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**Neo-Prophetism and the Commercialisation of
Religion in Ghana**

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Abstract

Drawing on the commercialisation of religious items and services by Ghana's neo-prophetic actors, this paper seeks to draw a relationship between existential insecurity, reliance on religion and associated abuses. The paper brings to the fore the factors that push religious followers to patronise the services of prophetic actors. It contends that a symbiotic dependence between prophetic actors

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and their followers in terms of what the paper identifies as *religious dependence, opportunism and interdependency* fuels and fans the commercialization of religion in the Ghanaian neo-prophetic Christianity. The paper also interrogates the ways in which the attempt to meet the demands of religious consumers yields itself to certain forms of violations and abuses. The paper does this via the qualitative approach to research with interviews and participant observation.

Keywords

Abuses, commercialisation of religion, interdependency, Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal Christianity, opportunism, religious dependence.

Introduction

On January 3, 2017 the Ghanaian media reported that Rev. Stephen Odamy Asare, a pastor of the Genesis International Church had lamented about the increasing manner in which the Ghanaian religious field has been turned into a business arena. According to the report, the cleric, complained that 90% of churches in Ghana were operating as business entities by hiding behind the name “churches” as a convenient tool to siphon monies of members instead of adhering to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ. While his claim can be easily dismissed as lacking empirical supporting evidence, in a large measure, it reflected a popular concern regarding the activities and operations of some churchly leaders.³

Drawing on the commercialisation of religious items and services by Ghana’s neo-prophetic actors, this paper seeks to draw a relationship between existential insecurity, reliance on religion and the associated abuses. The paper assesses the factors that occasion consumers’ behaviour in patronising the services of these prophetic actors. We interrogate the ways in which the attempt to

³ Ultimatefmonline, 90% of Ghanaian churches now business entities – Pastor, Ghanaweb.com, 3 January 2017. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/90-of-Ghanaian-churches-now-business-entities-Pastor-498375>. See also Kwame Asare Boadu, “Tax churches on businesses they do,” *Daily Graphic*, September 2 2019. <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/tax-churches-on-businesses-they-do.html>; Kojo Emmanuel, “The church is not a business enterprise - Man of God,” May 11, 2020. <https://www.pulse.com.gh/news/local/the-church-is-not-a-business-enterprise-man-of-god/r9lrkz2>.

meet the demands of religious consumers yields itself to certain forms of violations and abuses.

In most of Africa, religion is debatably identified as pervading in almost every facet of human life. According to the Kenyan theologian, John S. Mbiti, Africans are notoriously religious.⁴ This view is reinforced by the Ghanaian scholar, Kofi Asare Opoku, who has observed that religion is so pervasive among Ghanaians that it is difficult to delineate the religious and non-religious aspects of Ghanaian lives.⁵ The pervasiveness of religion in Ghana's religious landscape, coupled with the many existential insecurities, has occasioned reliance on religious resources. This is closely evident in the upsurge in the number of churches, religious traditions, shrines, and mosques scattered across the country.⁶ Pentecostal Christianity, the fastest growing Christian denomination in African and beyond, has risen to respond to the many challenges confronting majority of the population. To be sure, many of the churches identified as Pentecostal fall under what is quite offensively labelled as 'one-man churches' categorised under the Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal strand of Christianity whose founders popularly refer to themselves as 'Prophets', 'Bishops', 'Rev. Drs' and 'Angels/ Archangels' among others.⁷

One of the religious practices that has begun to gain academic interest in this Pentecostal strand of Christianity is the commercialisation of religious paraphernalia and services to interested section of the Ghanaian populace who are known to express exponential demand for them. Owing to the incessant commercialization of spiritual gifts, some studies have described Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana as a business enterprise.⁸ Evidence of this is found in studies that show

⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Second Revised and Enlarged Edition (Gaborone: Heinemann Education Botswana (Publishers) (Pty) Ltd, 1989), 1.

⁵ Kofi Asare Opoku, "Aspects of Akan Worship", in *The Black Experience in Religion*, ed. Eric C. Lincoln, (New York: Doubleday, (1974): 286.

⁶ Karen Lauterbach, *Christianity, Wealth, and Spiritual Power in Ghana* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 91-92.

⁷ Seth Tweneboah, "Religion, Human Rights, and the Parliamentary Regulation of "One-Man Churches" in Ghana," *Journal of Church and State*, (2022):1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/csac074>

⁸ George Anderson Jnr, "Commercialisation of Religion in Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Ghana: Christian Ethical Analysis of their Strategies," *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 42, (2019): 1-8; David K. Okai, Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry on Some Television Stations in 21st Century: A Study of Prophetic Ministry in Ghana, *The American Journal of Biblical Theology*, 18, 20, (2017): 1-15; Francis Benyah, "Commodification of the Gospel and

that in some Neo-Prophetic Churches in Ghana, items such as anointing oils, eggs, soaps and bottle water are sold as high as GH¢ 2000 (US\$ 400), GH¢ 1000 (US\$ 200) and GH¢ 500 (US\$ 100).⁹

Over the years, this situation has raised significant concerns in the Ghanaian religious field. Some studies posit that neo-prophetic Christianity is characterised by financial extortions, abuses and the sale and purchase of assorted sanctified items and services between pastors or prophets and consumers of religion. These vulnerable clientele have been reported to have gone through some sort of financial extortions, and sexual, emotion, and physical abuses in their quest to find supernatural solutions to their daily predicaments.¹⁰ In spite of the unsurmountable evidence regarding the phenomenon of the commercialisation of religion among Ghanaian neo-prophetic actors, there is a worrying gap when it comes to what might be termed as the producer-consumer behaviour especially the factors that give rise to the phenomenon of commercialisation of religion.

This paper seeks to provide an understanding of the reasons that occasion the commercialization of religious services and items: religious dependence, opportunism and interdependency and the praxis of commercialisation. The paper aims to contribute to the academic map of knowledge creation by investigating the foundations of the phenomenon of commercialisation of religion and the abuses religious consumers are reported go through in their bid to find supernatural solutions to their plights. We begin our discussion with a brief overview and understanding of the concept of commercialization and then pay attention to the ways in which neo-prophetic actors have capitalized on the vulnerability of their clients. We pay particular attention to the implications of this situation, focusing on the abuses that occur.

Theoretical Framework and Relevant Literature

This paper hinges on the Religious Market Theory (RMT) which is based on the application of general market principles on activities

the Socio-Economics of Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Ghana. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 29, 2, (2018): 116-145.

⁹ Kuwornu-Adjaottor, Jonathan E. T. *Contemporary Prophetism in Kumasi*, 64; Anderson Jnr, *Commercialisation of Religion in Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Ghana*, 5.

¹⁰ George Anderson Jnr, "Ghana's Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity: Future Prospects," *ERATS*, 1,1, (2019): 16-27.

of religious organizations.¹¹ RMT can be conceived as a set of interrelated marketing concepts and propositions that could be used to explain and predict events or situations in religious organizations by specifying and interpreting market variables in relation to those of religion.¹²

RMT is said to be an outgrowth of Religious Economy Theory, which posits that in a religiously pluralistic society, the population, which is religious consumers, is presented with a wide range of religious or spiritual options to choose from. This situation yields to a competitive religious economy in which differing religious organisations compete for followers just as businesses compete for consumers in a market economy. Originally developed by Peter L. Berger in the 1960s, the theory has received wider application particularly in the 1980s when critics like Roger Finke, Laurence Iannaccone, William S. Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, developed Berger's inchoate theory into a comprehensive one. With the influence of these intellectual associates, Stark developed a more economic "supply-side" theory of religious behaviour. In elaborating this, Stark predicated his paradigm on the supposed virtues of the free market economy rather than those of the regulated economy, in meeting and stimulating needs for such consumer goods.

Matthias Opfinger has noted that the Religious Market Theory dwells on three pillars, namely 1) a monopolistic church is less motivated to exert effort to produce high quality religious goods than churches in a fully competitive market; 2) a monopolistic church can meet the needs of only a smaller portion of beliefs than many churches in competition, which implies that higher religious diversity should lead to higher levels of religiosity; and 3) market forces have crowded out religion.¹³ Opfinger explains that the rise of welfare states has invariably reduced the performative role of churches. As he notes, "many competing churches can supply better social services which attracts more people to each religion."¹⁴ A religious market entails religious activities, in a specific society. It is a spiritual market place of

¹¹ Bruno Tunderman, *Between Cliffs of the Religious Market Theory: An Exploration of the Religious Market Theory within a Secular Context*. Master Thesis Practical Theology, VU Amsterdam, (2013): 18.

¹² See Karen Glanz, The Role of Behavioral Science Theory in Development and Implementation of Public Health Interventions. *Annu Rev Public Health*, 31, (2010): 399-418.

¹³ Matthias Opfinger, "Religious Market Theory vs. Secularization: The Role of Religious Diversity Revisited," Leibniz Universität Hannover - Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät - Diskussionspapiere Discussion Paper; No. 475 (2011): 1-32.

¹⁴ Opfinger, "Religious Market Theory vs. Secularization," 3.

existing and potential worshippers; and religious cultures offered by religious organisations. Here religion is seen as a “commodity” and worshippers as “consumers” who shop for the religious goods and services on a market (religious organization).¹⁵ In other words, religious organizations are likened to firms or markets that produce and supply consumable religious goods and services. As Eric Sengers says, the religious market is not confined only to the vicinity of religious organisations. Instead, it extends to other places where transactions or exchange process takes place between ‘customers’ (rational actors) and religious organizations. Just as market economies thrive on competition, so too in the religious market, there is a competition to attract, win and maintain existing and new members, who are religious consumers.¹⁶

In spite of the diverse scholarly criticisms levelled against the Religious Market Theory, it still remains germane for an insightful appreciation of the discussion in this paper. For one thing, the theory is useful in providing critical explications of the market dynamics most religious organisations are involved in to carve a niche, achieve visibility, access potential followers, supply religious commodities, and understand the nature of, and the dynamic interactions that go on between religious consumers and religious organisations in an ever-flourishing religious field of Ghana.

Commercialisation of Religion

While religion is largely associated with things related to the ultimate reality, there are several ways in which religion can be and is actually commodified. Indeed, power and wealth acquisition are imperative in Pentecostalism. Amos Yong for instance, notes that prosperity Pentecostalism has introduced a “sanctified consumerism” or a “holy materialism.”¹⁷

‘Commercialisation’ has several meanings. The term can mean introducing or launching a commodity, selling and buying a product/commodity and service in a market environment to

¹⁵ Albert K. Wuaku, Selling Krishna in Ghana’s Religious Market: Proselytizing Strategies of the Sri Radha Govinda Temple Community of Ghana. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 30, 2, (2012): 337.

¹⁶ Roger Finke, & Rodney Stark, Religious Economies and Sacred Canopies: Religious Mobilization in American Cities. *American Sociological Review*, 53, 1, (February 1988): 42.

¹⁷ Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 19.

consumers.¹⁸ Commercialisation of religion in this paper means the sale and purchase of religious products (sanctified items) and services between consumers of religion and a church. It is important to realise that in neo-prophetic circles, the sale of religious items and services are not held as commercialisation; that is, commercialisation of religion does not mean selling and buying of religious items and services. Rather, in the activities of neo-prophetic actors such transactions are referred to as “offertory”; *afɔrebɔ* or *afɔdeɛ* – an act of giving out one’s financial resources in support of God’s work and in receipt for religious products that are believed to provide blessings and healing or solutions to the believer’s glitches.¹⁹ Commercialisation of religion, in this sense, is a situation whereby religious adherents are expected to pay for certain religious goods and services, including blessings and healing. In this sense, religion in this paper is largely referred to as religious products (sanctified items) and services. This meaning is consistent with Rodney Stark’s and Roger Finke’s²⁰ depiction of ‘religion’ as a commodity, or items/products on a religious market where pastors or prophets present them to religious consumers as an antidote to the consumers’ existential needs.

Scholarship on Pentecostalism has shown that “Pentecostal churches show a wide variety of forms, from back-room churches with a dozen members directed by one pastor, to mega-churches with millions of members, run as a religious enterprise by CEO-style leaders. This organizational diversity is part of Pentecostals’ capacity to adapt to local demands. It also reflects their able use of market strategies and entrepreneurial tools.”²¹ Emerging out of a humble beginning, a good portion of Ghanaian pastors and prophets have risen to become prominent big men of society. Yet as their churches grow, the affluent lifestyle of the leaders put significant burden on membership who have to contribute more to sustain the lavish lifestyle of these prophetic actors. Thus, tithing and monetary sowing of faith are presented as a surest way of obtaining divine blessings and success. Clients are promised divine blessing on the amount of money they contribute. Crucially, certain

¹⁸ Rana Eijaz Ahmad & Abida Eijaz, “Commercialisation of Religion in Pakistan”, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, vol. 1, no. 2, (2011): 186.

¹⁹ George Anderson Jnr, “God has Instructed me to Sell Questioning the Practice of Commercialisation of Religion in Neo-Prophetic and Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Ghana”. *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought*, 6, 2:178.

²⁰ For further reading, see Wuaku, *Selling Krishna in Ghana’s Religious Market*, 337.

²¹ Alan Anderson, Michale Bergunder, Andre Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 3.

sanctified items are presented to their religious consumers as the surest channel of accessing divine blessings, wealth and health. It is within this context that the sale of religious items has received prominence in Ghanaian neo-prophetic scholarship.

The religious products and services sold to religious consumers vary from church to church. David Okai for instance, has identified soap (black, rose, rope, healing, sulphur, pacholi scented, rue cyclarine, sandara, money (jackpot), and Jabon), Florida water, money perfume and Kananja water, myrrh breakthrough water and myrrh spiritual healing blood as the religious items commercialised to religious consumers by some churches.²² These items are believed to be potent enough to remedy the problem of religious consumers. Francis Benyah has identified books, stickers, wristbands, church paraphernalia/religious objects as tangible religious items, and healing and deliverance, or others related to the promise of a reward for a better future as intangible items often interpreted as “salvation goods” or “goods of pure belief” and guidance and counselling, *akwankyerε*.²³ George Anderson Jnr. has shown a special type of anointing oil known to believers as “the collector of fight and separator of fights” (*ɔpata ko agye ko abɔwobo*) and “iron cuts iron” (*dadie bi twa dadie*) with eggs as religious items sold by prophetic actors like Prophet Ebenezer Adarkwa Yiadom popularly known as Opambour to religious consumers in Ghana.²⁴

A key tenet of capitalism is that the success of a business owner is uniquely measured in terms of how much profit he or she earns. Market competition, we have said, is an essential component of capitalist economy. Thus, the ability of individuals to control the tools or means of production are crucial. This also leads to some form of rivalry. Put it another way, rivalry among sellers is an infrequent marker in the market competition. In neo-prophetic Christianity, too, power struggle among prophetic actors is a common occurrence. The success, power and wealth of a leader is determined by how much patronage they control. In fact, some prophetic actors have used the beauty and shape of their wives not only as their status symbol but also to insult their spiritual rivals.²⁵

²² Okai, *Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry*, 10-12.

²³ Benyah, *Commodification of the Gospel*, 126-7.

²⁴ Anderson Jnr, *God Has Instructed me to Sell*, 178-9.

²⁵ Edwin Lamptey, “Rev. Obofour flaunts his wife's 'assets' in front of his congregation.” October 18, 2018 Read more: <https://yen.com.gh/117454-rev-obofour-flaunts-wifes-assets-front-congregation.html>

Religious Consumer

In the market economy, consumers are held as playing a major role for the smooth running of the system. In the religious economic system, too, a religious consumer is a person who has preference and need for 'religion', religious meaning, or spirituality and consumes products and services of religion.²⁶ Such a person holds the staunch belief that religion possesses the revealed truth and efficacious solution to his/her lingering plights. Usually, he/she interacts with providers of religion that exhibit high-level religious satisfaction to religious consumers. At the research units, barren and pregnant women, impotent men, the sick, cripple, nurses, politicians, teachers/lecturers, students, pastors, accursed, police officers/soldiers, aged, visually impaired and the unemployed were identified as religious consumers. These were people, who at the same time, expressed political, social, psychological, religious, emotional, educational (promotion and successes in exams), economic and health needs.²⁷ Thus, they buy and patronise the religious products and services offered to them by religious specialists without necessarily registering any reservations about the latter.

Methodology

The research design for this study is exploratory, and it used the experiential survey method. This method helped the present study to obtain insight into the relationships between variables and new ideas relating to this research's problem.²⁸ The study was conducted in five Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, namely Ebenezer Miracle Worship Centre (Kumasi), International God's Way Church (Tema, Accra), Anointed Palace Chapel (Kumasi), House of Power Ministry (Kumasi) and Church of Bethesda (Accra). These churches were purposefully chosen because they are well known to be engaged briskly in the sale of religious goods, including services to their clientele. The two cities, Kumasi and Accra, are densely populated in Ghana. Moreover, the cities are characterised by a proliferation of Pentecostal,

²⁶ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 57-79, 195. Eric Sengers, *Do You Want to Receive a Missionary at Home?*, 6; Rodney Stark & William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (1996): 27-28, 32, 113.

²⁷ Anderson Jnr, "Commercialisation of Religion", 3.

²⁸ Cartik R. Kothari, *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*, (2nd rev. ed.). New Delhi: New Age International (P) Limited, Publishers, (2004): 35-36.

Charismatic, and Orthodox churches, making it an ideal field for pastors or prophets who are producers of religious goods to compete for church membership and maintaining existing ones. Besides, the two cities are well noted for brisk real-world commercial activities.²⁹ Thus, there is the likelihood that such commercial environment may influence the activities of church leaders.

Data were collected from September, 2018 to May, 2020 via interviews and focus group discussions on the phenomenon of commercialisation of religion and its ensuing abuses. The research techniques above were used to gather information on the study's objective. The principles of *epoché* and *eidetic intuition* in phenomenological studies were strictly adhered to. Adhering to the two principles helped to avoid biases and passing pointless judgments.

The study involved 40 (25 women, 15 men) participants as its sample size. The study involved 8 focus group discussants involving 5 women and 3 men in each church; and 8 members (5 men and 3 women) from each church were also interviewed. The participants' age ranged from 28-50 years. Eleven (10) of the participants were Ga speaking people and 30 were Asante. All the participants had had secondary education background. The participants comprised 20 traders, 8 teachers and 12 non-workers. The rationale was to find out what went on in relation to securing religious items and services from the churches for solution of their problems; and their experiences during the exchange processes. The study also sought to find out what influenced their decision to go for the religious items and services.

The participants were accessed via purposive sampling procedure. The purposive sampling procedure was used to select participants who had key information, involved in commercialisation of religion in the church, and were willing to share to achieve the study's set objectives³⁰. For the analysis of data, the study drew connections between the field data, literature and the Religious Market Theory (RMT).

²⁹ Ghana Statistical Service, *2010 Population and Housing Census: District Analytical Report, Kumasi Metropolitan*. Accra: Ghana Statistical Service, (2014): 18, 38.41.

³⁰ Ranjit Kumar, *Research Methodology: A Step-By-Step Guide for Beginners*, (2nd ed.), (Australia: Pearson Education, 2005):189.

Causes of Commercialisation of Religion in African Pentecostal Christianity

It is important to acknowledge that the commercialisation of religious products and services occur due to a number of factors. In a rather apologetic, emotional and somewhat contemptuous manner, David Okai, for example, has identified cultural markers of African spirituality which appears to find continuity in present-day Neo-Prophetic Christianity as one of the causes of commercialisation of religion.³¹ Cephas Narh Omenyo and Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, among other scholars have explained that the religio-cultural worldview of Ghanaians is an important reason that supports the perpetration of the practice.³² There is the general belief among Africans including Ghanaians that the forces of evil are in constant scuffle with the successes of humankind; and that every mishap has a spiritual dimension. In that regard, in order for one to earn protection from malevolent forces and to be successful in life; one needs to use the religious resources offered by “powerful” religious functionaries. This belief influences religious consumers to patronise religious functionaries at all cost in order to assuage and secure their protection.

In Ghanaian Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity, the fear of malevolent spirits and religious consumers’ quest to be delivered from the enemy – *atamfo*, the desire to become wealthy and healthy in life, and the hermeneutics on the prosperity gospel allows for more liberal interpretations that become a vanguard for commercialisation of religion.³³ The quest for wealth creation and the lucrative nature of commercialisation of religious products and services thereby account for the cause and perpetuation of the practice.³⁴ There is little point overemphasising that the desperation of religious consumers in their bid to get their existential needs quickly met is another cause of the commercialisation of religion. As Amos Yong has noted, “Pentecostalism has become religion of

³¹ Okai, *Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry*, 10-12.

³² Cephas Narh Omenyo & Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space, The Case of Neo-Propheticism in Ghana”. *Ghana Bulletin of Theology, New Series*, 1, 1, (July 2006): 62; Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye, Magic: Its Nature and Meaning in Traditional Akan Society in Ghana. *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*, 40, 1, (2008): 25-46. See also: Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, (1995): 77; Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*. Singapore: FEP International Private Ltd., (1978): 55-58.

³³ Benyah, *Commodification of the Gospel*, 119-124.

³⁴ Anderson Jnr, “*God Has Instructed me to Sell*”, 183.

choice in part because it promotes values that enable transition into and survival within the market economy.”³⁵

There have been accusations that illiteracy and ignorance serve as a reason why some religious followers are duped by their leaders. According to David Okai, for example, “there are a lot of literate Christians who do not study the Bible for themselves and for this reason are ignorant of the scriptures and the wicked schemes of their slave masters.”³⁶ This assertion implies that religious consumers who are involved in the commercialisation process lack understanding of their engagements. This, as a matter of fact, obscures the reality of the religious followers’ attraction to their leaders. As David C. Rose has noted, the challenge associated with high transaction costs in impoverished societies is not rooted in the fact that people in such societies lack intelligence, education, sophistication, or lawyers.³⁷ Personal interviews and observations revealed that consumption of religious goods leading to commercialisation is not limited to the so-called economically untutored. Indeed, patronisers of spiritual gifts cuts across all manner of professional backgrounds. According to Rita (a nurse), a key participant, her husband could not have had his promotion if not because she took a bold decision to present her husband’s academic papers to the prophet for spiritual guidance.³⁸ Moreover, as already indicated, there were some clergymen who had come to seek spiritual assistance from the prophet to surmount the challenges they faced in their church and marital homes.

Using Nigeria’s religious landscape as a typical example, Princewell A. Nwanganga has identified poverty and unemployment as the two major causes of commercialisation of religion. Nwanganga argues that the protracted search for gainful employment has caused many young people to be frustrated. This situation has compelled them to resort to pastoral work without genuinely called by God. This pastoral enterprise serves as means of livelihood option to them. Nwanganga indicates that in most cases those who are very good orators and are endowed with effective and rhetorical communication skills set up ministries which later metamorphose into full-fledged churches. This

³⁵ Yong, *In the Days of Caesar*, 21.

³⁶ Okai, *Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry*, 7.

³⁷ David C Rose, *The Moral Foundation of Economic Behaviour*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20.

³⁸ In fact, Rita showed the research team the documents. Three weeks later, she was in the church to testify with her husband about his promotion.

situation has led to church proliferation hence, fanning the embers of commercialization of religion in Nigeria.³⁹

Religious Dependence, Opportunism and Interdependency

As identified above, many causes of commercialisation of religion and its associated religious consumer abuses exist. We now turn our attention to three key interrelated causes of commercialization, largely ignored in the literature: *religious dependence, opportunism and interdependency*. Below we detail these in turns.

Religious dependence: Religious dependence refers to the situation whereby religious consumers rely solely on a pastor or prophet for all of their needs (spiritual, emotional, psychological) premised on the fact that the former is incapable of tapping into the supernatural realm unlike the latter who has the power to offer such a need. The absence of *religious dependence*, which initiates the entire phenomenon of commercialization of religion, renders the other two null and void. In other words, religious dependence gives rise to opportunism and interdependency in the commercialisation and abuse processes in the churches. It follows that anytime religious consumers depend on their religious leaders (prophets, pastors, priests/priestesses) for solutions to their needs, there is the high tendency of the rise of opportunism on the part of the prophets or pastors, which then leads to interdependency between religious consumers and religious leaders (prophets, pastors and priests).

In the commercialisation chain, religious dependence, as already indicated above is the starting point. It usually starts with the religious consumer. The dependence is usually motivated by the religious consumer's quest, and inability to personally and naturally address his/her personal existential needs; be it social, psychological, educational, emotional and more importantly religious. The dependence is usually the fruit of the religious worldview of the religious consumer. As already indicated elsewhere in this paper, Africans including Ghanaians' religious orientation is that nothing happens in a vacuum. In this regard, the

³⁹ Princewell A. Nwanganga, "Church Commercialisation in Nigeria: Implications for Public Relations Practice," *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, 28, (2017): 1-11.

religious consumer attributes all mishaps and good fortunes to the activities of malevolent and benevolent spirits. In that sense, since the believer has preference and need for religion (i.e., religious meaning, or spirituality) religion would be seen as the only remedy to his/her existential needs.

At the research units, we gathered that congregants expressed so much confidence in, and over reliance on their prophets or pastors. They usually disclosed to their prophets their secrets and every happening in their life. Majority of the participants including Mary, Akosua and Fremaa, for instance, revealed that they could not trust any of their family relatives with their existential problems; thus, they trust and solely depend on their prophets and the spiritual direction (*akwankyerε*) they give to them.⁴⁰ Interviewing our participants, we gathered that they relied on the directives of their prophets or pastors in every decision they took. In other words, they could not have taken any personal decision (be it marriage, business, education, health or distress) without relying on the counsel of their prophets or pastors. Moreover, they expressed so much satisfaction and confidence in their prophets and the religious paraphernalia they received from them. This finding describes the phenomenon of dependence of religious consumers on their prophets or pastors.

Opportunism: In a market economy, opportunism simply refers to “a condition of self-interest seeking with guile” involving but not limited to more blatant forms, such as lying, stealing, and cheating.⁴¹ Opportunism is said to, more often, involve subtle forms of deceit.” It is simply a condition of taking advantage of circumstances - with little regard for principles or with what the consequences are for others. In the religious market system, opportunism flows out of religious dependence. It is occasioned by the religious leaders, in our context, prophets. It becomes actualized when religious leaders come to terms with the fact that religious consumers revere them as ‘superhuman figures’ who are the only persons capable of addressing their predicaments. In that regard, religious leaders/prophets display supremacy, dwell on the religious artlessness and gullibility of religious consumers, invoke fear, display their spiritual capabilities and thus take advantage of

⁴⁰ Interview with Mary, Akosua and Fremaa, October 24, 2018.

⁴¹ Oliver E. Williamson, *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism*, (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 3; see also Rose, *The Moral Foundation of Economic Behaviour*.

them. This helps the prophets or pastors to regulate and dictate the religious and human behaviours of his followers in order to have access to and control over their resources.

At the research units, we gathered that congregants were unable to question the authority of their prophets or pastors. Congregants act in accordance with the demands and prescriptions of their prophets. They exhibit this attitude by buying or patronising every sanctified item or service offered to them on sale without any reproach. In Ghana and elsewhere, media reports abound on prophets and pastors who have and continue to dupe their congregants by taking possession of their cars, houses, gold bars, money, and have engaged their associate pastors' wives and some desperate congregants in sexual fantasies. As will be detailed later, there are reports of prophets and pastors who blatantly insult, fondle the breasts, and sell fake religious or sanctified items to their congregants which never worked out their purpose. This phenomenon is what we have termed as opportunism.

Interdependency: This is largely a product of *religious dependence* and *opportunism*. Interdependency depicts a kind of demand and supply chain of interaction between the religious consumers and their prophets or pastors. Usually, the interdependency interaction is championed and dictated by the prophets or pastors. Here, religious leaders or prophets on the one hand depend on religious consumers for their material and financial resources and satisfaction to enrich themselves, while on the other hand, religious consumers also derive their religious/spiritual, emotional, social, psychological satisfaction from the former.

At the research units, it was observed that some sanctified items such as two, four and eight bottles of anointing oil respectively are sold for GH¢ 500 ((US\$ 100), GH¢ 1000 (US\$ 200) and GH¢ 2000 (US\$ 400).⁴² One would want to find out why the price of the religious products would be sold at a very high price. It was revealed that the congregants solely depended on the items, and they have been conditioned to believe that God has endorsed its use. Moreover, they have been taught by their prophets that all other religious items procured by different prophets or pastors are not genuine, and have the potential of escalating their conditions. This kind of belief compels religious consumers to continuously

⁴² Presently, the exchange rate at the bank in Ghana is around GH ¢14.41 to 1 US dollar. The exchange rate at the time this study was conducted was GH ¢ 5.00 to 1 US dollar. The Ghana currency always devalues and scarcely appreciates.

patronise the prophets. It is important to underscore that the interdependency bond is very difficult to break. This is because the prophets or pastors frighten their congregants with curses, death and madness in the event that they seek to withdraw their allegiance and patronage of their services and sanctified items.

Religious Consumer Abuses

In a free-market economy business owner make decisions about their products and properties with no interference from the government. In other words, free market economies are based on voluntary exchange. At the same time, however, the government plays certain key traditional roles to ensure that consumers of goods and services, and indeed the public, are protected from any form of unfair practices in the marketplace. This traditional role includes enacting and enforcing laws that seek to safeguard consumers. Thus, state legislative regimes regarding the welfare of consumers aims to prevent business owners from engaging in fraudulent or certain unjust practices that inure only to the advantage of business owners. In the religious field too, similar situation can be observed. In Ghana, for example, as a constitutionally secular state, while the state does not interfere with the activities and operations of the religious groups, there are certain situation in which the state can step in to offer protection for its citizenry who may be impacted by the activities and operations of religious actors. Given that majority of the population live in place with no or limited state reach, a lot of religious abuses have been committed by religious actors. In this section, therefore, we want to call attention to the various abuses consumers suffer. We present the different levels of violations that religious consumers suffer from the hands of their leaders.

Indeed, Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in and outside Ghana, have provided us with marked instances whereby religious consumers go through different forms of abuses.⁴³ The abuses are mostly physical, emotional, psychological, financial and sexual in nature, details of which we provide in the ensuing discussion. In terms of physical abuses, some important studies have shown that given its relatively recent start, there is an impressive spread of the number of the Pentecostal faithful worldwide. Today, the movement is seen as the most rapidly

⁴³ Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches that Abuse*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992): 53-54; Okai, *Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing*, 6; Anderson Jnr, *God Has Instructed me to Sell*, 174.

expanding religious movement in the world. According to some studies,

Within the last past thirty years there has been an estimated 700 percent increase in the number of Pentecostal believers, who represent about a quarter of the world's Christian population and two-thirds of all Protestants. The rapid expansion of Pentecostalism has pushed so-called mainstream Protestantism into a minority position. It is not uncommon to see Pentecostalism presented as a modality on its own, at the same level as Catholicism and Protestantism. The growth of Pentecostalism has raised a challenge to ecumenism cooperation.⁴⁴

Like many firms that once had monopoly-like power which have now seen their market position diminished over time, historic churches have seen a diminution of their hitherto power, numerical strength and social respectability. Evidence of this is seen in the increasing growth of Pentecostalism in Ghana over the last two decades at the time the historic churches have witnessed a gradual decline in their numbers. Pentecostalism's ability to offer solution to the existential needs of its adherents has become a major capital for it to take over the hitherto monopoly that the historic churches had over members of society, making Pentecostalism to flourish to become a global movement with wider appeal. Their ability to offer spiritual solution to the mundane happenings of their members has become a moving motivation for its wider appeal. Yet, in their attempts to help adherents overcome their daily struggles, certain forms of abuses and violations have been reported. Typical examples of this situation include instances whereby pastors or prophets subject their members to physical abuses for the members' failure to adhere to their leaders' spiritual prognosis. There have been situations whereby worshippers are compelled to carry a 50 kilogram of cement bag(s) for hours through a long distance for their failure to stake a lottery number the leader reportedly gave them either in physical or spiritual realm.⁴⁵ There

⁴⁴ Alan Anderson, Michale Bergunder, Andre Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 3.

⁴⁵ George Anderson Jr, *Ghana's Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity*, 24; Ghabase, "Obinim punishes woman to carry a bag of cement around for lotto number," *Ghanaweb.com* 4 May 2018.

are those who received multiple head knocks, hit with plastic chairs, spanked, walked and sat on.

In fact, there have been reported cases of some followers having their private parts hardly and harshly stepped on. Over the years, there have been reported cases of women who have undergone various forms of sexual violations as part of their search for spiritual security. Some of them have been reportedly had their private parts shaved and bathed by male pastors while others have had their breasts fondled, kissed, buttocks caressed and are also involved in sexual intimacy. In reported cases, these religious consumers are women who out of desperation for the fruit of the womb go to the extent of forfeiting their sacred marital vows to engage in surreptitious sexual intimacy with prophets or pastors under duress.⁴⁶

Religious consumers are also verbally and emotionally abused with insults by prophets. The experience of one of the authors of this paper and his team is telling here. As participant observers, one of the team members was insulted by a prophet during the fieldwork. The member was abused for refusing to believe in certain prophetic utterances of the prophet. In the midst of the entire congregation, the prophet referred to a member of the research team as “an ugly fool.” Unsurprisingly, to avert further insults from the prophet, the researcher in question conceded to the prophet’s ‘fake’ prophecy. According to some of our participants, there have been occasions whereby associate pastors of the church involved yelled at them, mislabeling them as insensible because they refused to sit at a place where they were instructed to sit.⁴⁷

Rev Adjei, a pastor and key participant narrated how he felt emotionally abused and embarrassed by a prophet after informing the prophet of his desire to get spiritual assistance to enable him address the challenges bedeviling his church. According to Rev Adjei, the prophet asked him why he couldn’t pray to God for help, but rather came to seek for him assistance. Rev Adjei revealed that the prophet’s comment embarrassed him and rendered him spiritually useless in the midst of the entire congregation.⁴⁸ There were other religious consumers who we observed were emotionally and verbally abused by prophets and their assistants at the research units after their private issues were disclosed openly to the rest of

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/entertainment/Obinim-punishes-woman-to-carry-a-bag-of-cement-around-for-lotto-number-648925>

⁴⁶ Okai, *Evaluating the Effects of Merchandizing Ministry*, 6.

⁴⁷ Interview with Ama, Yaa, Sammy, Esi and Adjoa on February 6, 16, 26, 2019.

⁴⁸ Interview with Rev. Adjei on March 20, 2018.

the congregation which incited several unpleasant comments and laughter.

Religious consumers are also yelled at and embarrassed for late response to the prophet's call. Felicity, a key participant, indicated that a prophet referred to her as stupid, uncivilised and unserious in the midst of the rest of the entire congregation. According to her, sitting far behind the large congregation, she couldn't audibly hear the prophet calling out people associated with the problem she finds herself in. It was her sister who prompted her to attend to the prophet's call. When she rushed to see the prophet, she said, she was insulted and embarrassed. According to Felicia, this scene made her so ashamed that she could not pay attention to the spiritual direction the prophet eventually gave her to pursue to get her plights resolved.⁴⁹

Importantly, in the attempt to commercialise their spiritual gifts, some prophets have abused religious consumers financially by selling to them religious products and services at exorbitant rates. It has been revealed by some studies that, in the sacred spaces of religious market, some prophets sell anointing oils with eggs, perfumes, bottle water, soaps, witches' pomade, and miracle bangles as high as GH¢ 2000 (US\$ 400), GH¢ 1000 (US\$ 200) and GH¢ 500 (US\$ 100), which in actual sense would have cost lesser in the everyday commercial market. In some instances, prophets extort money from religious consumers by asking them to pay GH¢ 200 before they could prophesy or reveal secrets concerning their lives, and the reasons for their misfortunes. Religious consumers are also made to buy varieties of religious products at different costs to be used as mediums to surmount their problems, which product in some cases have been found to be incapable of surmounting their problems.⁵⁰

Essentially, there is also the use of fear to regulate the religious behaviour of religious consumers.⁵¹ It has been shown that in the religious field, the existential problems of religious consumers, and the knowledge religious organisations have about religious consumers' problems influence how the latter treat the

⁴⁹ Interview with Felicity October 24, 2018.

⁵⁰ Anderson Jnr, *Commercialisation of Religion*, 5.

⁵¹ See Steve Mochechane, *Dealing with Fear and Anxiety in Pentecostalism: The Bushiri-Phenomenon in Pretoria*. A CHSSA paper presented at the Third Conference of Academic Societies in the Fields of Religion and Theology. University of Pretoria, (11-15 July, 2016).

former.⁵² Pastor or prophets, thus, employ fear or superstition to control religious consumers. Deploying the notions of demonic and satanic influences, they compel religious consumers into buying and using religious products and services for the purpose of protection against their enemies. As Lucius M. Plutarch tells us, fear and superstition clouds most of the religious consumer's rationality, and thereby condition his/her decision and choice-making processes in the religious market.⁵³

In all the study units, we gathered that prophets and their associates maneuver their way by invoking fear to regulate the religious behaviour of their congregants to influence them to patronise their services and products. Neo-Prophetic Pentecostal/Charismatic pastors and prophets in Ghana use fear as a strategy to regulate the religious behaviour of religious consumers in order to buy their religious products and services.⁵⁴ They do this by accusing some close relations of their followers as witches, thus attributing every failure or mishap experienced by their followers to the so-called witches in their circle.⁵⁵ Paul Gifford, for example, has narrated how the renowned prophet, Owusu Bempah, founder of End Time Power Ministry International instilled fear in the followers of Prophet Salifu Amoako's convention on 31st January, 2001 in order to regulate their religious behaviour and to adhere to his biddings.⁵⁶ According to Gifford, Prophet Owusu Bempah told a woman that she was going to die of stroke if she failed to pay the sum of money he had invited the congregants to pay. This threat of fear consequently induced the woman to pay the money.

⁵² Frank Cole Babbit, (Ed. and Trans. in English). *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. VI, London: Cambridge Mass, (1938), 2; Enroth, *Churches that Abuse*, 53-54. See also Mochechane, *Dealing with Fear and Anxiety in Pentecostalism*, 2.

⁵³ Babbit, *Plutarch's Moralia*, 2.

⁵⁴ Omenyo and Atiemo, *Claiming Religious Space*, 62; See also Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Signs, Wonders, and Ministry: The Gospel in the Power of the Spirit". *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, 1, (2009):36; Frimpong Wiafe, & Harriet Clotney, "Ghanaian Christian Understanding of the Concept of Enemy with Reference to Psalm 35: 1 - 10: A Case Study of Some Selected Churches under the Neo-Prophetic Strand of Ghanaian Christianity". *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, 2, 11, (2015): 1709.

⁵⁵ George Anderson Jnr, *Commercialisation of Religion*, 6.

⁵⁶ Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 101.

Conclusion

Focusing on the commercialization of religious items and services by Ghana's neo-prophetic actors, this paper has brought to light the foundations of the phenomenon of commercialisation of religion and its related religious consumer abuses in today's African Pentecostal Christianity. The paper was driven by the observation that Sub-Saharan African Pentecostal Christianity is akin to a business enterprise. This is because it is characterised by the sale and purchase of assorted 'sanctified items' and the provision of religious services by pastors or prophets to consumers of religion; it also involves financial and material extortions and the abuses these consumers of religion suffer. This phenomenon raised the question; what could be the foundations of this practice and its ensuing abuses?

The paper has revealed a chain of interconnected relations in terms of *religious dependence*, *opportunism* and *interdependency* as the basis of commercialization of religion and its ensuing abuses in neo-prophetic churches particularly in Ghana. This means, the total dependence of religious followers on their leaders influences the latter to take advantage of the former to exploit, and in most cases abuse them and thus depend on each other for their survival. The paper suggests a state regulation of the activities of religious organisations. This will bring sanity on the religious landscape.

The findings of this paper allow a recommendation that consumers of religion should rather express much belief, reliance and confidence in Jesus Christ who is the way to the Christian God than their prophets or pastors. Prophets or pastors should treat their congregants as an end in themselves; but not as a means to an end, and they should accord them with worth and dignity instead of putting fear in them and abusing them. Furthermore, prophets or pastors should not use their congregants to enrich themselves under the guise of helping them to address their existential needs.