PENTECOSTALISM AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

REIMAGINING THE PENTECOSTAL LANDSCAPE, POLITICS, AND VISION

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Abstract

A growing body of literature on African Pentecostals in sub-Saharan Africa is highlighted in this article, highlighting a more defined contribution of African Pentecostals to the development landscape. Until recently, the African Pentecostal development landscape recorded little visibility at the national level, on the assumption that their experience only highlights cultural and theological relevance. However, this emerging visibility has identified, as a conceptual category, an imaginary social space with practical ramification. Based on a critical analytical review of literature, this article examines the shift from traditional Pentecostal theology to a more focused attention on the social transformation created by a post-colonial discourse on development in Africa. We argue that there is an imaginary social space occupied by Pentecostal theology, providing it, not just a voice of influence as a social movement, but a reconstructive identity of power in development that also integrates into political spheres. The cases of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria, and the Church of Pentecost, Ghana, exemplify this. Their social space has distinctive expressions that link a constructive integral aspect of Pentecostal theology to contribute to their social responsibility. This article suggests that such an understanding is better explained when considering African Pentecostal progression in this imaginary social space. We recommend that African Pentecostals and the development sector create awareness of this space through a dialogical approach.
**Introduction**

In recent years, Pentecostal social engagement in West Africa has led to many changes, especially in the community development landscape, accounting for the idea of secular transformation rather than the traditional Pentecostal theology of mission. An evaluation of the shift in theology from the first to the third response to Christianity to “set the captive free”¹ is crucial for understanding the contribution of African Pentecostals to community development. Despite the increasing literature on African Pentecostal development, the area of this “shift” remains insufficiently explained, suggesting a further analysis of this theological, social, and development landscape.

Terminologies such as “development,” “African Pentecostals,” and the “imaginary social space” employed here allowed us to make some inferences to understand them better. First, we adopt the term “African Pentecostals,” often described as Africa’s third response to Christianity, to identify their collective contribution, rather than their classification and categories.² By focusing on their progression and shift in theology, this article observes that they occupy a “space”³ that highlights their contribution. Second, development is a broad, complex concept. To map its interaction, we borrowed from Richard Burgess’ categories related to the intersecting landscape of politics, economics, human rights, and peacebuilding.⁴ Finally, some scholars have identified this “space” as an “emerging development practice” of the African Pentecostal social movement in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ For instance, Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu

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¹ See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Mission to ‘Set the Captives Free’: Healing, Deliverance, and Generational Curses in Ghanaian Pentecostalism,” *International Review of Mission* 93 (2004), 370–371, 389–406, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2004.tb00468.x. According to the author, the catchphrase to “set the captive free” is associated with the phenomenon of “healing deliverance” linked with Africa’s new Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement and churches, serving as a restoration ministry that encompasses holistic pastoral care to their followers. At the heart of this movement is being freed to partake in the abundant provision of God through Christ. This also in a way de-identifies distinctly African Pentecostals with the emerging liberation theology that took shape in South America and elsewhere around 1968. Although it emerged under similar circumstances (poverty, hardship, deprivation) as the African Pentecostal movement, liberation theology focused more on the worsening social conditions created by dominant cultures. However, for the African Pentecostals, culture was crucial in their theological development. See also Kwame Bediako, “What is the Gospel?,” *Transformation* 14:1 (1997), 1–4. Like Badiako mentioned, taking control of one’s destiny (spiritual) within God’s providence (material) for humankind was their ultimate eschatological call. Hence the infusion of African theological thought into Christianity that allows the gospel to be relevant in all areas of life for human flourishing, setting the captive free.


³ A conceptual category we identify as imaginary social space with practical ramification.


⁵ Although we considered increasing literature on these various spaces and emerging development practices, we confined ourselves to the works of Burgess (*Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development*),
perceived this space in the Ghanaian context as created by Africa’s third response to Christianity based on contextual and cultural factors and its post-independence development challenges. Other researchers agree with this contention by noting sociological, contextual, and theological aspects. For instance, they explained that the introduction of neoliberal reforms, which led to the deterioration of the quality of life and an increased inequality gap in Nigeria, created this space. By leaning on these scholars, this article linked these thoughts and explored the definition of this “space” and likened it to an “imaginary social space.” The rationale is that this imaginary social space with practical ramification sits within Africa’s third response to Christianity with the realities of neoliberal reforms in context, giving room to African Pentecostalism to operate and experiment with its expression.

This study is divided into three sections. The first section introduces this imaginary social space by examining the African Pentecostal transition, vision, and social movement. Section two explains the post-independence and political landscape in this space, and with cases from the Church of Pentecost, Ghana, and the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria, it identifies the cause of the theological shift and the uniqueness of the imaginary social space. The last section concludes the article with a missiological implication, serving as an African Pentecostal contribution to occupying this imaginary social space and the need for dialogue.

The Imaginary Social Space

Scholars have yet to clarify whether Africa’s third response to Christianity among Pentecostals in sub-Saharan Africa distinctively responds to its features in engaging social conditions across many countries. Although this expression appears inclusive of a development language in economic, socio-political, and cultural landscapes, its growth is fast becoming the expression of faith in sub-Saharan Africa. While in some parts of West Africa, such as Ghana and Nigeria, this growing experience may be seen as

Asamoah-Gyadu (African Charismatics), and Afe Adogame (“African Christianities and the Politics of Development from Below,” HTS: Theological Studies 72:4 [2016], 1–11) to enhance and define the imaginary social space.


contributing to “church growth,”\textsuperscript{9} it has also unintentionally reintroduced theology into the development landscape. The reintroduction of theology into the development landscape seeks to create an identity for African Pentecostals. Thus, the revitalization of dual “epistemic theology”\textsuperscript{10} of the coexistence of the physical and the spirit worlds defines what it means to set the captive free.

Richard Burgess’ monograph provides a mapping of the “Pentecostal development” landscape that links failed neoliberal reforms and economic challenges in Nigeria to highlight the contribution of African Pentecostals in the imaginary social space.\textsuperscript{11} Although Burgess focuses on Nigerian Pentecostals in studying this “emerging development practice,” he extends the understanding of this development space, tracing it to the diaspora, particularly in Britain and the United States, to explain the relevance of its “contextual, sociological, and theological” factors.\textsuperscript{12} The emphasis is that this new form of Christianity brings together effects of “democratisation and neoliberal economic reforms” away from the state into the public sphere to construct their identity.\textsuperscript{13} This interfaces with Afe Adogame’s view on “African social responsibility.”\textsuperscript{14}

For Adogame, this identity is partly due to much of the attention given to the Pentecostal theology of social responsibility, which explains the theology of mission in context.\textsuperscript{15} This links Asamoah-Gyadu’s approach to what it means to set the captive free.\textsuperscript{16} Adogame’s context focuses on Europe and Africa, where African Pentecostals function as religious support networks and “registered main charities” in partnership with some development sectors to influence their community.\textsuperscript{17} Both Burgess and Adogame distinguished the essence of this theological identity within the competing imaginary social space.\textsuperscript{18} Although both scholars examined this emerging development from their different socio-cultural contexts, they converged because of their similar struggles for identity, giving visibility to this development landscape. Similarly, in the

\textsuperscript{11} Burgess, \textit{Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development}, ii, thus, connecting the “intersecting spheres of politics, economics, health, education, human rights, and peacebuilding.”
\textsuperscript{12} Burgess, \textit{Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development}, 2.
\textsuperscript{13} Burgess, \textit{Nigerian Pentecostalism and Development}, 3.
\textsuperscript{14} Adogame, “African Christianities,” 1–11. According to Adogame, such distinctive roles are visible because of the deteriorating government’s conventional approaches, which could no longer be sustained.
\textsuperscript{16} Asamoah-Gyadu, “Mission to Set the Captive Free,” 390.
development space, others refer to the Pentecostal Movement, linking with the African transition from colonial to postcolonial development, giving Pentecostals an inclusive outlook.\(^{19}\) The assumption here is that this emerging development practice of African Pentecostals within the development space pays attention to theological and social factors to address moral ills and alleviate poverty in the local community.

Besides, Ogbu Kalu positions Pentecostals in context and discusses their progression, arguing that this new movement sought to find its identity and fill both the theological and social gaps within the African transition from colonial to a self-gratified identity.\(^{20}\) This identity merges with the inclusive perceived secular roles. Allan Anderson also concludes, “Pentecostals do not always separate the spiritual from the physical, but integrate them in a holistic whole, leading to involvement in social issues and politics.”\(^{21}\) The confluence and continuing emphasis on this space and African Pentecostal theology suggests that the quest to refine a Pentecostal theology that takes root within the African context draws the developmental deficit and a political twist to it.

Several alternative observations by scholars indicate the influence of Africa’s third response to social transformation and its impact in the West African context. Asamoah-Gyadu discussed the relevance of the response and its interface with the African Pentecostal transition, highlighting six thematic areas that identify the progression and idea of setting the captive free.\(^{22}\) According to Dena Freeman and Olufunke Adeboye, although the circumstances that gave rise to the fall of neoliberal thinking and aided the rise of Pentecostalism into this landscape in Africa are distinctively different, they serve a similar struggle for theological identity.\(^{23}\)


\[^{22}\] Asamoah-Gyadu, “Spirit and Empowerment,” 34. According the author, the integration of charismatic renewal into expressions of Christianity brought a practical orientation towards salvation that created the theological space for rituals that accommodated real needs such as health, unemployment, marriage, and success in business; dynamic pneumatology in which the empowering presence of God was coveted not just for the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit but also for various practical life concerns; the use of oral theology in liturgical expressions such as the use of locally composed choruses and the narrations of personal testimonies of salvation; and an innovative gender ideology in which space was created for women to exercise leadership based on their charismatic experiences rather than the stereotypes that excluded them from Christian leadership.

This third response gives visibility to a void we observed as the imaginary social space with practical ramification, highlighting a reconstructive Pentecostal theology. Other than one case of identity in this Pentecostal landscape, Asamoah-Gyadu’s approach evidenced various contextual and cultural issues that support the theological space because of the post-independence development challenges in sub-Saharan Africa. For John Gichimu and Atinuke Abdulsalami, the task of extrapolating prayers, church services, sermons, rituals, and songs from more normative Christian conventions to a contextual form of African theology, engaging its diaspora community experience, could only be a response to an identity that satisfies theological and social needs. As various scholars demonstrate, Pentecostals have transitioned over time into this imaginary social space, creating several platforms to evolve, contextualize, and extend their development practices. As such, the core argument is that the occupation of these multiple landscapes creates an imaginary social space yet with practical ramification within Africa’s three responses to Christianity into which the African Pentecostals sought to fit, reconstructing an identity that is gradual and broad, and intentionally or unintentionally draws into the African political landscape.

African Pentecostal Vision and Pentecostal Transition

Many scholars may not easily connect the African Pentecostal vision with its social movements such as religious, cultural, and social capital. The underlying assumption, as Gerrie ter Haar and Stephen Ellis mention, is that religion “seemed irrelevant to the processes they were analysing other than, perhaps, as an obstacle to modernisation.” This may be true, considering that African Pentecostals’ experience has always assumed and highlighted cultural and theological relevance, giving its social responsibility little visibility at the national level of the development landscape. However, there are various movements that scholars accept as part of the traditional African Pentecostal theology of mission that covers its vision to set the captive free, encompassing the community’s spiritual and social conditions. Crucial is the “prosperity gospel that makes material gain a spiritual virtue,” and the Pentecostal civil responsibility that stretches into the

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political landscape.\textsuperscript{27} How these movements are interrelated is often obscured, due to the lack of a clear “articulated theological foundation for social ministry” and the operational approaches they employ, giving them less visibility to their contributions.\textsuperscript{28} We argue that this African Pentecostal transition holds a crucial “shared-value experience” for Pentecostals, whose vision is to be the voice of the disadvantaged.\textsuperscript{29} As an actual course for African Pentecostals, this imaginary social space has thus optimized its vision and the reliability of the social movement within the increasing socioeconomic fragility of society.

Pentecostal progression has seen arguments of social movements linked to African Pentecostals and development. However, the non-reliability on external donors and distinctive features, such as cultural, social, and religious capital, set African Pentecostals as a point of departure from dependency. The rationale is demonstrated by David Korten’s fourth-generation development paradigm as “relief and welfare,” “community development,” “sustainable system development,” and “people centred,” giving clear evidence of their perceived closeness to community organizing experience.\textsuperscript{30}

For instance, Asamoah-Gyado believes that the surge in the social movement and progression of Ghanaian Pentecostals connected mediating factors such as religious and cultural “capital.”\textsuperscript{31} Others contend that it has changed and shifted the community narratives and development dialogue as a point of departure from the neoliberal reforms in Nigeria, offering Pentecostals the voice of influence in the imaginary social space.\textsuperscript{32} However, the gap identified here is that although African Pentecostals have progressed

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] Anderson, “Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development,” 123.
\item[28] Anderson, “Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development,” 128.
\item[29] Anderson, “Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development,” 124. As Allan Anderson notes, “There is an increasing awareness of the potential of Pentecostalism for a politically and socially relevant engagement, particularly because of its tendency to attract marginalised and working-class people.”
\end{footnotes}
into this space, there is little information on the cause of this shift in theology. Below, we attempt to identify the cause of the theological shift by drawing on the post-independence African Pentecostal and political landscapes. By identifying the cause of this shift, we hope to establish a case for the uniqueness of this imaginary social space.

**African Pentecostals, Post-independence, and the Political Landscape**

Some Pentecostal scholars recognized the 1940–1960s period as the first major wave of the Pentecostal Movement in West Africa. The “Pentecostal movement was, to an extent, defined by its eschatology of premillennialism and expectation of the imminent rapture.” They limit their liturgical emphasis and hermeneutical stance on the theology of holiness for eschatological preparation. By inference, this movement paid little attention to social development, as fundamentalists set their camp against modernism. However, from the 1960–1970s, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana, the second wave of the movement expanded modestly in membership, with greater contextualization of Africanism and Pentecostal vision to set the captive free.

The surge in Pentecostalism in the 1960s also witnessed a period of great expectation of post-independence euphoria on social and political development in the sub-region. Some leading political figures, for example, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (1909–1972), rhetorically assured, “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all else shall be added unto you.” However, with the immediate post-independence political and social troubles in the 1960s, the expected socio-economic development in the sub-region was not realized.

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36 Nel, “Pentecostal Hermeneutical Considerations about Women in Ministry,” 6.


Rather than actualizing the dividends of political independence, the government could not fulfill its developmental responsibilities. This created room for non-governmental and non-profit agencies, including faith-based organizations, to gradually venture into the imaginary social space for social responsibilities in West Africa. As promising, Pentecostals position themselves to meet society’s needs. As Anderson argued, they appealed to underprivileged West African communities for membership. This marks the beginning of the gradual Pentecostal incursion into areas of theological, social, and developmental landscape of responsibility in West Africa.

The third generation, emerging in the 1980s with mega-churches and prosperity gospels, has been playing a significant role in the socio-economic and political development of their societies. With their mega-church philosophies, the Neo-Pentecostals tend to motivate “people to translate their salvation into practical everyday achievements in business, education, economics and family life.” Common to them in West Africa “is that God rewards faithful Christians with good health, financial success and material wealth, ‘according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.’” While this philosophy partly highlights the prosperity gospel, it does not sufficiently offer Pentecostals the theology of social responsibility for an incursion and shift in theology into the imaginary social space of development and political landscape. As such, we identify that this emerging Pentecostal visibility responded to theological, developmental, and social-political gaps for sociological, contextual, and cultural reasons to occupy this imaginary social space.

African Pentecostal Leadership and Upward Mobility

Here, we will examine how this imaginary social space with practical ramification interacts with the West African development narrative by considering the cases of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Nigeria, and the Church of Pentecost (CoP), Ghana, landscapes to understand the shift in theology. These cases connect the development, social, and theological landscapes, assuming their importance for four

41 Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 31, 43; Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 141–42.
42 Anderson, “Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development,” 12. Anderson notes that Pentecostal churches “have a significant role to play in the social development of their members and their communities.”
44 Asamoah-Gyadu, African Charismatics, 1.
45 Asamoah-Gyadu, African Charismatics, 2.
reasons: (1) they share some resemblance in the mode of social engagement; (2) their emergence around the 1950s coincide; (3) they suggest the cause of the shift; and (4) they have become arguably the most influential transnational networking Pentecostal movement in the history of Africa’s third response to Christianity with a “missionary impulse.”

The Case of Ghana

In Ghana’s case, this section attempts to draw on the CoP’s experiences within this imaginary social space to situate Pentecostal leadership and upward mobility.

CoP and the Theological Space

The CoP is the largest Pentecostal denomination in Ghana, with a membership of about 9% of the population. The shift in its traditional Pentecostal theology identified space for community development and social transformation in almost every district they occupy.

Prior to the leadership transfer between 1950–1982, the CoP’s core mandate was primarily the emphasis on the theology of holiness and Holy Ghost baptism, with no attention to social or political participation, like the RCCG theological thinking around the same time. However, the second-generation transformation, as a theological shift, occurred in a way that necessitated some usefulness. First, the leadership transfer is contextual and culturally relevant today because it witnessed a theological shift that engaged a biblical interpretation that “God is interested in the communities,” addressing the local community’s need. Second, it served as a point of departure from the “foreign outlook” in its context. By inference, this oral culture exemplifies the vision that gives credence to the surge in the CoPs’ emerging development practices, while simultaneously reinvigorating theology into the development space. Although the CoP’s core receptor is “its oral cultural functions and social value,” it does not entirely...
underpin the shift. Instead, oral culture as a logical system emphasised the importance of the contextual and theological relevance with practical ramification of the CoP in this imaginary social space. For the CoP, this is evident in their leadership landscape.

We contend that although contextual culture played a crucial role and was intricately connected in highlighting the shift, it was not the trigger for the shift. Rather, we conclude that the core reason for the theological shift was leadership change, which impacted other areas. However, it is equally clear that the shift provided cultural recognition through effective identification, leading to various spaces. This gradual progression of expression has given visibility to the uniqueness of the imaginary social space for which the CoP has witnessed several transformations, covering social and development landscapes in the Ghanaian context and diaspora.

**CoP and the Social Space**

During Safo’s leadership, the church grew. The first social service established by Safo in 1982 was the Pentecost Social Service (PENTSOS). Although PENTSOS and its responsibility were apolitical, it served the political situation symmetrically by helping address some socio-economic challenges, such as deprivation, education, and healthcare. Thus, according to the “records” of PENTSOS, it served its usefulness.

On the international front, where African Pentecostals function as religious support networks and “registered main charities,” the 2018 “State of the Church Address” indicates the CoP’s strong presence, spiritual capital, and self-funding social

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52 The first indigene to stir the CoP’s affairs, the second generational transformation experienced tremendous social movement and responsibility as a result of the re-visioning of its outlook, imparting the church’s missional landscape.

53 Onyinah, “Distinguished Church Leader Essay: The Church of Pentecost and Its Role in Ghanaian Society,” 189. PENTSOS’s core mandate is to provide both the spiritual and physical needs of local communities.

54 Onyinah, “Distinguished Church Leader Essay: The Church of Pentecost and Its Role in Ghanaian Society,” 189. Onyinah notes that the church reported in the 2018 State of Church Address that by the end of December 2017, the church had eight health institutions—one hospital and seven clinics. The total outpatient department attendance at the church’s eight health institutions in 2017 alone was 194,995. Altogether, a total of 17,682 admissions and 4,987 deliveries were recorded during 2017. The church currently runs eighty-four basic schools, three vocational schools, two senior high schools, and a university college and a magnificent convention center. The head office and the areas continue to sponsor needy student members at the tertiary level under the Pentecost Educational Scholarship Scheme.


movement in the diaspora, presenting an understanding of decreasing Western theological influence. While these development praxes cannot be said for other Neo-Pentecostal movements in Ghana, they have all come under constructive criticism to pay taxes that offer accountability and prevent economic exploitation.

Some scholars suggest that building on this social cohesion and the managerial skills of the CoP could serve as a “Pentecostal model” in political governance if such an idea is propagated with ethical and social development policy.\(^{57}\)

**CoP and the Development Space**

The significance of the CoP’s development space that links Ghana’s political landscape can best be summed up in its leadership approach to institutional management. The CoP’s structure and governance are hierarchical with a “local-up” approach to leadership.\(^{58}\) Although the leadership structure is hierarchical in appearance and management, it has a democratic outlook where, after every five years (per their constitution), leadership and administration are elected and given the mandate to lead.

In this respect, Ghana has seen significant contributions of some Pentecostal leadership to peacebuilding, political discourse, and religious tolerance in various forms. While this was not the case in the late 1970–1980s, with several military coups d’état that saw most churches in the trenches with no prophetic voice, their recent activities, such as peacebuilding and national government policy negotiations, have implications for the political landscape. While some scholars have highlighted the contribution of Pentecostal leaders in the development space,\(^{59}\) others disagree in context.\(^{60}\) Increasingly, there are notable “political positions and civil society organisations” CoP leaders occupy.\(^{61}\)

Similarly, recent developments in Ghana note that Ghana’s president appointed the immediate past chairperson of CoP, Opoku Onyinah, to chair the construction of “Ghana’s National Cathedral.”\(^{62}\) Whether political or religious influence exists is an issue of contestation. In the spirit of peace, one could only submit that these

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60 See Gifford, *Christianity, Development, and Modernity in Africa*.

61 Onyinah, “The State of the Church Address,” 190. Such political and civil society positions include the Bank of Ghana, the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC), and significant state publications, making a case for the growing interest in inclusiveness in development.

62 There are solid dissenting views in opposition equal to those for the national cathedral. Regardless, the chairperson has encouraged the progression of the cathedral.
appointments have served as a gradual upward mobility of Pentecostal leaders into prominent political spaces that rally support for inter-denominational tolerance and a balance in absolute political power and development. Although, as Anderson explains, African Pentecostal theology has also avoided any political involvement that could be a potential drawback for its evangelistic appeal, some scholars hail this involvement as a democratic principle and gesture for inclusiveness rather than individualism. We contend that the Pentecostal leadership’s gradual mobility is crucial in this imaginary social space in Ghana, as it enables social cohesion against prevailing political conditions that descend into unnecessary deprivation and human suffering. In essence, the interplay between the shift and progression highlighted the significance of Africa’s third response to Christianity, the challenges of post-independence, and the CoP’s response, providing the imaginary social space visibility.

The Case of Nigeria

We take the RCCG not as representative, but to demonstrate the Pentecostal Movement’s incursion into the imaginary social space in Nigeria.

RCCG and the Social and Development Space

The RCCG, with wider membership globally, has seen three generations of Pentecostal transformation. Enouch Adejare, assuming Overseer’s responsibility, immediately curved the church’s renewed vision and reconstructive theological identity that propelled the church’s social development space. Scholars often give credence to the liturgical transformation between 1981 and 1989 that saw the re-engineering of the church’s operational framework, articulating its mission and vision.

The three generational transformations coincide with the trajectory of Pentecostal theological shift from an exclusive mission focus to one of inclusive social responsibility and political participation, proffering the theological foundation that “Corporate Social

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63 Anderson, “Pentecostalism and Social, Political, and Economic Development,” 123.
65 See Okanlawon, “Churchpreneurship in the Nigerian Socio-economic Space,” 33. First, from 1952 to 1980, the church eschewed materialism but emphasized the theology of holiness and healing through fervent prayers. Second, the scenario changed in 1981 with Enoch Adejare Adeboye’s appointment as the successor General Overseer (GO) of the RCCG.
66 See, Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 38; Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 187. Thus (1) “to make heaven and take as many people with us” (Redeemed Christian Church of God [RCCG], “Corporate Social Responsibility,” 2021, https://www.rccg.org/rccg-csr), and (2) “to plant churches within five minutes walking distance in every city and town of developing countries and within five minutes driving distance in every city and town of developed countries.” Third, from 1990 the RCCG’s vision and mission in context entailed occupying the renewed theological and imaginary social space of service.
Responsibility”67 (CSR) “has its root in Christianity and the church is meant to be an example for the world to follow and not the other way around.”68

To fulfill its CSR, the RCCG identified eight sectors for its outreach and development projects: social, health, education, business, arts and culture, government, and sports.69 In the education sector, RCCG has established forty-four (primary and secondary) schools, one university, and one college,70 with scholarships to thousands of students nationwide.

Similarly, with fifty primary health centers, two modern hospitals, and one orphanage in the Redemption Camp, the RCCG connects national efforts against debilitating diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, COVID-19, cancer, and reproductive health care.71 The RCCG’s unprecedented social sector efforts further provide 223,100 free meals daily on average to people in need.72 Similarly, in the business sector, the RCCG implements programs that create and support cooperative societies, youth empowerment and employment, vocational and skills education, and charity shops, accounting for over 96,000 beneficiaries.73 Besides, with business networks nationwide, the RCCG’s social activities in ending hunger and recognizing widespread misery and suffering has seen leadership launch full-scale welfare and humanitarian services, with rehabilitation as its core function. For instance, with a center in Lagos, the Christ Against Drug Abuse Ministry (CADAM) rehabilitates drug abuse victims and occultists in the campuses of higher institutions. In 2021, the RCCG reported that over 60.9 million people have benefited from its social responsibility programs. We agree that Adeboye’s receptivity to novel ideas, within and outside the church, and the deployment of university graduates to high positions in the church structure, as well as female members’ upward mobility, are fundamental to the RCCG’s success, creating a niche for itself in the social space in Nigeria.74

67 See RCCG, “Corporate Social Responsibility,” n.p. Further, it served as a conscious avenue for Christians to make visible impact in various key areas of society. Where many view societal challenges and its scale all around the world we see an opportunity to take decisive effort to creating solutions as we work with people, communities, leaders, and governments worldwide.
71 Okanlawon, “Churchpreneurship in the Nigerian Socio-economic Space,” 34.
Nigerian Pentecostals’ link to politics is often traced to the formation of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN).75 Although the RCCG is a significant member of the PFN, it did not bring transformative and expansive advantages to the political landscape before the 1990s.76

Although initially the church leadership avoided direct partisan politics within the context of the reformed theology of service, they made it a duty for church members to pray for the unfolding political process in the country.77 The policy of the RCCG in the initial stages of the fourth republic in 1999 was to encourage the general congregation to exercise their civic rights by voting during elections. However, the church did not mobilize electoral support for politically inclined members.78 Instead, like the other Pentecostal churches under the PFN, in the fourth republic, the RCCG pursued a distinct political agenda suited to its mission and vision.79 As democratic governance evolved, under its CSR, the RCCG defined its political and governance policy to “actively participate in public engagements with government bodies on how governance and policies could improve society.”80

By inference, with a formal policy on political participation, the RCCG encourages its members to directly participate in partisan politics. As such, Yemi Osinbajo was elected in 2015 as the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. RCCG leadership moved a step further in February 2022, transforming its program on politics to a full-fledged Office of Directorate of Politics and Governance, with similar offices at its zonal, area, and parish levels in Nigeria. The Directorate assists and mobilizes support for its members seeking elective political positions at all levels.81 We conclude that RCCG neo-political participation is evidence of what Burgess inferred, as faith-based organizations “seek to empower their members to pursue political goals in the public sphere.”82 By implication, the RCCG is expanding its occupation of the imaginary social space in Nigeria’s new political dispensation of democratic governance. Hence, considering the RCCG’s developmental and political activities, it demonstrated the Pentecostal shift in vision from initial holiness to social responsibility and currently to the political arena.

75 Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 151.
76 Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 54.
77 Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 150.
78 Adeboye, “‘Arrowhead’ of Nigerian Pentecostalism,” 54.
79 Vaughan, Religion and the Making of Nigeria, 151.
Missiological Implication for the Church

What lessons can the church learn from the thinking of secular development and the imaginary social space?

Missional Visibility

There are strong missiological and crucial reasons for the Pentecostals’ emerging development practice in West Africa. One such is theology. Pentecostal belief in the involvement of God in everyday life, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the need for every believer to minister provides strong motivations for development. There is also the necessity to bring to bear the power of the Spirit on the shared value experience, converging both the spiritual and the required material blessing for society at large. The imaginary social space can serve as a starting point in identifying common grounds for dialogue between the development sector and the church as a mission agent.

Politics

As evidenced and demonstrated elsewhere in this article, African Pentecostals’ indirect and/or direct involvement in social political development has given visibility to the thin line (middle ground) between the church’s mission and the political landscape. This visibility (middle ground) is what we argue as the imaginary social space with practical ramification, providing African Pentecostals the intentional and/or unintentional experience and the emerging development practice. The church’s aggressive and desperate development approach can serve as a model. Additionally, the awareness of this imaginary social space can allay the church’s fear and suspicion of engaging in secular debate, harnessing these tools accordingly. In contemporary development, however, although the church’s role in mission still assumes an apolitical position, its responsibilities most often stretch and align with the underlying “political development structures and goals,” enabling development that cannot be overlooked, evidenced in their leadership mobility.83

As true to practice, this emerging development practice within the imaginary social space of the CoP and the RCCG meets most of these development goals. However, as

83 See also the SDG Acceleration Toolkit of the United Nations Development Group (no longer available on the United Nations Sustainable Development Group website, originally at https://undg.org/2030-agenda/sdg-acceleration-toolkit/guidance/). For instance, in July 2014, the UN General Assembly Open Working Group proposed a document containing seventeen goals to be put forward for the General Assembly’s approval in September 2015. This document sets the ground for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the global development agenda to span from 2015–2030, to which most African nations have subscribed in order to access funding. These goals are already part of African Pentecostals’ general vision and development scheme.
identified by Anderson, there are no “articulated theological foundations for social ministry” for Pentecostals that highlight their achievements at the national level. We contend that the CoP’s and the RCCG’s roles in the development landscape are symmetrical to the political development areas of the sustainability development goals (SDG). Hence, it would warrant a dialogical approach for sustainable development of local communities, where the church is actively a model. The imaginary social space now constitutes a component of the entire Pentecostal mission in West Africa.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown and drawn a trajectory of mission and vision of Pentecostals’ shift from the traditional theology of mission to the theology of social transformation, conditional on Pentecostals moving into the imaginary social space and gradual extension into the partisan political landscape in West Africa. The shift we identified is triggered by a change in leadership in both cases, influencing the development landscape.

The failure of the governments to provide socio-economic development, increasing poverty and hopelessness, acute and rising unemployment, and governance failure combine to create an imaginary social space ready for non-governmental and faith-based organizations to provide alternative measures to set the captive free.

The critical recommendation in moving forward is that the church, especially the proliferated third-generation Pentecostals, creates awareness of this imaginary social space, which could serve as a mediating factor necessary for identity and as a contributing agent within the development sector that the church can no longer undermine in twenty-first-century West Africa.

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