

Pentecostalism, the Akan Religion and the Good Life

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Introduction

It was Geoffrey Parrinder who noted that a comparative study in other religions in Africa can help in understanding attitudes behind traditional religion.¹ For example, the emergence of Christian prophetism in the tropics reveals important elements in traditional religion. With the Church of Pentecost (COP) as my main case, I will examine and assess the Ghanaian Pentecostal ideas about the good life. I will also demonstrate the interface between the Akan traditional religio-culture and Pentecostals' inherited Christian tradition in their ideas about the good life. I will then propose a contextualisation of the ideas of the good life. The Akan people constitute about 44% of the total population of Ghana. Their language and culture pervade through much of the nation's culture, including the Christian religion. Hence, a discussion of this nature must entail a discussion on how the Akan conceive goodness. We will ask: In what ways does the Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding of God's goodness and the good life show the impingement of the Akan primal religion?

Ghanaian Pentecostalism began with the initial work of Apostle Peter Newman Anim in 1917. Later in 1937, the British Apostolic Church sent a resident missionary, Pastor James McKeown, to help Anim with the administration of his organisation.² The short-lived relationship would later result in three major churches, (Christ Apostolic Church, The Apostolic Church, and the Church of Pentecost), which together with the American Assemblies of God church constitute the main part of classical Pentecostalism in Ghana. In the late 1970s, newer Pentecostal groups, known locally as Charismatic Churches or Ministries (CC/CMs) emerged. Paul Gifford designates them as Ghana's "new churches." He argues that these churches thrive on the economic plight of the majority of Ghanaians by presenting themselves as providers of the spiritual solution to the Ghanaian material lack.³ Pioneered by radical young people, these

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churches championed North Atlantic gospel of prosperity with diverse emphases. As I have noted elsewhere, from the early 1990s there emerged a new phenomenon in Ghanaian Pentecostalism.⁴ This was the emergence and proliferation of prophetic groups. In classical Pentecostal circles, there emerged prayer centres led by lay leaders whom I designate as Grassroots Prophets. Similarly, the New Prophetic Churches (NPCs) emerged within the ambits of the Charismatic Ministries. The Grassroots Prophets, like their counterparts in the New Prophetic Churches (NPCs), representative of Pentecostal common believers, view and interpret life from a spiritual perspective.

The Discordant Life

In Ghanaian Pentecostalism, the issue of the good life is critical. Daily people come face to face with disasters that take away loved ones, or cause destruction of property and loss of job. These and many other such evils leave scars of despondency on their lives, sometimes for good. Consequently, in their songs, sermons and practices Ghanaian Pentecostals denounce badness in life as a decolourisation and contradiction of goodness in life. To Ghanaian Pentecostals, no talk about the good life is complete without the depreciation of the bad life. They believe that people are contaminated with the badness in this world. Human beings are victimised by forces more powerful than themselves. The bad life is a life of struggles and entanglements as this Ghanaian Pentecostal song illustrates:

All my fetters are broken asunder
I've seen my Saviour, my wonderful Saviour
Who is so precious to me
All my fetters are broken asunder

This song presents the bad life in terms of bondage, imprisonment and slavery that call for salvation. Salvation is conceived in terms of deliverance from the entanglements of life that limit and impede human life. This is what makes Lord Emmanuel Elorm-Donkor think that salvation among African Pentecostals is teleological, underpinned by “a belief that the Christian life is fraught with the ongoing struggles between God and local or territorial [demonic] spirits.”⁵ This is the logic in what Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi calls the quest for the “balance of power” in one’s favour, or a “maintaining of the ‘cosmological balance’”.⁶ Above the songwriter aptly captures the ideas of bondage, imprisonment and slavery by such a key term as fetters (chains)

that call for breaking asunder. Fetters imply frustration in one's upward mobility which could be due to spiritual causes or stem from physical actions of the individual or others. Thus, among Ghanaian Pentecostals life's badness is abhorrent because of its potential to strangulate the realization of the full or good life. This is why Ghanaian Pentecostals, especially common believers, look at the incidence of evil and suffering with so much distaste.

The Pentecostal abhorrence of evil is shared by all streams of the movement. For example, Johnson Asamoah-Gyadu maintains that the CMs conceive salvation in terms of transformation and empowerment, healing and deliverance, prosperity, and restoration of spiritual gifts being by-products of the Spirit's anointing in believers' lives.⁷ Gifford posits that to implement their success/victory theology the CMs deny negative realities like death and suffering by resorting to the use of "instruments of destiny."⁸ Consequently, they adopt a defensive posture when they are confronted with evil.⁹ The basic emphases of the CMs' prosperity theology are health, wealth and happiness which deny or refuse suffering as part of Christian life.¹⁰ Bradley A. Kroch identifies the prosperity gospel with Jay McCloud's "divine hierarchies" categorization of theologies of class in American religious history in his work *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood* (1995). The rest are "economic Arminianism," "social harmony," and "the class-conscious Christ."¹¹ The apparent capitalist orientation and tendencies of exponents of the prosperity gospel have caused critics to see it as a suspect theology. Perhaps, the theology is not wholly incorrect, especially when gauged against the economies of African countries like Ghana where many people survive below a living income. Thus, the prosperity gospel becomes the clutch of hope.

The Good Life as Predicate of the Good God

Ghanaian Pentecostals distinguish between what they consider as the good life and the bad life. They see life full of contradictions between the good life and the bad life. This means that not all experiences and conditions may actually reflect God's best for his people. The good life or full life means liberation from intimidating factors and forces. Accordingly, it manifests in vitality, hopefulness, good health, wealth, significance, greatness, social celebration, social mobility, respectability, and self-confidence.

The Good life is important because human beings live in an unfriendly world, where forces far stronger than themselves mitigate against them. As in traditional Akan thought, human

finitude does not allow us to control our existence,¹² hence, the teleological and pragmatic nature of religious attitudes.¹³ We can understand why Ghanaian Pentecostals long for protection, goodness, love, security, and the restoration of fortunes from God. Indeed, it is the good life which cancels all that undermines excitement in life.¹⁴ Consequently, the good life means a rejection of the bad life. It is an option for “the good”: the beautification of life akin to the original import of creation being “good.”¹⁵ Hence, in times of lack and nothingness, Ghanaian Pentecostals cry to God for His provisions. The Ghanaian Pentecostal notions about the good life demand that we examine God’s role in the balancing of favour towards believers. For Ghanaian Pentecostals, the enjoyment of the good life is contingent on the goodness of God. It is about God “sweetening” hitherto distasteful circumstances.¹⁶ Critical to this is the friend-motif which is typified in the Christ-event.

The Ghanaian Pentecostal idea of the good God is contingent on the idea that God is the friend of humanity. An idea of divine goodness as revealed in the friend-motif is at once a rejection of divine indifference to human affairs. Consequently, it connotes ideas such as divine dependability and equity, which are themselves corollaries of God’s nature and character. The Ghanaian Pentecostal idea about God’s goodness is an inferable and emphasised celebrated fact in many Ghanaian Pentecostal sermons, songs and practices. As the following song which appeared in the early 1980s demonstrates, God’s goodness is eternal and must not be overlooked at all:

God is good, his goodness is forever more
I will adore him, I will praise him
I will sing hallelujah
God is good, his goodness is forever more

The theme of divine goodness is strong in this song. God deserves praises and adoration because God is the source of limitless goodness. Ghanaian Pentecostals understand this divine goodness as an unconditional provision of mercies that God demonstrated when Jesus Christ died. So they relate Christ’s death and resurrection to divine providence for believers’ wellbeing in this world.

God is dependable

Many Ghanaian Pentecostal sermons, songs, and practices portray God as the most

dependable One. They stress that the enjoyment of life's goodness underscores the dependability of God. This understanding informs their singing as illustrated below:

For the bountiful goodness (and)
The abundant loving-kindness
That the Lord has bestowed on me
I will praise him, I will thank him
For the entire world to hear

Ghanaian Pentecostals interpret and celebrate their positive reversal of fortunes in terms of the abundant goodness and loving-kindness of God. To them, even "trivial" goodness of God cannot be taken for granted, but must be celebrated in songs and dance. By such theologizing, they reveal how they appropriate biblical notions of God's goodness vis-à-vis satanic weakness before an empowered church. For Ghanaian Pentecostals, God knows every need of his children, even the overlooked needs to the minutest detail. He is always present to meet such "trivial needs" as food and clothing. When all human promises and assurances fail, the believer can go to bed and sleep, for there is an ever-present God willing to meet our needs.¹⁷ Such divine provision is so great that one cannot help but to proclaim it. This Pentecostal emphasis on the immediacy of God's presence and ability underpins Ghanaian Pentecostalism's success and relevance.¹⁸

The equitable God

The Ghanaian Pentecostal proclamation of God's goodness recognises him as the just dispenser of help to humanity. In this respect the divine equity knows no bounds nor respects status. As COP's P. B. Appiah-Adu's song below, which appeared in the early 1980s, stresses, it is the yearning of the Ghanaian Pentecostal that God will not ignore him/her in the dispensing of his goodness:

Equitable Distributor
Include me on Your distribution list
Even the ant is included in Your distribution
Equitable Distributor
Include me on Your distribution list

God's goodness reveals itself in his encompassing, equitable concern towards all creation. In this song God is imaged as someone who equitably distributes to all earth's dwellings such that the most insignificant, typified by the ant, can be sure of their daily share in

his largess. Hence, “creation” and “providence” tie together as works of God.¹⁹ And yet the inherent divine equity denotes divine impartiality. God is impartial in his distribution of blessings, a truth that holds for all, Christian or non-Christian. Unfortunately, this divine impartiality is often overlooked and not integrated into the daily encounters of people which results in untold hardships for many.

Naturally, Ghanaian Pentecostals’ simple assumptions about God’s character places him outside (but not aloof) of creation itself. He is the source of all life. Thus, a reflection on creation provides ample ground for worshiping God. If this is the case, may we not say that the attribution of worship to any creature deprives God of his right in his creation? And that the attribution of success, prosperity and our very existence to our skill, ability or some other source boils down to idolatry, and a complete ignorance of the nature of God?

For Ghanaian Pentecostals, to realise the good life is to know Christ/God. This is critical in their teachings to the faithful not to relent in their trust in God even when there is a delay of divine answer. For example, the COP current chairman, Apostle Dr. Opoku Onyinah, preached a sermon titled, “The God of the Living is my God for Today” on the “Pentecost Hour” program on Ghana’s TV3, November 18, 2009. About the implications of the living reality of God he admonished, “If God considered the dead patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as living, what should be the attitude of the living believer. The believer is living twice; God is concerned about their welfare, their success, life, protection, victory, etc.” Thus speaking, Onyinah ties the realization of the totality of the believer’s wellness to the reality of God. The soteriological implications of this are that the new birth experience is both transcendental and immanent. On one hand, it assures the believer of eternal life, and on the other, it assures him/her of God’s total provisions in this world, thematically illustrated below.

The sermon referred to above was drawn from Jesus’ refutation of the Sadducees’ rejection of the belief in resurrection (Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38) that claimed life ends in the grave. Such an understanding made death frightful, and a ghastly subjugating tool. Onyinah in the sermon says this is not the case. Jesus teaches that death ushers believers into a new life in God. This means that believers are victorious over death. Accordingly, there is no contradiction in Jesus’ saying that God is the God of the living, rather, it offers believers the hope of a life hereafter. Such a hope positivizes death by removing from it the sting of fear and uncertainty. Many times people fear death because they are unsure of what awaits them

thereafter. However, Jesus' statement indicates that the Old Testament saints went to live with God in what was called Paradise. Therefore, to the believer to be absent in this life is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

Actually, Onyinah's sermonizing is representative of COP's teaching on death. In general in the COP, it is taught to see death as beneficial to the believer. By it believers' go to the "many mansions" in the heavenly home (John 14:2). Thus understood, we may appreciate the Ghanaian Pentecostal celebration of God's sovereignty and goodness even in times of death as illustrated in COP's Elder J. K. Appiah's song of the 1980s:

Almighty God, we shall praise Your name
For Your good deeds we shall praise Your name
In death or in life we shall praise Your name
For Your good deeds we shall praise Your name

Bad as death is, the Ghanaian Pentecostal response may be positive. The occurrence of death can actualize and crystallize the Christian community, and expose the loving side of humanity. Not only does the Christian receive comfort from God, but also he/she experiences group solidarity when fellow believers share his/her sorrows with him/her: "I received much consolation from fellow church members and believers."²⁰ Indeed, to the Christian, bereavement can result in "the power of comforting religious compensations."²¹

Second, Onyinah in the sermon above is suggesting that God protects and insures the lives of his children against the contaminations of this life. This means that the believer is to go through life without fearing anything that the unbeliever fears. The fact of death is frightening to many people. Accordingly, Onyinah challenges his audience, "There are people who are too much afraid of death. I don't want to die; you don't want to die. But whether we like it or not we will die. What we have to do is to prepare to meet death by accepting Jesus." Truly, Ghanaians love life. In traditional Ghanaian society, death is an abomination, so people seek for protection from all kinds of spiritual succour.²² But Onyinah says the only sure kind of protection is granted in knowing Christ.

Ghanaian Pentecostals do not pretend about the slur that incidences of death and calamities leave on their faith in God. Theirs is not a world disenchanted of the supernatural.²³ They differ from the nineteenth century western missionaries who interpreted existential issues with disenchantment.²⁴ The missionaries failed because they sought to replace African

moral/religious thought with so-called Christian morality which was actually a rationalistic Western Universalist moral paradigm.²⁵ This was a situation that was reversed by Pentecostal prophets.²⁶ Ghanaian Pentecostals recognize the doubts calamities raise about God's caring love. And yet with proper godly counselling and support they believe that calamities can become times of reorienting and resourcing the divine.

Forgiveness of sin as the actualisation of divine goodness

Among Ghanaian Pentecostals Christ's blood is important because by it the sinner obtains forgiveness from God. Forgiveness is important because of the inherent human sin and the world's imperfections which make it impossible to enjoy life. Human finitude and imperfections in the world entail adversities, failures, and conflicts that impair personal, societal and group achievements. It may be true that some of the sins that we commit are unconscious. Equally true is that to avoid demands and obligations we consciously do certain things that we know we ought not to. We are not able to do what we ought to; nor desist from doing what we ought not to (Rom. 7:15-23).²⁷ So prayer for personal and corporate forgiveness is critical to personal and societal decency. This makes it imperative to acknowledge the reality of sin and brokenness in our world. By this understanding again we are afforded the opportunity to see how divine forgiveness is critical for doing our "little good deeds" in an imperfect world. Moreover, we are able to appreciate that grace and forgiveness set us free to do what others are unable to do. This is important for welcoming others with vulnerabilities and deficiencies as equals, a precondition for decency in the public sphere.²⁸ To this end we can appreciate why the need for divine forgiveness is ubiquitous in many Ghanaian Pentecostal songs and sermons.

Sin has the power to deprive one of divine blessings and favour. Hence, in COP for instance, a great attention is given to the issue of forgiveness of sin and the importance of living a righteous and holy life. It is against this backdrop that Psalm 51, for example, becomes crucial in Ghanaian Pentecostal prayer/dedication services. Actually, a portion of this psalm, verses 10-12, is very popular in many Ghanaian Pentecostal worship circles:

Create in me a clean heart, O Lord
And renew a right spirit within me
Cast me not away from thy presence, O Lord
And do not take thy Holy Spirit from me
Restore unto me the joy of thine salvation
And renew a right spirit within me

Although the song is western by origination, its popularity among Ghanaian Pentecostals cannot be overemphasised. Aside its beautiful musical rendition, its lyrics express deeply the Ghanaian Pentecostal desire to enjoy divine forgiveness. The Christian life requires daily cleansing from sin's contaminations which cannot be achieved by human effort, but through the gift of forgiveness which is granted by God himself. Daily believers are confronted with issues like how to live morally upright. But more than this is how they can avoid being merciless, hateful to competitors and opponents, and irresponsible living. This is because in many cases human actions and inactions create conditions that undermine personal and societal decency and harmony. To forgive is a gift from God and contingent on one's love for the Lord that trickles down to one's offender. No matter the magnitude of offense committed against them people should still be able to forgive. This is imperative for personal and societal harmony and existence.

The good life as new identity

Ghanaian Pentecostals maintain that in Christ they can enjoy a new identity or have their lost identity restored.²⁹ Therefore it is not uncommon these days to hear them sing and talk about the good life in terms of identity restoration. This is seen in the song below:

Once upon a time I was a slave
This time around I am not a slave
The heavens and earth testify
Now I am no longer a slave

As the song depicts, salvation means positive reversal of fortunes. It is about transference from bondage to freedom. It is the granting of an unhidden and inventive new identity that "the heavens and earth" (all creation) attest to. The Ghanaian Pentecostal rejection of suffering and evil thrives on this belief. It is a rejection of the tilting of the balance of significance in favour of unbelievers, the slaves of sin and the devil. This means the good life evidences itself in identity

transformation. Yet the attitude to the good life must be one of appreciation of divine grace. By divine grace the vilest sinner experiences spiritual, material, attitudinal, psychological, physical and emotional transformations. Thus, the idea of identity transformation readily rejects the bad life which we have already intimated differs from the good life.

In Ghanaian Pentecostalism, evil and suffering have economic values because of their humiliating and undesirable effects on human existence. Ghanaian Pentecostals abhor poverty since as Onyinah puts it “a wealthy person can contribute towards the welfare of the family and the state.”³⁰ The socioeconomic significance of evil gives rise to what I conceptualized elsewhere as the concept of the “the poor and the sick.”³¹ There is a symbiotic relationship between poverty and ill health because poverty can make people ill, and when one is ill there is no way one can work to get money. The point is although Ghana has travelled a long way in terms of healthcare delivery,³² many people still approach their health issues as a religious imperative; they resort to prayer to God.

So we see that the Ghanaian Pentecostal quest for identity restoration can be appreciated better against the Ghanaian socioeconomic context. In Ghana, identity is a socioeconomic and political fact. For instance, employment is tied to who you know. Identity is important because people are defined by what they possess. Identity also means carving a name in public. It goes with respect, honor, opportunities, and expansion. “Super-citizenship” derives from one’s status on the socio-economic and political ladder. To be saved is not enough; existential transformation must commensurate with heavenly citizenship.³³

Thus far our discussions have shown that Ghanaian Pentecostals conceive the realization of the good life in terms of the Christ-event. In Christ, they see and meet God as the most powerful, dependable, trusted, helpful, and ever-present friend who turns their low estate into significance. Now we shall proceed to investigate the plausibility of the impingement of the Akan traditional religion/culture on the Ghanaian Pentecostal notions of the good life and God’s goodness.

Akan Primal views versus Pentecostal views on the Good God and the Good life

The analysis of Ghanaian Pentecostals’ ideas about the dependability of God is very important and interesting. It reflects the general Ghanaian religious propensity in the face of uncertainties.

The Ghanaian Pentecostal interpretation of the bad life as a decolourization of the good life shares much affinity with the traditional Akan religion/culture. In both worldviews, the good life is a life that gives colour to hitherto negative circumstances. This is obtained from God. That is why in their daily conversations, whether in relation to industry, farming, marriage, and child bearing, God's goodness is not overlooked. In fact, issues of prosperity are traditionally attributed to God so much so that even traditional priests attach the importance of God's goodness to the administration of cure and solution.

Again, in both religious worldviews God's goodness is predicated on His parenthood, which entitles Him for human upkeep and dependence. Accordingly, Kofi Ofose Adutwum claims this divine parental imaging "is made to stand out more prominently against the background of the hardships of life."³⁴ This idea underlies the Akan existential understanding of the universe and their quest for spiritual succour in times of trouble, difficulty and confusion, the very thing that underlines the Pentecostal appropriation of the good life.

However, there is a difference in the appropriation of spiritual succour. The Akan traditionalist seeks this from the traditional deities, so Elorm-Donkor observes that "unending networks that exist between humans and these other entities, make the religious life of Akans not just anthropocentric but also cosmic or, rather, theocentric."³⁵ The Ghanaian Pentecostal accesses success or prosperity through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. For example, faith in the name and blood of Jesus, prayers in the form of prophetic ritualism, and spiritual warfare are crucial in the Pentecostal appropriation of such divine interventions to negate evil. Jesus is critical here because he has overcome the intimidating forces in the Akan world.³⁶ Herein is the logic of deliverance interpreted as spiritual warfare.³⁷

The strong Akan belief in God's goodness made Robert Sutherland Rattray conclude that the Akan were monotheistic.³⁸ This essay does not seek to debate this Akan monotheism. What is important to us is the indisputability of the Akan belief in God's goodness. Among the Akan, God's goodness reveals through his dependability, hence, he is the Dependable One and the Unmovable Rock with concern for his creation. Consequently, he is the one who provides life, sunshine, rain, water, good health, fertility of people, animals and plants, food and protection. Ghanaian Pentecostals see these traditional notions of divine goodness as relevant to their practice of Christianity, and so employ them in their description of God's character of goodness. Nonetheless, in practice it sometimes appears these traditional views about God's goodness are

deficient. For in times of disaster, say famine, drought, childlessness, the traditional Akan religionist turns to the deities for intervention, a situation which is repudiated by the Ghanaian Pentecostal.

As in Ghanaian Pentecostalism issues of protection and favour are critical to the Akan. This is because the Akan abhors death, especially, untimely death. Consequently, time, efforts, and money are spent on finding the causes of death people suffer. Indeed, to the Akan, nobody dies without a cause. Death is seen as a great misfortune to aspirations and plans. Thus, there is always the search for protection from some powerful deities. While theoretically God is the source of life, in practice the access and perpetuity of life are attributed to the actions of the deities and spirits. The Ghanaian Pentecostal disagrees with this because to them it is Jesus Christ who alone makes divine protection and security possible.

The Ghanaian Pentecostal notions about protection and security transcend this-worldly into other-worldly. They console believers that while they may suffer untold hardships today, they are protected and secured against eternal sufferings in the life hereafter, a notion which is absent in the Akan traditional religion. Thus, although the Pentecostal conception of God's goodness is articulated through those traditional expressions, yet unlike in the traditional religion, Ghanaian Pentecostals accredit them to the power of Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

According to Akan traditionalists, the bad life gives way to the good life through the mediation of the traditional pantheon of spirits. Among the Akan clan, communal deities and ancestors mediate and avert evil, and also mediate goodness to the living. Hence, purificatory rites are performed to both. To Ghanaian Pentecostals Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension made it possible for human beings to experience God's goodness even in distress and trouble. This does not depend on any efforts of theirs but by the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The Ghanaian Pentecostal idea about destiny transformation shows an interface with the Akan traditional views about life. In the Akan cosmology, a good destiny is one that is full of favour, prosperity, devoid of evil, and assures significance. Destiny is crucial to wellness of the individual, and so efforts are made to ensure it is unhampered by enemies. Although theoretically the Akan believes destiny is irreversible, in practice efforts are made to "do something" about people's destinies through consultation with oracles. This is to ensure that the "irreversible" may become "reversible" for bearers to enjoy the good life. While Ghanaian Pentecostals may share

with the traditionalist on the interruption of destiny by evil and wicked forces, they do not subscribe to the deities or traditional oracles as the sources for achieving destiny transformation. As our discussions have shown, they maintain that any talk about destiny transformation must be done in the context of the Christ-event. We may say that in some respect the Ghanaian Pentecostal and the Akan traditional religious/cultural ideas about goodness and God resonate. In another respect, there appears a dissonance in the way primal religionists perceive the channelling of divine goodness into human life.

Contextualising the Good Life

This section assesses the Ghanaian Pentecostal ideas about the good God and the good life that we have examined so far. First, Ghanaian Pentecostals synthesise their understanding of the Bible, and the influence of their Akan traditional religious views about the good life. This is not surprising since worldviews impinge on people's attitudes and beliefs. In the case of the Ghanaian Pentecostal he/she is influenced by both the Christian and his/her primal worldviews.³⁹ This interface of differing worldviews that impinges on the Pentecostal interpretation of evil and suffering is consistent. As has been demonstrated, Ghanaian Pentecostals' ideas about the good God and the good life rationalizes their Christian experience as an interplay of both religious cosmologies.

Meanwhile, the interpretation of salvation in terms of enjoyment of the good life poses hermeneutical problems on the nature of a saviour. As has been shown above, this approach to life is more or less a denunciation of all that taints the beauty of life. Consequently, Pentecostal songs and sermons heavily emphasise the peril of life, and its need of reversal by Jesus. Here is demonstrated the Pentecostal interpretation of evil and suffering as bondage, imprisonment, and slavery (typified as fetters/chains) that calls to be broken asunder. In this scheme, human life is seen as nothing more than a life of slavery, torture, entanglements, and imprisonment. As has already been seen above, such views are what define who the saviour is to the Pentecostal. Unfortunately, such an approach to evil distances evil from anthropological reasons or elements. The fact is that not all evil is spiritual; there are often anthropological dimensions to evil and suffering. A lopsided understanding of evil (placing all evil in the supernatural realm) prevents people from taking personal or corporate responsibility and redressing problems of palpable anthropological causality.

Again, fuelled by the traditional worldview seekers are always in search of the latest powerful prophetic meeting to attend. The problem with this kind of hermeneutic is if one's problems appear unresolved it means shifting allegiance from the Lord Jesus Christ to some other "saviour." This attitude recalls the traditional attitude to the deities, and may underline the proliferation of prophetic churches/meetings in the Ghanaian society. Hence, it is important that Ghanaian Pentecostals reorient their understanding about God and the good life to accommodate the contrariness in the Christian life.

The friend-motif offers us important lessons for a relevant practice of Christianity in Ghanaian society. This is because it helps us to appreciate the divine/human relationship that results in God's self-giving in salvation. Again, its inherent ideas of helpfulness, love, concern, empathy, sympathy, compassion, faithfulness, comfort, loyalty, sharing, belonging, understanding, closeness and confirmation, are needful to a developing society bereft with emotional, psychological and spiritual wholeness. 'Who is my friend?' must occupy the Ghanaian socio-religious and political psyche. It is only when people begin to understand the friend-motif that they will appreciate how "ungodly" it is to create conditions of pain, anguish, and depression for others.

The friend motif has socioeconomic implications to the Ghanaian in what I call elsewhere "clan and tribal symbiosis."⁴⁰ The community confers personality on the individual and determines or defines individual freedom, maturity, and responsibility.⁴¹ Communal sharing in times of good fortune and of bad times is crucial in Akan life. Tribal symbiosis makes it possible for people to share other members' burdens. Therefore, "prosperous" relatives share the burdens of "poor" relatives.⁴² The basis of tribal symbiosis is altruism. Hence, personal welfare inconsiderate of the common good is condemned. Tribal symbiosis inextricably connects individual freedom, joys, and problems to those of the tribal community.⁴³ This is an aspect of the traditional system that the church cannot neglect—the tribe.⁴⁴ After all, as a community of believers, the church is a kind of "tribe" with immense power. It therefore impels church leadership to tactfully and wisely educate members on the importance of their communal responsibilities and commitments.

Although tribal symbiosis can create tensions and envy, give rise to witchcraft, and indeed, can result in political corruption,⁴⁵ nonetheless, this does not warrant the church interfering "unwisely" in tribal cohesion. The fact is members belong to families and a

community, so the church does not and cannot replace the family or clan. So it is important that the church helps to safeguard ethnic cohesion, but not to needlessly interfere it. Social cohesion and equilibrium are contingent on the interplay between the individual and communal norms, values, and laws. Religion serves as an enforcer and vehicle in the educational, medicinal, cultural, economic, social and political spheres of the society. This makes religion multifaceted in its features and character.⁴⁶ Consequently, among Africans, religious conversion carries various undertones for the whole society and its norms. People continue to be interested in the welfare of their relatives in the church, and *vice versa*.⁴⁷

Consequently, the friend-motif can be extended here to sensitise believers to contribute to the welfare of members of their family or clan so that they can experience Christian love and Kingdom values. A proper understanding of tribal symbiosis requires the discarding of negative attitudes and social structures by re-reading the Bible for socio-psychological re-orientation towards the communal good. The net effect is what Elorm-Donkor calls "pneumatological characterology."⁴⁸ In many African societies human individuality is intertwined with the communal identity.⁴⁹

Indeed, the Ghanaian Pentecostal perception and proposal of Jesus as the best alternative to problems has important socio-economic and political implications. What it suggests is that everybody is involved in some form of difficulty. This does not exclude the politicians. By thinking themselves as the movers and shakers of the economy, African leaders presume to possess the solutions to national problems, and so expose themselves to all kinds of criticisms. Such problems occur when they willfully or ignorantly blame some external forces for the difficulties of their economies.

Finally, the Pentecostal perception of salvation as the acquisition of a new identity tends to overlook the ambiguities in the Christian life. It therefore imposes personal opinions and categorizations of the person and nature of Jesus Christ. Consequently, it ignores clear biblical teaching on the nature of the Divine. In this soteriological scheme, Jesus *can* and *must* create new things. That means he must repair the broken life of *all* who come to him. The logic is: If Jesus is powerful, and able to create new things and repair broken lives, then at all cost he should stop evil and suffering in believers' lives. Positively, this interpretation proposes Jesus as the Absolute Monarch over evil and human suffering. Such understanding conveys notions of divine attributes of perfection and an abiding concern in salvific realities. It also becomes a

Christological positivization for embracing victory over existential threats. In this way, the question of victory becomes paramount in interpreting the whole idea of salvation in Ghanaian Pentecostal theology. Salvation becomes necessarily an automatic enjoyment of the full or good life. Thus, wholeness or full life becomes a sensitive matter in Ghanaian Pentecostal theodicy. By this argument I am not in the least discounting the role of special providence in the Christian life. What I mean is that by such positivization, we overlook the fact that scripturally evil and suffering are accepted contradictions of existence. This means we should take seriously our struggle with evil in this world.

Conclusion

In this essay, we asked ‘In what ways does the Ghanaian Pentecostal understanding of God’s goodness and the good life show the impingement of the Akan primal religion?’ Consequently, with the friend-motif as my point of departure, I contended that in Ghanaian Pentecostalism God is dependable for enjoying the good life. God’s goodness reveals itself in his concern towards creation. God’s goodness is interpreted in salvific terms through the works of Jesus Christ. It is within this matrix that the good life is interpreted as the opposite of the bad life, and the beautification of life that effects identity transformation. Good life is predicated on divine goodness. These ideas are not peculiar to Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Also in the Akan cosmology, God’s goodness is revealed through his attribute of dependability.

¹ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa’s Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969).

² R. W. Wyllie, “Pioneers of Ghanaian Pentecostalism: Peter Anim and James McKeown,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 6, no. 2 (1974): 109.

³ Paul Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004), viii, ix.

⁴ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Prophetism in Ghana Today: A Study on Trends in Ghanaian Pentecostal Prophetism* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Publishing, 2013).

⁵ Lord Emmanuel Elorm-Donkor, “Christian Morality in Ghanaian Pentecostalism: A Theological Analysis of Virtue Theory as a Framework for Integrating Christian and Akan Moral Schemes” (Ph.D diss., University of Manchester, 2011), 49.

⁶ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, “The Nature of Continuity and Discontinuity of Ghanaian Pentecostal Concept of Salvation in African Cosmology,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, 3, no. 1 (2002): 88, 91.

⁷ Johnson K. Asamoah-Gyadu *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Accra, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 2005), 158.

⁸ Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 60.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52-3.

¹⁰ Bradley A. Koch, "The Prosperity Gospel and Economic Prosperity: Race, Class, Giving, and Voting" (PhD Diss., Indiana University, 2009), 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² Lord Elorm-Donkor, "African Worldview and Christian Pneumatology: Divergences and Convergences," *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 12, no. 1 (Summer 2012) ISSN: 15360156 (web version) – <http://didache.nazarene.org12>. Page 2 (accessed 9/8/2014).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ See Elorm-Donkor, "Christian Morality," 49.

¹⁵ Cf. Joanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos, *Making Wise the Simple: The Torah in Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

¹⁶ Interview with Lydia Larbi, 18 July, 2008.

¹⁷ John V. York, *Missions in the Age of the Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2000), 191-92.

¹⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu *African Charismatics*, 236.

¹⁹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basis for a Reformational Worldview*. 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 14.

²⁰ Interview with Mrs. Comfort Asiedu, widow of a COP pastor, 3 October, 2009.

²¹ John Mansford Prior, "The Challenge of the Pentecostals in Asian Part One: Pentecostal Movements in Asia," *Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 36 (2007): 37.

²² T. N. O. Quarcoopome, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan, Nigeria: African Universities Press, 1987), 74-84.

²³ See Onyinah's discussions on the "Origins and Ideological Bases of Missionaries." Opoku Onyinah, "Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost" (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2002), 126-33.

²⁴ See for example, Ezekiel Oladapo Ajani, "Leadership Roles in the Transnationalisation of Nigerian Pentecostal Churches: The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church in the Netherlands and Ghana" (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit (Free University) of Amsterdam, 2013), 68.

²⁵ Elorm-Donkor, "African Worldview," 2.

²⁶ Opoku Onyinah, "Deliverance as a Way of Confronting Witchcraft in Modern Africa: Ghana as a Case History," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 112.

²⁷ Hendrick M. Vroom, "Why are we inclined to do Evil?: On the Anthropological Roots of Evil," in *Wrestling with God and with Evil: Philosophical Reflections*, edited by Hendrick M. Vroom (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 131-32.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See a fuller discussion of the Ghanaian Pentecostal views on identity transformation in my, Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "Christ, Evil and Suffering in Ghanaian Christian Liturgy," *PentecoStudies: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Research on the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* 14, no. 1, (2015): 9-41.

³⁰ Onyinah, "Akan Witchcraft," 34.

³¹ "Ideas of the Divine and the Human in Ghanaian Pentecostal Songs" (MA Thesis, Vrije Universiteit (Free University) of Amsterdam, 2008), 33.

³² See Daniel Okyere Walker's discussion on the healthcare problems in the Gold Coast in the 1920s and 30s, and how the faith-healing practices of Peter Anim's group proved useful. Daniel Okyere Walker, "The Pentecost Fire Is Burning: Models of Mission Activities in the Church of Pentecost," (Ph.D diss., University of Birmingham, 2010), 83.

³³ Quayesi-Amakye, "Ideas of the Divine", 35.

³⁴ Kofi Ofori Adutwum, "African Traditional 'Psalms' of Confidence," *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 1, no. 2 (1991): 18.

³⁵ Elorm-Donkor, "Christian Morality," 40.

³⁶ Emmanuel Kingsley Larbi, *Pentecostalism: Eddies of Ghanaian Christianity* (Accra, Ghana: CPCS, 2001), 425.

³⁷ See Elorm-Donkor, "Christian Morality," 51.

³⁸ Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), 18-19.

³⁹ Cf. Ogbu U. Kalu, "Introduction: The Shape and Flow of African Church Historiography," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, edited by Ogbu U. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007), 35.

⁴⁰ Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, *Christology and Evil in Ghana: Towards a Pentecostal Public Theology* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 228-30.

⁴¹ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra, Ghana: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996).

⁴² See Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 35-76.

⁴³ cf. Black Americans' thoughts on communalism. Melissa V. Harris-Lacewell, "Righteous Politics: The Role of the Black Church in Contemporary Politics," *Crosscurrents* 57, no. 2 (2007): 186.

⁴⁴ Elorm-Donkor, "Christian Morality," 91.

⁴⁵ See also my, Joseph Quayesi-Amakye, "Social Responsibility in the Christianised Akan Ethnic Culture of Ghana," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 23, no. 2 (2013): 5.

⁴⁶ Peter B. Clarke, *West Africa and Christianity* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1997).

⁴⁷ See my article, Quayesi-Amakye, "Social Responsibility," 6-7.

⁴⁸ Elorm-Donkor, "Christian Morality," 282.

⁴⁹ J. Kofi Agbeti, *West African Church History: Christian Missions and Church Foundations-1482-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).