entrusted with the leadership of different African countries, both past and present (Atoi 48). The motive behind all these is the accumulation of wealth for self-aggrandizement. This was the situation in Nigeria when the former chairperson of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Farida Waziri, asserts that:

The extent of aggrandizement and glutinous accumulation of wealth that I have observed suggests to me that some people are psychologically unsuitable for public office.....We have observed people amassing public wealth to a point of madness or some form of obsessive or compulsive psychiatric disorder (cited in Atoi 48).

From the foregoing assertion, it is obvious that political corruption by African elites has reached the level of a psychological disorder requiring treatment.

It is pertinent to state that the unethical practices of most African elites have resulted in unpalatable political and socio-economic conditions in many societies within Africa. Atoi maintains that the political and economic conditions of most African societies have continued to fuel discontentment and frustration for the citizens of many countries in Africa (3). As such, the search for viable alternative became inevitable. This was the political and economic situation in Africa that made the religious conception of power, poverty and prosperity in African neo-Pentecostalism to gain prominence in the continent.

Understanding African Neo-Pentecostalism

African neo-Pentecostalism has to do with those churches that some scholars referred to as the new-age churches in Africa. They are Churches which revolve around individual leaders who claim to have a vision from God which they had to execute. These churches do not function according to "formal" structures and process with regard to church administration and governance (Dada 97; Magbadelo 15; Atoi 1; and Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye 112). According to Lumbe, these churches are exclusively independent and do not exist under any primary or secondary authority except in loose "fraternal" functions (21). Some of

them began as conservative evangelical churches whose shift in theology regarding matters of the working of the Holy Spirit in individual believers caused them to break away. Citing Khanyile, Komolafe sees neo-Pentecostalism as new Pentecostal in orientation because they are said to be trans-denominational, socially relevant, unorthodox, non-dogmatic and cosmopolitan as compared to their classical Pentecostal forerunners (171). Dada argues that neo-Pentecostal churches are different from the classical Pentecostal churches, which developed in the early parts of the 20th century (97).

Some scholars think that the commencement of neo-Pentecostalism in Africa is probably associated with the activities of the Church of God Mission International of Archbishop Benson Idahosa, with headquarter in Benin City, Nigeria. In 1971, Archbishop Idahosa briefly attended the independent Pentecostal College of Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas. Thereafter, he (Archbishop Benson Idahosa) began the first of many mass evangelistic 'crusade' for which he became well known. It is imperative to state that Archbishop Idahosa had formal ties with other neo-Pentecostal and charismatic groups throughout Africa, especially in Ghana where he held his first crusade at Accra in 1978 (Anderson 53; Atoi 26-27). Atoi opines that neo-Pentecostal churches first emerged in Africa in the late 1960s. However, this category of Christian denomination became prominent in the 1980s when some individuals who were concerned about the mismanagement of the African economy and the massive corruption of politicians and military leaders, which resulted to acute hardship and abject poverty of many Africans, sought a religious solution to address the issue (9).

In a related manner, Anderson maintains that new Pentecostal and charismatic churches (NPCs), which have only sprung up since the seventies in Africa, are fast becoming a major expression of Christianity on the continent, especially in the cities. Neo-Pentecostal churches began to emerge all over Africa in the eighties, particularly in West Africa, where they tend to have younger and more educated leadership and membership, including young professionals (53). Dada maintains that the middle of 1980s witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of the neo-Pentecostal movement due to the harsh socio-economic condition in Africa (97-98). Mpigi is of the view that the uncertainty in the African socio-economic and political environment made the neo-Pentecostal movement to become more appealing to the masses (41).

Magbadelo observes that the new age Pentecostalism which was initially confined to campuses in some African countries began to grow in leaps and bounds, first in the consciousness of converts or proselytes on campuses, and later extended beyond. He argues that the expansion of the reach of Pentecostalism was facilitated by the economic and political crises of the 1980s, which naturally and psychologically created adherents who were drawn from pool of frustrated and marginalized people (15). Magbadelo further contends that the growth of African neo-Pentecostalism can be explained variously. According to him, aside from the spiritual rebirth experience by those who were swayed to turn from their confessed evil ways, several others were enticed to neo-Pentecostalism by the appealing and soothing messages that portrayed prosperity, holiness, and blissful living as attainable heights in Christendom (16). Allen posits that the services of neo-Pentecostal churches are usually emotional, enthusiastic and loud, especially as most of them make use of electronic musical instruments (54).

One of the major characteristics of neo-Pentecostalism is the phenomenon of 'Godfather and Godmother', with the appellation of 'papa' and 'mama' who provide guidance to their Godsons and Goddaughters. According to Komolafe, there are men and women that have emerged to be spiritual 'fathers and mothers' of the adherents of neo-Pentecostalism. These people claim that they have been imbued with God's wisdom and experience in the ministries and, therefore can provide mentorship, especially on spiritual matters (180-181). It is imperative to note that prosperity is the hallmark of the neo-Pentecostal assemblies in Africa. Nearly all of them preached about miracle money, miracle jobs, miracle houses and cars, among others. Generally, neo-Pentecostal notable practices and beliefs include laying of hands during service, and sowing seed, structural renewal, spiritual warfare and deliverance from evil forces. Atoi and Babale assert that the neo-Pentecostal churches have radical approaches to Christian doctrines. They are more militant in their evangelistic and proselytizing movements, particularly with respect to their aggressive style of witnessing (235).

Critique of African Neo-Pentecostal Notion of Power, Poverty and Prosperity

African neo-Pentecostal notion of power, poverty and prosperity is to some extent based on the spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social realities of the African people in contemporary times. A fundamental notion of power in African neo-Pentecostalism is the belief that all powers belong to God. African neo-Pentecostal leaders contend that God has given divine powers to pastors who serve as his representative on earth and they are expected to exercise these divine powers on his behalf in order to manifest his glory in the life of believers. Generally, Africans believed that there are myriad of spiritual powers, both good and evil, operating in every nook and cranny of the cosmos. These spiritual powers have continued to influence the activities of human beings on daily basis. African neo-Pentecostal leaders teach that God has given believers the ultimate power to conquer all the evil forces which act as the invisible enemies of humankind. These evil forces are believed to be responsible for the numerous problems being experienced in the universe.

African neo-Pentecostals claimed that God has given believers the power to dominate, subdue, overcome and triumph over every principalities and powers in high places through the power of the Holy Spirit. This power enables believers to perform signs and wonders that are beyond human imaginations. According to Magbadelo, the claim to 'power' by neo-Pentecostal outreaches across many countries in Africa was attested to by the numerous reports of instant miracles and wonder turnaround experienced by several attendees, devotees and testifiers at the different crusades and other spiritual programs organized by leaders of African neo-Pentecostalism. It was indeed the harvest of miracles that serves as the trump card of evangelization which attracted large followers to African neo-Pentecostalism (15). African Neo-Pentecostal notion of power became relevant in contemporary Christianity through the sermons preached about deliverance from the power of darkness or evil forces, which the exponents argued is the divine means for believers to achieve overall victory in every aspects of life. Nevertheless, some critics are of the opinion that some of the televised miracles and testimonies are not genuine. This is not to say that there may not be some genuine miracles among African neo-Pentecostal pastors.

Moreover, African neo-Pentecostals believe that the spiritual controls the physical. The leaders of African neo-Pentecostalism consider themselves as the link between the spiritual and the physical world because of the position they occupy as the representatives of God in their congregations. As such, it is believed that they have the power to give prophecies and determine future occurrences. Based on the foregoing, prophecies, healings and deliverances have become the methods of linking the people to divine powers. In recent times, African neo-Pentecostal pastors have extended their prophecies to the political arena. They often roll out series of prophecies on public life issues and predict the politicians who will win elections in the next political dispensation. These pastors now see themselves as people who use their spiritual power to determine who is to hold the political power of the state. For this reason, politicians frequently consult them for prayers, counselling and direction, especially during election seasons in order to achieve political success. It is pertinent to note that some African neo-Pentecostal pastors have continued to channel their energy more toward Political prophecy than other forms of prophecies. Critics have argued that some African neo-Pentecostal pastors are promoters of the philosophy of elitism because of their association with corrupt politicians and the kind of flamboyant lifestyle most of them live.

Regarding the conception of poverty, several scholars have observed that there is a common notion among leaders of African neo-Pentecostal churches that poverty is a curse and a disease (Dada 97; Unegbu cited in Atoi 10; Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye 113). According to Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye, there is a popular belief in African neo-Pentecostal assemblies that poverty is an anomaly which every believer must strive to overcome by adhering to certain new age Christian principles on how to make wealth through faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (113). Also, Goroh observes that a common belief among neo-Pentecostals is that poverty is the result of lack of giving and lack of the knowledge of God's promises (cited in Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye 106). Dada posits that African neo-Pentecostal Pastors claimed that poverty is of the devil and the result of man's sins. They equally maintain that poverty, diseases, and other forms of deprivation are some of the consequences of the fall of man, and that a true child of God is not supposed to be poor at all (98). It is very common within neo-Pentecostal churches in many African countries today to hear a pastor making statements such as, "Jesus Christ has paid the price for our poverty" "Christ became poor so that we might be rich" "God does not want you to

be poor" "poverty is not from God but from the devil" and "God promises to bless you beyond measure if you honour Him", among others.

Critics have argued that the above teaching of African neo-Pentecostal leaders contradicts the biblical notion of poverty which implies that the poor on earth are often rich in the kingdom of heaven (James 2:5). Moreover, Jesus Christ said to his followers: "you will always have the poor among you" (Mathew 26:11, Mark 14:7, and John 12:8). This statement of Jesus Christ suggests that poverty is neither a curse nor a disease but a human condition that provides people the opportunity to be generous to fellow human beings to bridge the gap between the materially poor and the materially wealthy. Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye are right in their articulation that:

The reason God allow poverty may be because he wants to establish a mutual relationship between the materially poor and the materially wealthy, so as to create a balance life between these two categories of people. As such, both the rich and the poor are expected to perform mutual functions for each other in order to promote a harmonious human relationship in the society. In actual sense, neither poverty nor wealth are evil in themselves, rather, both of them are basic realities of life. God has actually allowed both to exist to fulfill a purpose in human relations (116).

Furthermore, the African neo-Pentecostal notion of prosperity arose from the desire of the pastors to address the issue of poverty in Africa through divine means. Omosor (2019) has lamented the attitude of some clerics who are engrossed with the pursuit of wealth to the point that they even politicise the gospel to gain financial favour from politicians. According to Atoi, the leaders of neo-Pentecostal churches contend that adherents can only overcome the issue of poverty in the society by obeying certain divine instructions for the purpose of obtaining financial prosperity from God. These instructions include regular payment of tithe, sowing of seed faith, generous donations for church projects and others (3). Woodworth asserts that the neo-Pentecostal notion of Prosperity emphasizes "... the need for the transformation of an individual's life through faith in Jesus Christ" (cited in Adega 109). Some scholars have argued that many African neo-Pentecostal church pastors have focused their attention more on programs that deal primarily with material prosperity so as to teach their adherents how they could overcome poverty and improve on their socio-economic wellbeing. This is evidence in the kind of posters some of these pastors paste on the street of many African societies. We often see posters of neo-Pentecostal churches' programs with the following themes: "Accessing the Path to Financial Success," "Encountering Jesus, the Richest," "The Road to Self-Sufficiency," "Breaking the Curse of Poverty," "Anointing for Financial Explosion" pasted on every available conspicuous locations in different African countries such as, Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, among others (Adeyanju and Babalola 27; Atoi 9).

In the light of the foregoing, African neo-Pentecostal pastors have continued to admonish their members to exercise undoubted faith in God's promises of prosperity. The exponents of African neo-Pentecostal ideologies further assert that the exercise of faith in the prosperity message is one of the major prerequisites for the acquisition of material wealth (Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye 106). African neo-Pentecostal leaders have continued to maintain that the aforementioned prosperity principles lays the foundation for the life of abundance, riches and good health through faith in God, followed by the harvesting of the riches of the world by believers. They claimed that this is so because God owns all good things and he gives them to any of his children who honors him. However, critics have argued that if the above is the case, how come there are thousands of people who are richer than the "so-called children of God" in contemporary society? This is a pertinent question that African neo-Pentecostal pastors need to answer convincingly in order to defend their prosperity ideology.

Moreover, other critics have continued to maintain that some African neo-Pentecostal pastors take pride in marketing materialistic ideologies to their adherents during sermons in order to acquire material wealth. According to these critics, some pastors lack the virtues of sincerity and integrity in their interactions and dealings. It is imperative to note that one of the problems facing many African societies today is the issue of get rich quick syndrome|| that has found its way into the contemporary religious assemblies. This issue has continued to promote the desire for excessive materialism, lack of contentment and avarice among some believers in African neo-Pentecostal churches (Adeyanju and Babalola 27-28; Atoi, Sadiku and Kume 121).

It is pertinent to state that excessive emphasis on material prosperity by some neo-Pentecostal church leaders has turned many adherents into greedy and dubious people (Atoi 11). Little wonder Atoi and Ajiji opine that the attitudes of some religious leaders in Africa have resulted to increase in the incidence of moral decadence among their adherents (132). Also, many African neo-Pentecostal pastors have been accused of irresponsibility for their failure to criticize corrupt politicians who are responsible for the economic problems of their countries. Kalu regards the failure of some African neo-Pentecostal leaders to openly criticize corrupt politicians for the ailing economies of African countries as a weak political theology. Biri in Komolafe shares the same view and argues that it is a manifestation of the corruption that is within some neo-Pentecostal churches when they shield corruption and emphasize prayer for leaders as a panacea for challenges in Africa (179). Nevertheless, there may be some pastors who genuinely want to address the existential problems in Africa, especially socio-economic issues through the lens of neo-Pentecostal Christian ideological conception of power, poverty and prosperity. However, the undue emphasis that is laid on financial prosperity and some reported miracle scandals involving some African neo-Pentecostal pastors have intensified the criticism of the ideology being promoted by the aforementioned Christian denomination in Africa.

Conclusion

This paper has critically discussed the African neo-Pentecostal Christian conception of power, poverty and prosperity in relation to the contemporary socio-political and economic realities in Africa. This paper uncovered that the African neo-Pentecostal movement has contributed immensely to the growth of Christianity in the continent through its notion of power, poverty and prosperity. It established the fact that African neo-Pentecostalism is a unique kind of Christianity in its own right because of the innovative socio-political and economic ideologies it brought into Christian beliefs and practices. It is quite obvious that African neo-Pentecostal Christian denomination brought a new brand of social theology into Christianity at a time when the socio-political and economic life of the African people needed some remedies due to the damages done to the system by the political elites in Africa. It is believed that human beings can overcome different challenges of life through the intervention of divine beings in human affairs. African neo-Pentecostals believe that God has given every believer the power to overcome the forces of darkness and the ability to make wealth as well as the assurance of victory in every facet of life through the workings of the Holy Spirit and the redemptive works of Jesus Christ.

However, the African neo-Pentecostal social theology which seeks to address the socio-political and economic needs of the African people in contemporary times also encounter serious challenges because of greed and avarice both from the side of some leaders and the adherents who are so desperate to solve their socio-economic problems. This research submits that African neo-Pentecostal notion of power, poverty and prosperity can be applied to address the socio-political and economic challenges in Africa as long as the exponents do it in a more practicable manner and in line with the Christian values of sincerity, integrity, truthfulness, diligence, hard work, compassion, empathy, patriotism, and others. African neo-Pentecostal churches are therefore admonished to approach this subject matter with sincerity of purpose in order for Christians to impact more effectively on the socio-political and economic life of Africa

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