

# Philanthropy as Image Politics in Ghana's New Churches

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## Abstract

Ghana's new Pentecostal-charismatic churches are budding in charitable deeds and parade such humanitarian intervention publicly, some via TV channels. Based on in-depth interviews with spokespersons of Christian Action Faith Ministries International (Action Chapel) and International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), as well as the observation of the churches' philanthropic actions in the Ghanaian public sphere, the study argues that such actions of the Pentecostal-charismatic churches constitute mimetic isomorphism in relation to the historic churches. The philanthropy of the new churches augments their public image while "Prosperity Theology" drives the churches' growth in material wealth.

**KEY WORDS:** Ghana, New Churches, Prosperity Theology, Philanthropic Actions, Mimetic Isomorphism

## Background

"Faith Gospel", Lindhardt<sup>1</sup> opines, is referred to variously as "the Gospel of Prosperity" and "the Word Faith Gospel", observing, however, that there are various "versions of this gospel", whose "conviction that every saved or born-again Christian has the right to receive divine blessings of wealth and health as well as the duty to pay tithes and make donations of money to God through a ministry". "Faith Gospel, the Gospel of Prosperity, or the Health-Wealth Gospel", Gifford<sup>2</sup> avers, essentially asserts that "God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share in Christ's victory over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ, and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith". According to Gifford<sup>3</sup>, the theological underpinning lies in the fact that such faith "propounds the view that the human condition of the born-again believer has been profoundly altered by the work of

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Lindhardt, "More Than Just Money: The Faith Gospel and Occult Economies in Contemporary Tanzania," in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Volume 13, Number 1, 2009, 41.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 48.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Jesus”. Drawing on the works of well-known scholars in the field (Maxwell<sup>4</sup>; Martin<sup>5</sup>; Gifford<sup>6</sup>; Hasu<sup>7</sup>, Lindhardt<sup>8</sup> makes the following contentions. First, “the roots of the Faith or Prosperity Gospel can be traced back to post-Second World War spiritual revivals in the United States and more specifically to the foundation of Kenneth Hagin’s Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1974”. Second, “its impact” can be appreciated better “by focusing on local cultural contexts into which it is appropriated and adapted”. Third, scholars of the phenomenon in Africa have shown that “the promise of manifold returns for money offerings serves as an effective means to fundraising”. From the foregoing, critical scholarship on the phenomenon in Africa gives credence to Gifford’s<sup>9</sup> view that “Faith Gospel, the Gospel of Prosperity, or the Health-Wealth Gospel” emanates from Pentecostal Christianity and is a “much more theological” form of what he refers to as “Christianity entails success”. If Ghana’s new churches of the Pentecostal-charismatic tradition are steeped in Faith Gospel theology, then it stands to reason that they would be concerned with their own economic success. How, then, would they promote philanthropy for its own sake?

Okyerefo<sup>10</sup> has argued that “Pentecostal-charismatic organizations have taken on new, unexpected roles in African public culture” such as the provision of social services in the areas of education and health, thereby augmenting their public image, not least because the public questions their contribution to society. Thus, in 2006 Lighthouse Chapel International, for example, established an orphanage at Aburi in the Eastern Region of Ghana and, in the same year, a hospital in Accra. In 2007, Royalhouse Chapel “launched the Royalhouse Vanguard Christian Life Assurance, an insurance policy for the future welfare of members of the church”<sup>11</sup>. While some of these projects may not lack the profit motive entirely, the shift into the provision of social services is evidently a new path these churches are charting, as has been the tradition in the historic mission churches, and verges on the spirit of philanthropy. In fact, it is a development that favourably lends credence to Lindsay and Wuthnow’s<sup>12</sup> idea of “strategic philanthropy”. The authors examined the influence federal tax policy has had on religious philanthropy in the United States, focusing on “the role of private foundations” “in religious giving”. They observed that not only has the growing importance of private foundations underscored the emergence of “supporting organizations and oversight organizations”, both of which “have become increasingly prominent for religious philanthropy”, in fact, private foundations “are important because of their institutional independence, financial resources, and unique ability to redirect energies within an institutional field”. The authors point out that religion has been an important source of philanthropy in the West, with great antecedents in the Torah, the Koran, and specific emphasis on the Roman Catholic Church’s “patronage for the arts during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance”,

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<sup>4</sup> David Maxwell, “Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty? Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe,” in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 28, Number 3, 1998, 350 – 73.

<sup>5</sup> David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Is Their Parish*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Gifford, “The Complex Provenance of Some Elements of African Pentecostal Theology,” in André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Frantani (eds), *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 62-79; Paul Gifford, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Päivi Hasu, “World bank and Heavenly Bank in Poverty and Prosperity: The Case of Tanzanian Faith Gospel,” in *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 110, 2006, 679 – 92.

<sup>8</sup> Lindhardt, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Gifford, 2004, 48.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, “The Gospel of Public Image in Ghana,” in Harri Englund (ed), *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 205.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>12</sup> Michael David Lindsay and Robert Wuthnow, “Financing Faith: Religion and Strategic Philanthropy,” in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Volume 49, Number 1, 2010, 87.

just as the Protestant reformers “established relief chests for the poor”<sup>13</sup>. Their work provides a good analytical foundation to the present study on the novel spirit of philanthropy in Ghana’s new churches which, the study argues, depicts isomorphic modelling of the new churches on the historic mission churches to enable the former to gain public acceptability and curb critique over the visible opulence to which Prosperity Gospel has propelled them.

### Mimetic Isomorphism as Driver for New Churches’ Philanthropy

The neoinstitutional theory, according to Lindsay and Wuthnow<sup>14</sup>, affirms that “organizations within the same institutional environment tend to be similar”. In furthering this theoretical underpinning, the authors explored the extent to which private foundations have introduced isomorphism within the American religious sector. Drawing on DiMaggio and Powell’s<sup>15</sup> classic paper on institutional isomorphism, which accounts for similarities in organizations, Lindsay and Wuthnow<sup>16</sup> argued that the philanthropy of private organizations “shape and condition the activities and behaviors of religious actors through what they fund and what they regard as legitimate activities”, thereby exacting similarities in the institutional landscape of philanthropy. Following Amos Hawley<sup>17</sup>, DiMaggio and Powell<sup>18</sup> observed that “*isomorphism*” is the “concept that best captures the process of homogenization”. They hold that there are two existing types of isomorphism, competitive and institutional, observing that coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism constitute “three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphic change occurs”<sup>19</sup>. Coercive isomorphism occurs through state regulation of organizations’ activities and definition, mimetic isomorphism results from organizations modelling themselves on others “they perceive to be successful”<sup>20</sup>, and normative isomorphism is “associated with professionalization”<sup>21</sup>.

This typology is illustrative of the present study, with the philanthropy of Ghana’s new churches verging on mimetic isomorphism as they model themselves on the historic mission churches. While Lindsay and Wuthnow<sup>22</sup> were interested in private organizations, this study focuses on the religious groups themselves, arguing that their practice of “strategic philanthropy”<sup>23</sup> is a modelling on the other religious groups for legitimacy in the Ghanaian public sphere. This is important, however, not only as a driver for gaining acceptability, but also to stem criticism in the face of the opulence to which their Prosperity Theology has propelled them.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Joseph DiMaggio and Walter Woody Powell, “The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields,” in *American Sociological Review*, Volume 48, Number 2, 1983, 147 – 160.

<sup>16</sup> Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010, 90.

<sup>17</sup> Amos Hawley, “Human Ecology,” in David Lawrence Sills (ed), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan, 1968, 328-37.

<sup>18</sup> DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 149.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>20</sup> Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010, 90.

<sup>21</sup> DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 150.

<sup>22</sup> Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 87.

While 71.2% of Ghana's 24.6 million inhabitants are Christians, the Christian groups consist in 13.1% Catholics, 18.4% Protestants, 11.4% other Christians, and the Pentecostal-charismatic churches together forming 28.3% of the population<sup>24</sup>. Both their growth in population and notorious activities point to the growing influence of the Pentecostal-charismatic churches in the nation's public sphere, making them worthy of serious academic attention. There is no doubt that the socio-economic influence of the historic mission churches is still formidable. For example, of the 290 registered Health Institutions under the auspices of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG) shown in Table 1 below, 72.46% belong to the historic mission churches (Anglican, Catholic, Evangelical Presbyterian, Global Evangelical, Methodist, and Presbyterian). The leading single denominations in the provision of the said health institutions are Catholic (42.07%) and Presbyterian (17.24%). It is this reality, this study argues, that the Pentecostal-charismatic churches seek to replicate in their philanthropy.

**Table 1: CHAG Member Institutions by Religious Group**

No	Religious Group	No of Health Institutions	%
1	A.M.E ZION	1	0.34%
2	Anglican	8	2.76%
3	Assemblies of God	3	1.03%
4	Baptist	3	1.03%
5	Baptist Mid Mission	1	0.34%
6	Catholic	122	42.07%
7	Church of Christ	2	0.69%
8	Church of God	3	1.03%
9	Church of Pentecost	9	3.10%
10	Evangelical Presbyterian	7	2.41%
11	Faith Evangelical Mission	1	0.34%
12	FAME	7	2.41%
13	Global Evangelical	1	0.34%
14	Lighthouse Mission	1	0.34%
15	Luke Society Mission	2	0.69%
16	Manna Mission	1	0.34%
17	Methodist	22	7.59%

<sup>24</sup> Ghana Statistical Service, *2010 Population & Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results*, (Accra: Sako Press Limited, 2012), 40.

18	Presbyterian	50	17.24%
19	Run Mission	1	0.34%
20	Saviour Church	3	1.03%
21	Seventh Day Adventist	29	10.00%
22	Siloam Gospel	1	0.34%
23	The Salvation Army	9	3.10%
24	WEC Mission	2	0.69%
25	Word Alive	1	0.34%
	TOTAL	290	

Source: Adapted from CHAG Annual Report 2015, 62-74.

### Method

The study forms part of a continued research into Ghana's Pentecostal-charismatic churches and their transnational engagement since 2008<sup>25</sup>. With reference to this specific paper, in-depth interviews were held in Accra with spokespersons of selected churches between September and October 2016. The churches were selected purposively according to their age and influence in the Ghanaian public sphere. Purposive sampling was an effective means of identifying specific religious groups whose spokespersons were interviewed<sup>26</sup>. They include Archbishop Duncan William's Christian Action Faith Ministries International (Action Chapel), founded in 1979; Pastor Mensa Otabil's International Central Gospel Church (ICGC), founded in 1984<sup>27</sup>; Bishop Dag Heward-Mills' Lighthouse Chapel International, which has roots in his "Legon Calvary Road" founded in 1985 at the University of Ghana while he was a student; Apostle General Korankye Ankrah's Royalhouse Chapel International that goes back to his "evangelistic ministry, Showers of Blessings" founded at the University of Ghana, which he entered in 1984<sup>28</sup>, even though the founding date of Royalhouse itself is pinned to 1992<sup>29</sup>. The paper, however, singles out Action Chapel and ICGC for the sole reason that they are the two oldest new churches in order to analyze their level of institutionalization in the light of their philanthropic actions vis-à-vis the historic mission churches.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "'Ausländer!': Pentecostalism as social capital network for Ghanaians in Vienna," in *Ghana Studies*, Volume 11, 2008, 77-103.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Gifford, "Ghana's Charismatic Churches," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 24, Number 3, 1994, 241-265; Paul Gifford, 2004; Akosua Keseboa Darkwah, "Aid or Hindrance? Faith Gospel Theology and Ghana's Incorporation into the Global Economy," in *Ghana Studies*, Volume 4, 2001, 7-29; Marleen De Witte, "Altar Media's *Living Word*: Televised Charismatic Christianity in Ghana," in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Volume 33, Number 2, 2003, 172-202.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, 2011, 207.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Graphic*, September 26, 2016, 03.

The in-depth interviews<sup>30</sup> carried out with spokespersons of each church (who wished to remain anonymous) to establish its official position on its philanthropic activities, as well as the observation of the said activities were analyzed thematically as ‘charitable actions the churches are engaged in’, ‘how their charitable activities are presented in the Ghanaian public sphere’, and ‘what such actions mean for the churches’. Some of the critical questions explored in the interviews include “does your church engage in charitable works? Which ones? What are the reasons if, according to your faith-gospel belief, people can pray their way out of poverty?” “Are you engaged in philanthropic projects? Which?” “Do you advertise them in the media? Why?”

The images of the churches depicted in the media provided a foremost means of knowing and understanding how they engage in their charitable actions, leading to the observation of the churches’ philanthropic actions in the Ghanaian public sphere. Since the media have their limitations in presenting objectivity, spokespersons of the churches were themselves interviewed in an ongoing fieldwork to present the voice of the churches on their philanthropy. Content analysis is a major research tool employed to gain a thoughtful insight into the churches’ philanthropy.

## Results

Since their inception both Action Chapel and ICGC have had an almost similar trajectory regarding reaching into the wider world. Action Chapel will be 40 years in 2019. This celebration will be anticipated with the founder’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2018. The church prides itself in having established 71 branches in Ghana, 21 in West Africa, therefore 92 branches in Africa. 10 branches are said to be in Europe and 13 branches in North America, making 23 in the global North<sup>31</sup>. ICGC, on the other hand, has since 1984 grown to a membership of 97,086 worldwide by 2013, 93, 856 of them being in Ghana. It has 586 branches, 560 of which are in Ghana, 2 in other parts of Africa, and 24 in the rest of the world<sup>32</sup>.

The study engages both churches comparatively to examine their charitable actions, explore how they are presented in the Ghanaian public sphere, and tease out the meanings they attach to their philanthropic activities.

### Charitable Activities of the Churches

‘Compassion in Action’, the church’s NGO, consists in Action Chapel’s Social Services Wing. The establishment has a number of sectors. First, the Compassion Rehabilitation Centre, located at Dawhenya in the Greater Accra Region, caters for drugs and alcohol addicts. The church claims that one out of every five (5) persons at the facility is treated free of charge. During fieldwork in August 2016 twenty-five (25) clients were at the facility. Second, every month the Social Services Wing of the church donates food, clothing and 2000 Ghana cedis to the Basco Orphanage at Nsawam, which was established in 1996 but not owned by the Church. Some of the orphans there are said to

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<sup>30</sup> I wish to acknowledge the research assistant on the project, Emmanuel Codjoe, an MPhil student of the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, who helped in carrying out the interviews.

<sup>31</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.

be students of Dominion University College owned by Action Chapel. Third, the Students' Scholarship Foundation was established in 2009, disbursing over 200 scholarships to-date to gifted students in need of financial aid at basic, secondary and tertiary levels. Fourth, the church claims to have sunk boreholes in a number of communities since 2014, and helped to refurbish High Grade Academy, a school on the Spintex Road in Accra. The headquarters of Action Chapel are on the Spintex Road. Its university college and one clinic are hosted at the same premises. The church has no basic or secondary schools but claims to have donated 100 school uniforms to the Street Children Empowerment Foundation (SCEF) at Jamestown in Accra in 2016.

ICGC initiated the 'Central Educational Trust' in 1988, a scholarship programme for Ghanaian students in Secondary, Vocational, and Technical Schools. This charitable project was rebranded in 1996 into 'Central Aid', moving beyond providing just educational need to Social and Community Development Projects, Relief Services (takes care of distressed people during times of disaster), Career Guidance and Counselling (to help beneficiaries of scholarship, youth groups, and others who come for help), and Advocacy (mobilizing experts to speak on national issues in areas like youth development, education, and social welfare). The flagship project of Central Aid, however, remains the allocation of scholarships, moving from 51 people who were on the scheme in 1989 to over 3,000 people in 2016 who have benefited from the project. Beneficiaries are said to have entered the field of medicine, the media, and other responsible positions. The funds for Central Aid are solicited internally in the church.

The church is said to have awarded a total of two hundred (200) scholarships to Second-cycle school students each year since 2011. The modus operandi of Central Aid is to ensure that if, for example, 50 students graduate from Senior High School in a particular year, 50 students would be accepted onto the scheme to make up the 200. This means that Central Aid caters for 200 students at every point in time. Once a beneficiary gets accepted onto the scheme, the individual enjoys it until his/her final examinations are over. The project calls for some level of commitment from those receiving the bursary and their families, thereby earnestly desiring community participation, stakeholders' involvement, and commitment at all levels of its operations. Central Aid hopes to cater for students at the tertiary level of education in future.

Apart from Central Aid, ICGC's 'Institutional and Community Support' sends financial assistance to the Ghana Heart Foundation monthly, supports the Princess Marie Louis Children Hospital, Mammocare-Ghana (a facility for breast cancer screening), while members of the church donate blood to the National Blood Bank twice a year. In 2006, the church also built a two-storey boys' hostel at a cost of over \$200,000 at the Osu Children's Home, a state-owned and state-ran orphanage. It furnished the hostel with beds, mattresses and bed sheets, a canteen/dining hall, providing plates and chairs. An E-library was also established for the school. Furthermore, a caretaker's hostel was constructed and a water tank provided.

'ICGC Clean Water Project' is aimed at providing some deprived communities in the country with good drinking water. Twenty (20) boreholes fitted with hand-pumps are said to have been constructed at a cost of \$200,000 in nineteen (19) selected communities in the Ga West municipal area of the Greater-Accra Region. The selection of the sites was based on the fact that some of the communities are Buruli ulcer endemic areas while others have high iron levels in their groundwater sources. It is estimated that a total population of over 12,000 people will be served with good drinking water in these

communities. The boreholes are under the supervision of the Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) Committees. Beneficiaries pay 0.20 pesewas each time they access water, being money used to repair pumps whenever the need arises.

In 2008, the church established a \$100,000 recreational facility, ‘Game Centre for both Church and Community’, comprising basketball, volleyball, and tennis courts for the mutual use and benefit of its members and interested members of the public. A gym was later added. In the words of the spokesperson of the church, “this Game Centre is to help the will, emotions, and minds of the individuals, thus, keep the spirit, soul and body sound. It helps to minister to all facets of persons”<sup>33</sup>. Some of the other projects of the church include 17 Early Childhood to Junior High Schools and a University.

### **Publicizing the Churches’ Charity**

Action Chapel’s philanthropy is publicized via the Dominion Television, which is owned by the church, as well as on the church’s website<sup>34</sup>. It is also a means by which the church promotes its own television. The publicity given to their philanthropic acts is important to Action Chapel so “that those outside the body of Christ and in other churches can see what Action Chapel is doing”. It wants non-members of the church “to sponsor and support such endeavours”, as displayed on a flier designed by the church captioned ‘Dominion Covenant Partners-DCP’.

ICGC, on the other hand, claims to make a conscious effort not to advertise these philanthropic activities in the media, although its website<sup>35</sup> contains some of these projects. “Basically, advertising such works of piety is not the focus of such activities. Dr. Otobil likes keeping the good he does and not blow his own horns. It is a responsibility to community and nation. Thus, the church gives back to humanity from the many she received. More so, the church is not taxed. Therefore, the only way you can consciously help is by ploughing back into the system. This becomes almost like a corporate social responsibility (CSR)”<sup>36</sup>.

### **Meaning the Churches Attach to Charity**

Action Chapel asserts that its philanthropic projects are done in the spirit of the founder of the church who is acclaimed to have said that the “true essence of Christianity is best defined by how we serve humanity. Eternity will reward and record these good works for our profit”<sup>37</sup>. The background of Archbishop Duncan Williams is said to be a great inspiration for Action Chapel’s philanthropy, which aims at supporting and emancipating people in similar situations in which its founder found himself in his youth. As a young man he engaged in substance abuse and fell out of school due to financial difficulty.

To this end, the church believes that investing in the Rehab Centre will help reduce substance abuse and crime. Thus, the orphanage invests in the nation through its youth, which is also the reason advanced for awarding scholarships to students. All these

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<sup>33</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> <http://actionchapel.net>; <http://dominiontv.net>

<sup>35</sup> See projects under: <http://www.centralgospel.com/?root=news&cid=3>

<sup>36</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.

activities are ostensibly geared toward gaining membership and encouraging non-members of the church to contribute to their DCP project. The church understands success “not as a destination, it is actually a journey. It is about how many lives you have touched both spiritually and physically. The words of Matthew 25 are thus relevant here. If you have not impacted onto others, you are not successful”<sup>38</sup>. In the same vein, “it is God who gives you wealth in order for you to give. If you have money and you do not give you are not wealthy”. Action Chapels’ understanding of status is with regard to God giving “grace to people to get higher”. “The one who is high is supposed to serve like Christ did. Humility is key in status. One’s intention is important even in status”. In terms of its hierarchy Action Chapel has the Archbishop, a College of Bishops, pastors and other people in ministry. “Wherever you are is by grace and not by your power”<sup>39</sup>. The spokesperson’s appeal to grace rather than power in this hierarchy where a founder of a church assigns the title ‘Archbishop’ to himself and appoints ‘bishops’, ‘pastors’ and ‘people in ministry’ depicts a penchant for building a positive public image. The fact is, titles in both institutions, like many comparable ones, are self-imposed, at least, ab initio.

Just as Action Chapel, the social responsibility of ICGC is predicated on the life experience of its founder, “Pastor Otabil, who in his youth lost both parents in one year and was catered for by friends and the extended family. Thus, he feels obligated to do same. More so, Christ asked us to cater for one another (cf. Matthew 25). The philosophy of the founder also holds that practical Christianity is essential”<sup>40</sup>.

The church understands success in terms of “an established person in the House of God not just on earth but also in heaven. This happens when one develops through Christian principles and not through illegal means”. “Wealth can best be explained as resources and not just riches. One who has wealth feels complete and total; here we must note that happiness should not be equated to being rich. You may not have all riches but one may be happy. Wealth is given by God through hard work”. “Status must make people humble. It is for this reason that Dr. Otabil is simply called Pastor Otabil. He does not accept any other title and does not encourage his pastors to carry titles. Hierarchy in ICGC consists in three main divisions in the pastorate: the lay pastors, the licensed ministers, and the ordained, i.e. the Reverend”<sup>41</sup>.

### Analysis

Weber<sup>42</sup> has shown in his discussion on charismatic authority and routinization that religious groups evolve and institutionalize, hence the structures of philanthropy we are beginning to observe in Ghana’s new churches. This study observes that the philanthropic structures and institutions the new churches are developing are similar to those of the historic mission churches, notably their health and educational institutions. To that extent the scholarship scheme of ICGC’s Central Aid or Action Chapel’s Rehab Centre also extend the said educational and health philanthropy. As growing religious groups Action Chapel and ICGC advertently or inadvertently find in the older religious

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<sup>38</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on August 26, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Spokesperson, interviewed on September 6, 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Max Weber, “On Charisma and Institution-Building,” in Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt (ed), *Selected Papers*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 1968, 46-65.

groups paradigmatic institutions in the field and are thereby modelling themselves on the precursors in the environment. The ensuing process encapsulates the neoinstitutional theory's characterization that "organizations within the same institutional environment tend to be similar"<sup>43</sup>.

The religious group with the largest educational and health institutions in Ghana is the Catholic Church, followed by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Their leading role in these fields, coupled with the moral authority these groups exert on the Ghanaian public in interrogating the public conscience, particularly in matters of ethics, has undoubtedly contributed to the respectability both historic mission churches enjoy in the Ghanaian public sphere. It is logical for new religious groups to seek to relish similar leverage by engaging in mimetic isomorphism through modelling themselves on churches "they perceive to be successful"<sup>44</sup>. After all, what Action Chapel and ICGC are participating in is not new in the institutional landscape of the philanthropy of churches in Ghana. They are exerting great effort to extend their charitable actions in creative ways but the stark similarities this philanthropy has with that of the long established churches is palpable. Church schools and health institutions belong to an extensive history of evangelization by the historic mission churches in Africa<sup>45</sup>, mostly a part of the churches' understanding of charity as a theological virtue to be lived in practical terms through the provision of free or subsidized education and health services, for example, to the people they serve, and not just their members.

By engaging in similar charitable projects in the Ghanaian public sphere, churches in Ghana verge on homogenizing philanthropy and are thereby engrossed in "*isomorphism*", the "concept that best captures the process of homogenization"<sup>46</sup>. With the historic churches being the trailblazer in the provision of social amenities, the new churches follow in their footsteps with mimetic isomorphic strides. This development is made clearer in the picture depicted in Table 1 above. Church of Christ, Church of God, Faith Evangelical Mission, Lighthouse Mission, Luke Society Mission, Manna Mission, Run Mission, Saviour Church, Siloam Gospel, WEC Mission, and Word Alive are all new players in the field, having on average one (1) health institution. All the above-listed eleven (11) churches together possess 18 of the 290 health institutions, all making 6.2% of all Christian health institutions in Ghana.

While mimetic isomorphism of religious institutions could replicate the provision of healthcare, for example, and increase concentration in a particular area of societal need, it at the same time increases service and stems an otherwise dire need in the area of augmenting social services, for instance, especially in poor countries. For example, in Ghana, as in a lot of African countries, many functions traditionally perceived to be the prerogative of the state have been taken up by foreign donors, religious and non-governmental organizations<sup>47</sup>. The consequences of the belt-tightening liberalization policies in Ghana since the mid-1980s and the drastic reduction in public spending on health and education have been well-documented<sup>48</sup>. The Structural Adjustment Policies

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<sup>43</sup> Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010, 90.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>45</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, 149.

<sup>47</sup> Nicolas van de Walle, *African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), 2001, 276.

<sup>48</sup> Reginald Overa, "When men do women's work: structural adjustment, unemployment and changing gender relations in the informal economy of Accra, Ghana," in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 45, Number 4, 2007, 539-563.

(SAPs) came to be replaced with Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers whose drafting created the expectation of involving more collaboration between African governments, civil society, and international aid and lending institutions. A closer inspection, however, reveals that the process has continued to impose donor-driven constraints on democratic governance in countries such as Ghana<sup>49</sup>, plunging such countries into even more poverty and exclusion from the wealth of nations. Interestingly, the founding of Action Chapel and ICGC coincided with the height of the the SAPs in Ghana. And ultimately, the next stage of the spiral of indebtedness, indicative of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative that poor nations were hurled into has brought no relief, a situation which the new churches notoriously feel called to rectify through philanthropy. And it is unlikely that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals, as they are called, will stem the need for the churches' intervention, given Ghana's socio-economic trajectory.

Following Lindhardt's<sup>50</sup> observation the "impact" of "the Faith or Prosperity Gospel" can be appreciated better "by focusing on local cultural contexts into which it is appropriated and adapted". The socio-economic conditions prevailing in countries like Ghana that warrant the various near-successful and failed internationally-led policy interventions outlined above are so dire that citizens of these societies crave for anything that would promise them hope. Prosperity Gospel has succeeded in igniting such hope, real or unreal. Okyerefo<sup>51</sup> has pointed out that in view of the "general distrust in the weak state in Africa", "church organizations" have been projected into "the limelight, thereby making Pentecostal churches" "wield power by exercising their authority in the public sphere" through "public discourse on individual success and wealth creation". Thus, keen observers in the field, such as scholars on Africa have shown that "the promise of manifold returns for money offerings serves as an effective means to fundraising"<sup>52</sup>. Consequently, the more these new churches trumpet their philanthropy, the more opulent their wealth, thanks to the Gospel of Prosperity they preach, even if some of it is "plowed into development projects such as schools and hospitals"<sup>53</sup>.

## Conclusion

Both Action Chapel and ICGC are forging an of agenda by employing creative ways of engaging with the Ghanaian public sphere. The said creativity involves the provision of social services, such as health and educational institutions, just as the historic churches do.

The study has delved into Action Chapel's Compassion Rehabilitation Centre that caters for drugs and alcohol addicts, its establishment of a Social Services Wing that provides food and clothing aid to orphans, a Students' Scholarship Foundation, sinking of boreholes in some deprived communities, and its one clinic, all geared toward institutionalization. In the same vein, ICGC's Central Aid, its Institution and Community

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<sup>49</sup> Lindsay Whitfield, "Trustees on Development from Conditionality to Governance: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in Ghana," in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 43, Number 4, 2005, 641-664.

<sup>50</sup> Lindhardt, 2009, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo, "The role of Pentecostal Churches as an influential arm of Civil Society in Ghana," in *Ghana Social Science Journal*, Volume 11, Number 2, 2014b, 74.

<sup>52</sup> Lindhardt, 2009, 42.

<sup>53</sup> Okyerefo, 2011, 214.

Support, the “ICGC Clean Water Project”, and its recreational facility are all seen by the church as philanthropic and contribute to the wellbeing of the wider society rather than just church members. Interestingly, the churches do not project their universities in the same light, probably because the churches themselves ostensibly perceive these as business projects. By the same token, Action Chapel and ICGC do not seem to be paying keen interest in the establishment of primary, junior and senior high schools as much as they are paying attention to their universities.

The institutionalization process in the two churches, however, bears a very close semblance to that of the historic churches. By modelling themselves on the historic mission churches, the paper argues, Action Chapel and ICGC engage in mimetic isomorphism. Not only does this result in their leveraging greater acceptability in the Ghanaian public sphere, in fact, the institutionalization agenda drives the churches’ growth in material wealth through members’ tithes and contributions, fuelled by the churches’ Faith Gospel theology. Both members and non-members are targeted to pay for the philanthropic projects of both churches. Perhaps the churches are realizing that engaging with the Ghanaian public sphere through philanthropy will stem the critique Faith Gospel theology is generally accosted with that prosperity gospel enriches the churches and their founders at the expense of the individual member and his or her community.

In providing social services, then, the churches do not have to re-invent the wheel where there are old players already in the field, players the new churches sometimes compete with. Modelling themselves on the historic churches in the provision of educational and health institutions, then, would be because the Pentecostal churches perceive the historic churches to be “successful”, what Lindsay and Wuthnow<sup>54</sup> describe as mimetic isomorphism. The process entails competition with the institutions on which they seek to model themselves at the same time as with the many other new players (Pentecostal churches) in the field in the bid to be more successful than the others. The process is also a logical corollary of the evolving and institutionalizing of religious groups<sup>55</sup>. In that vein the new churches’ development of philanthropic structures is “associated with professionalization”<sup>56</sup> thereby verging on normative isomorphism as well.

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<sup>54</sup> Lindsay and Wuthnow, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Weber, 1947.

<sup>56</sup> Dimaggio and Powell, 1983, 150.

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