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To cite this article: Ben-Willie Kwaku Golo (14 Nov 2023): Examining pastor-prophet authority in neo-Pentecostal deliverance practices in Ghana, Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity, DOI: [10.1080/27691616.2023.2279713](https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2023.2279713)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/27691616.2023.2279713>



Published online: 14 Nov 2023.



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Examining pastor-prophet authority in neo-Pentecostal deliverance practices in Ghana

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ABSTRACT


A popular and growing feature of contemporary neo-Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana are regular deliverance practices in search for solutions to diverse forms of existential predicaments, known in Pentecostal diction as afflictions. Pastor-prophets have become very popular for these practices with thousands of deliverance seekers attending one deliverance service or the other in search for solutions that these pastor-prophets proffer. Using ethnographic semi-structured interviews, this article examines the phenomenon of deliverance practices within neo-Pentecostalism in Ghana, and particularly focuses on the authority of pastor-prophets around which the activities of deliverance evolve. Findings indicate that supernatural authority and attaining of breakthroughs over life's predicaments, become the barometer and legitimacy for the authority of pastor-prophets.

KEYWORDS

Deliverance practices; neo-Pentecostalism; charismatic authority; deliverance seekers; pastor-prophet authority

Introduction

Neo-Pentecostal churches are described as the 'contemporary Pentecostalism that holds the cutting edge in Africa's new Christianity'.¹ They are a constellation of churches popularly referred to as Charismatic churches and/or ministries in Ghana,² with the term Charismatic popular for new independent Pentecostal churches.³ These churches are distinguished from the charismatic groups or movements within missionary established mainline churches, such as Catholic and Presbyterian Charismatics that have not metamorphosed into independent churches, and which Anderson refers to as 'older Church Charismatics'.⁴ Locally, in contra-distinction from other historic mission-established Christian churches, neo-Pentecostal churches are usually founded by a charismatic preacher who is the visionary of the church. Growing in leaps and

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¹Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 24.

²Golo, "The Groaning Earth," 201. See also Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 23.

³Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 1, 26.

⁴Anderson, "Varieties, Taxonomies and Definitions," 19.

bounds, they command ‘large followings in all major cities and towns and becoming the most popular characteristic of Ghanaian Pentecostalism today’.⁵ Before proceeding further, I provide an overview of the types of Pentecostals located on the Pentecostal topography of Ghana.

The Pentecostal topography of Ghana would be described as characterized with three main Pentecostal types. The first is the early 20th century post-First World War African Indigenous Churches (AICs) called in Ghana spiritual churches or *Sunsum sorè*,⁶ such as the Jesus Divine Healing Church, Church of the Twelve Apostles, the Apostles Revelation Society, and the Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC). AICs emerged in response to activities of early prophetic figures and movements⁷ and defined themselves against the historic mission-established churches.⁸ These churches were of a pneumatic revival which ‘confronted the muted pneumatic elements in missionary theology and practice’.⁹ Healing and deliverance, including exorcisms, were central practices in the AICs. In contemporary Ghana, many AICs are either declining or rebranding and metamorphosing into new identities in response to the changing trend in African Christianity.¹⁰ The second type of Ghanaian Pentecostalism are the post-Second World War classical Pentecostal churches such as the Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church, the Apostolic Church of Ghana, and the Assemblies of God.¹¹ Though with indigenous roots, many of the classical Pentecostal churches had some fermentation through links and encounter with the holiness and classical Pentecostal revival in the North which had encounters with the African continent at the turn of the 20th century.¹²

The third type, which is the focus of this article and referred to by Gifford as ‘newcomers’,¹³ is historically relatively newer, emerging in the 1980s, and broadly referred to as neo-Pentecostalism. As earlier indicated, neo-Pentecostals comprise ‘Charismatic independent churches, including megachurches, and influenced by both classical Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement’.¹⁴ Although, also of indigenous roots, these neo-Pentecostal churches, particularly the earlier Charismatic churches, have a lot of international character and connections, with significant influences of North American neo-Pentecostalism and tele-evangelists.¹⁵ In their forms, neo-Pentecostal churches comprise those churches identified in the literature, and by dint of history, as Charismatic churches and the closely related and more recent neo-Prophetic

⁵Quayesi-Amakye, “Coping with Evil,” 255.

⁶Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 2; Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 66.

⁷Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 19–20; Omenyo and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Spaces,” 57–8.

⁸Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 20.

⁹Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 66.

¹⁰Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 29–30.

¹¹Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 20. See also Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 23–4.

¹²Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 23; Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 64.

¹³Gifford, *Ghana’s New Christianity*, 23.

¹⁴Anderson, “Varieties, Taxonomies and Definitions,” 19.

¹⁵Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 1, 28.

churches,¹⁶ which are particularly known for deliverance practices.¹⁷ While Charismatic churches emerged in the 1980s, the neo-prophetic churches emerged in the 1990s to not only cater for those believers with orientations to the primal worldview but they also ‘serve the interest of people of low, socio-economic status who do not fit well into the rather elitist Charismatic Churches’.¹⁸

Many of the neo-prophetic churches emerge within the context of neo-Pentecostalism and/or the Charismatic movement and ‘largely operate under the ambit of the Ghanaian Charismatic movement’,¹⁹ with prophetic ministry and practices headlining their activities. While also showing features of the older AICs, their leaders bear titles of ‘prophets’, and engage in prophecies, healing and deliverance in a more elitist and refined form.²⁰ Examples of such typically neo-prophetic-Charismatic churches are Elisha Salifu Amoako’s Alive Chapel International; Emmanuel Badu Kobi’s Glorious Wave Church International; Emmanuel Agyei’s Prophetic Prayer Palace Ministry International; and Nanasei Opoku-Sarkodie’s Praying Family Chapel. However, in contemporary Ghanaian Pentecostalism these prophetic and deliverance practices are not limited to the neo-prophetic churches; deliverance practices have become a central part of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism. These are some of the features that make any clear-cut categorization and typologizing of African Pentecostalism arduous.

Regarding their significance, while deliverance practices are still rather predominant in neo-prophetic churches, deliverance practices have become very popular within Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism, and even found in some classical Pentecostal and historic mission established churches which are integrating deliverance sessions into their programmes.²¹ Deliverance practices are significant to the extent that there are many individuals in the earlier Charismatic churches who have been recognized as occupying the office of the prophet.²² Indeed, the significance of deliverance practices within neo-Pentecostal Christianity is to the extent that healing, and deliverance is ‘one of the main reasons why people join Pentecostal and independent prophet-healing churches throughout the sub-Sahara ...’.²³ It is popular for neo-Pentecostal churches to organize regular weekly, bi-weekly and even blocked number of days of deliverance sessions occasioned with fasting and prayer, which can take place online or in-person or access-on-demand. Some, such as the Alpha Hour

¹⁶Golo, “The Groaning Earth,” 201.

¹⁷Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 83–112.

¹⁸Omenyo and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Space”.

¹⁹Quayesi-Amakye, “Prophetism,” 162.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 162–3.

²¹Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 165.

²²*Ibid.*, 160.

²³Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 155.

Online Prayers, are daily midnight prayers in which deliverance practices significantly feature.

Consequently, neo-Pentecostal churches, which are numerous in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa, have become popular for engaging in diverse forms of deliverance practices and ‘characterized by new prophetism, prophetic consultation, prophetic objects, forensic prophecy and prophetic deliverance’.²⁴ Deliverance is defined as ‘the act of liberating someone from the power, influence, and bondage of an evil source through prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit’.²⁵ These deliverance practices in neo-Pentecostal churches, where there remain large numbers of prophets and prophetic activities,²⁶ account for their popularity and growth. In these deliverance practices are the central and active roles of pastor-prophets who are believed by followers as having the expertise and/or authority in facilitating and ensuring deliverance. For instance, there is the prevalence of consultation with pastor-prophets, where believers seeking deliverance (deliverance seekers/clients) have one-on one appointment with pastor-prophets ‘who project themselves as people with great spiritual power and capable of performing extraordinary feats’,²⁷ engage in prophetic guidance; providing information to explain the believer’s situation and providing directions and solutions.²⁸ This phenomenon is popular in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals deliverance practices today, and is known in the local Akan language as *akwankyere*, literally meaning prophetic guidance or direction. This has, largely, become associated with the use of ‘prophylactics such as anointing oil, blessed water, mantels (handkerchiefs after the prophet has prayed over them) as well as pictures or stickers of the prophet’.²⁹ Anointing with oil is, particularly, common in neo-Pentecostal prayer and deliverance sessions because the ‘anointing oil is believed to neutralize devilish works, and cause promotional and preventive effects for believers’.³⁰

Three inter-related frameworks have been identified as influencing the operational theologies of these deliverance-oriented neo-Pentecostals. These are first, the Ghanaian religious terrain where there is the belief in the works of evil spiritual forces; second, the concept/doctrine of the enemy, which in Christian history relates to the image for Satan; and third, a doctrine of salvation in which salvation is to benefit materially, health-wise and in good desires of the believer.³¹ Hence, it is important to understand that a fundamental discourse of these neo-Pentecostals is the prevalence of ‘a strong, uncompromising, and entrenched belief in the “causal other” believed to underlie people’s troubles,

²⁴Kgatle, “Triumphalist theology,” 141.

²⁵Quayesi-Amakye, “The Problematic of Exorcism,” 69.

²⁶Quayesi-Amakye, “Coping with Evil,” 255–6.

²⁷Omenyo and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Spaces,” 66.

²⁸Ibid., 65.

²⁹Tsekpoe, “Contemporary Prophetic,” 285.

³⁰Quayesi-Amakye, “Prophetism,” 167.

³¹Atiemo, “Mmusuyie,” 122.

be they Christians or not. Causal agents, typically witches, place less powerful people in spiritual bondages that restrict their progress and success'.³² Thus, the interpretive framework within which deliverance actors operate is one in which the view is held that, in terms of cause and effect, the material and physical world is not all that there is to life and its processes – the framework of the supernatural worldview. Within this worldview, there is the belief that there are evil powers operating from a believer's spiritual background where many do not have the capability of accessing or even controlling. Consequently, believers vest power in the pastor-prophet with such capabilities.³³ This article focuses on the examination of deliverance and authority of pastor-prophets around which the activities of deliverance evolve, particularly how authority of the pastor-prophet is derived and/or located regarding deliverance practices.

First, the introduction offers the general background and definitions of terms and is followed by a brief survey of the concept of authority as guiding framework for the article, before accounting for the method utilized in data gathering and analysis. The article then proceeds to examine pastor-prophet authority in neo-Pentecostal deliverance practices in Ghana, by looking at why the need for deliverance and exploring the various means by which authority is derived and/or located. The article finally provides a summary and conclusion.

Authority

There is the tendency to define power and authority as variants, where authority is considered as 'legitimate power' and power as 'informal authority'.³⁴ Authority is defined by Weber as 'the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons'.³⁵ Power, on the opposite, is considered as 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance'³⁶ or the 'a person's ability to impose his will upon others despite resistance'.³⁷

Fundamental to any sort of authority is legitimacy through which an action to control or influence and the outcome is considered legitimate and desired. Authority is about the legitimacy to control towards a desired end, usually collective goals and ends as compared to power which is oriented towards 'pursuit of individual or particularistic goals associated with group compliance'.³⁸ Hence, Buckley defines authority as: 'The direction or control of the behavior of others for the promotion of collective goals based on some ascertainable

³²Quayesi-Amakye, "Coping with Evil," 260. See also Quayesi-Amakye, "Propheticism," 172.

³³See also Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 89.

³⁴Grimes, "Power, Influence," 725.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Blau, "Critical Remarks," 306.

³⁸Grimes, "Power, Influence," 726.

form of their knowledgeable consent'.³⁹ Buckley suggests that 'authority implies informed, voluntary compliance ... or an identity of the goal orientation of the controllers and the controlled',⁴⁰ as earlier indicated by Weber as 'a certain minimum of voluntary submission'.⁴¹ The indication is that, because 'authority entails voluntary compliance with the superior's directives, it obviates the need for coercive force or for sanctions',⁴² and the use of force is an attestation the person exerting the control does not have authority over the controlled.⁴³

Three forms of authority have been identified by Weber. The first is 'traditional authority', which is 'legitimated on the sanctity of tradition'.⁴⁴ It is an authority that rests 'on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them'.⁴⁵ Traditional authority sees the central person from the perspectives of hereditary with the pre-ordination to rule over others⁴⁶ and 'subjects are bound to the ruler by personal dependence and a tradition of loyalty, and their obedience to him is further reinforced by such cultural beliefs as the divine right of kings'.⁴⁷ The orientation to this authority of the social order is 'sacred eternal, and inviolable'.⁴⁸ The second is Charismatic authority, to which I will return because it is similar to leadership in neo-Pentecostal and/or Charismatic churches, as the name implies.

The third form of authority, which is legal or rational authority, 'is legitimated by a formalistic belief in the supremacy of the law whatever its specific content'.⁴⁹ and requires principles that require the following of 'directives originating from an office superior to one's own, regardless of who occupies this higher office'.⁵⁰ It is authority that is premised 'on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands'.⁵¹ In its operationalization, whereas 'superiors have authority over subordinates, the former as well as the latter are subject to the authority of the official body of impersonal regulations'.⁵² Epitomized by the authority of the modern state in contemporary society, legal authority can be overarching and encompassing by bringing both traditional and charismatic authorities into its ambit. It is for this reason some

³⁹Buckley cited in Grimes, *Ibid.*, 727.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Weber cited in Blau, "Critical Remarks," 306.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 307.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁵Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory," 32.

⁴⁶Blau, "Critical Remarks," 308.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory," 32.

⁵²*Ibid.*

would define authority generically in relation to its legal conformity to the exercise of power and control. For instance, authority is defined as having to do with 'legitimacy or the right to do what is allowed by law'.⁵³

Charismatic authority, which is identical to what is exercised by many pastor-prophets in neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, is usually located in a leader and his mission considered as inspired by divine or supernatural powers.⁵⁴ It is authority established on 'devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him'.⁵⁵ Weber defines charisma as a 'highly individual quality'.⁵⁶ The leader, in Charismatic authority:

heads a new social movement, and his followers and disciples are converts to a new cause. There is a sense of being "called" to spread the new gospel, a sense of rejecting the past and heralding the future. Devotion to the leader and the conviction that his pronouncements embody the spirit and ideals of the movement are the source of the group's willing obedience to his commands.⁵⁷

While Charismatic leadership and authority is compatible with diverse areas of social and religious life because 'charisma is involved whenever a person inspires others to follow his lead',⁵⁸ in its typical crystallization in Christian forms and parlance, Weber notes that its guiding principle and spirit is 'symbolized by Christ's words, "It is written ... , but I say unto you ... "'.⁵⁹ Interestingly, charisma as used by Weber has been borrowed from early Christian theology where 'expressions such as "the of grace", "spiritual gift", or the Gnostic *pneuma* belong to the semantic field of the term'.⁶⁰

Blau and Scott have identified four properties for the exercise of any kind of authority. These are: (i) authority is vested in a position and irrespective of the personal characteristics of the one exercising it; (ii) authority permits voluntary acceptance and compliance to responsibility by subordinates; (iii) authority requires subordinates to suspend their judgements in advance of a command and commitment to execute a command or decision; and (iv) authority can only arise in a context of collectivity where an orientation to a common value regarding the appropriateness of control by authority supports the pattern of acceptance, whereby even if an individual rejects the control, collective acceptance means the authority is enforceable upon the dissenting individual.⁶¹

⁵³Gbekor, "Examining Authority," 365.

⁵⁴Blau, "Critical Remarks," 308.

⁵⁵Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory," 32.

⁵⁶Weber cited in Epley, "Weber's Theory," 8.

⁵⁷Blau, "Critical Remarks," 308.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory," 32.

⁶¹Blau and Scott cited in Grimes, "Power, Influence and Social Control," 726.

Method and materials

The methodology employed in this work is review of secondary literature and qualitative ethnography, with the deployment of participant observation and semi-structured interviews as data gathering techniques. Four (4) senior pastor-prophets from three churches were purposively sampled for interviews. Each of the interviews lasted between thirty to forty-five minutes. The reason for their selection was their popular and regular involvement in healing and deliverance practices in their chapels. All the pastor-prophets sampled identified themselves as Charismatic churches and were registered with either the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) or National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches (NACCC). This means they operate under the ethos and regulations of these legally recognized groups. Although focused solely on gathering information about a phenomenon and none of the interview questions bothered on data about the participants or any other identified human persons, all the interviewees were informed of their rights to withdraw at any point during the interview. They were also assured that the data was purely for academic purposes and that their responses would be anonymized to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. Hence informants were all presented using researcher-identifiable codes. Participant observation was carried out in only one of these churches, because it has more regular services, at least four in a week; two of which deliverance practices take place. This gave the researcher first-hand experience of deliverance practices.

The above methods of data collection have been augmented with the examination of deliverance narratives – testimonies – from anonymized deliverance seekers from twenty sessions/episodes (287–307) broadcast on Ghana's biggest online prayer platform, the Alpha Hour prayer sessions. Testimonies and testifying are an essential part of the African Pentecostal tradition,⁶² in gratitude to God and proclamation of being delivered from an affliction. They also express the responses and thoughts of the individuals testifying about the charisma and qualities of the pastor-prophet in their encounters. Therefore, while Alpha Hour is not a church in the strictest sense but an online prayer platform, my recourse to deliverance narratives from deliverance seekers aims at exploring their perspectives as a balance to views from the pastor-prophets. Particularly, I intend to explore and examine how authority features in the cognitive frameworks of believers (how they see and/or define authority, how they speak and/or testify regarding the authority of the pastor-prophets). It also aims at exploring how, in their interactions and encounters with the pastor-prophets, deliverance seekers vest authority. This approach allows a holistic examination of how authority pans out in the interactions

⁶²Ganiel, "Pentecostal and Charismatic," 131; Asamoah-Gyadu, "Missions," 390.

between pastor-prophets and deliverance seekers. Hence, my interest is not on the veracity of the testimonies, but rather on how authority features in the cognitive frameworks and lived realities of deliverance seekers and the interactions among actors.

Findings and discussions

Based on the aims of the article, I intend to present the findings and discussions through the concentrations on two questions, which are: (i) why the need to engage in deliverance practices; and (ii) how is the authority of the pastor-prophet derived or located in the deliverance practice?

The need for deliverance

Generally, and from an empirical perspective, the socio-economic situation in Ghana and, particularly economic survival, has been identified as the context and most pressing existential driver for the demand and popularity of deliverance churches in Ghana.⁶³ Several inexplicable existential challenges that affect social and economic life and security, particularly when they become recurrent and prolonged, such as fertility and gynecological issues; job, career and professional failures; recurrent financial and health challenges; failed relationships and marriages; delayed or stagnated promotion at the workplace, have been identified as drivers.⁶⁴ Admittedly, while pressing existential problems largely represent triggers why many seek deliverance and consult deliverance pastor-prophets, reasons for seeking these services go beyond the socio-economic challenges themselves.⁶⁵ As the discussions will show, there are also deep religious and theological reasons accounting for the demand and preponderance of deliverance practices in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism. Pastor-prophets indicated that when manifestations of certain blessings and expectations fail continually, these are physical and outward manifestations of a deeper challenge; something must have gone wrong spiritually and requiring deliverance.

The above view relates to a complex understanding of salvation that underlies deliverance practices among Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals. In Ghanaian neo-Pentecostalism, salvation of the individual goes beyond 'the conversion, transformation and empowerment that is wrought in one's life through an encounter with Jesus Christ, leading to the redemption and forgiveness of sin, the transformation into a new person (rebirth or to be "born-again") and an empowerment through the Holy Spirit to live a new life'.⁶⁶ According to neo-Pentecostals, conversion and encounter with Christ leading to a new

⁶³Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, ix, 86, 95.

⁶⁴Ibid., 89; Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 178–9.

⁶⁵See also Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 168–9.

⁶⁶Golo, "Creation and Salvation," 336.

birth is simply the first step of salvation towards the actualization of one's salvation. This understanding is based on a further notion of salvation popular among neo-Pentecostals, which conceives of salvation as 'transformation and empowerment, healing and deliverance, prosperity, and restoration of spiritual gifts'.⁶⁷ The neo-Pentecostal belief, however, is that the manifestations of these things can be frustrated and/or blocked by demons or spirit forces that still hold some power over the converted Christian.⁶⁸ Hence, following the conversion encounter with Jesus Christ, in the words of one pastor-prophet informant:

there are things that must be dealt with, depending on the practices that you have gone through in the past. There may be some habits you may have developed; maybe some kind of worship that you have done previously, and some kind of connections from which you have not disconnected yourself. So, the fact that you have accepted the Lord Jesus does not mean that same day everything is gone.⁶⁹

This is the fundamental religious and theological idea of deliverance. In the understanding of the informant above, there are predicaments and conditions coming from the history or past (background) of the believer that have the tendency to frustrate the believer's actualization of salvation, particularly the material and physical blessings, if such elements of the past are not 'dealt with'. The informant suggests that salvation is a lever to fight for one's complete extrication and towards the blessings of God. This becomes clearer in the submission of another informant:

Now in all that God has bestowed upon us as his blessing, they are also time tagged. So, when the time comes for a particular manifestation for you on the earth, by his Spirit, he generates your desire and longing for it, which means the time has come for it. ... So, God has put time tag to everything. When the time for that manifestation comes, that is a blessing you must walk in. Then, you realize that the enemy has already established some strongholds in the background that he's using to oppose you.⁷⁰

Submissions of informants suggest that the saved Christian, who is believed to have come from a background with some evil and/or demonic baggage, is exposed to being fought over their blessings by evil spiritual forces emanating from his/her family background.⁷¹ This is what Hackett refers to as discourses of demonism and satanism,⁷² which is popular in African neo-Pentecostal theological discourse. In neo-Pentecostal discourse, this constellation of pervasive and demonic forces, including one's ancestral past and background, are believed 'to be responsible for all kinds of events – including misfortune, illness, poverty, and a host of other social, economic, and political problems

⁶⁷Quayesi-Amakye, "Prophetism," 163.

⁶⁸Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 85.

⁶⁹RDD, deliverance minister and prophet.

⁷⁰RPJ, senior pastor and deliverance minister.

⁷¹See also Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 168.

⁷²Hackett, "Discourses," 61.

bringing spiritual insecurity'.⁷³ This is further affirmed by the informant when he continued that:

The reason for deliverance is because your back [*sic*] has to do with your past. Particularly your paternal and maternal lineage and activities that went on which are demonic. They are your back [*sic*] that is open. So, the enemy in most cases had already established legal ground to object a particular kind of manifestation of God, of blessing in the lineage. That is why we need the deliverance.⁷⁴

It is for these reasons Atiemo sees a convergence of the neo-Pentecostal doctrine of salvation with the indigenous ontology and suggests an influence from the indigenous religion on the interpretive soteriological framework of Ghanaian neo-Pentecostals. He suggests that in the Akan ontology, for instance, evil and suffering are considered as destructive and utterly negative and an affront to salvation, because to the Akan, 'the absence of evil and its physical manifestations is salvation'.⁷⁵ This notion has been corroborated by Asamoah-Gyadu when he notes that the neo-Pentecostal notion of salvation resonates with the indigenous Ghanaian notion where 'salvation connotes deliverance from evil and all misfortunes for an unrestrained enjoyment of material and spiritual prosperity'.⁷⁶ Hence, in neo-Pentecostal theology, prosperity 'is perceived as the good life Christ offers to those who believe in him'.⁷⁷ Therefore, contrasted with cherished forms of the good life such as successful marriage and business, and the absence of ill-health,⁷⁸ when it becomes evident that the good life is threatened by events such as continuous setbacks and human failures, these require rituals that appropriate spiritual power to restrain, correct or totally eradicate these undesirable conditions.⁷⁹ It is suggested that the massive influence of Pentecostalism on the religious psyche and framework of the Ghanaian believer is the 'success of deliverance-oriented Pentecostalism in incorporating local ideas and practices pertaining to old gods, witchcraft, and new spirits into its discourse'.⁸⁰

Noticeable in the language of informants, it is suggested that the prevalence of the doctrine of the enemy (spiritual or even physical enemy) is very instructive in understanding the theological framework of neo-Pentecostals, regarding deliverance.⁸¹ This enemy could be malevolent powers and demonic spirits, such as witchcraft. They could also be fellow human beings, usually close relatives, 'who are considered agents of the Devil who are being used willfully or unwillingly to impede one's progress in life'.⁸² This confirms the notion that the context of deliverance is misfortune and demonic blockages of a Christian's

⁷³ Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 8.

⁷⁴ RPJ, senior pastor and deliverance minister.

⁷⁵ Atiemo, "Mmusuyie," 26.

⁷⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 176–7.

⁷⁷ Quayesi-Amakye, "Prophetism," 171.

⁷⁸ Atiemo, "Mmusuyie," 26–7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 53; Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 223.

⁸⁰ Tweneboah, "Witchdemonic Accusations," 389.

⁸¹ Atiemo, "Mmusuyie," 35.

⁸² Omenyo and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Spaces," 63.

progress and advancement,⁸³ and interpreted as caused by Satan, generational curses, personal sin or witchcraft and sorcery,⁸⁴ with the discourses around deliverance usually grounded in satanism and demonism.⁸⁵

Therefore, salvation in Ghanaian neo-Pentecostal theology, also includes extrication and freedom ‘from one’s spiritual enemies, that is the devil, evil spirits, witchcraft and other such inimical forces who are only out to “steal, kill and destroy” the children of God (John 10:10)’.⁸⁶ Deliverance practices are basically deployed to enforce rupture or break from demonic spirits and forces of a believer’s past and to free believers from their influences,⁸⁷ and from the past relations and religion of the believer, as well as negative baggage from one’s ancestry.⁸⁸ Hence, deliverance was described as ‘a sub-set of spiritual warfare’, which is meant to ‘frustrate the gate of hell, thereby establishing the purposes of God’.⁸⁹ The language used above suggests a conflict situation, and it is within this context the concept of the enemy resonates with neo-Pentecostals. The notion of spiritual warfare is popular among neo-Pentecostal deliverance seekers and practitioners where ‘spiritual warfare’ is defined as ‘a set of practices and discourses that aim to battle with and deliver victims from invisible supernatural threats’.⁹⁰ It is within this warfare dynamics and context that requires authority and power capable of engaging them.

How pastor-prophets derive authority in deliverance practices

The data suggests that in neo-Pentecostalism, authority is derived from at least, a combination of two main sources operating in tandem but manifesting in various forms within the neo-Pentecostal deliverance encounter. These sources are the supernatural (supernatural authority), and the community of believers and followers, because of some supernatural abilities exuded by the pastor-prophet to ensure spiritual rupture or deliverance (vested authority).

Position and charisma of the pastor-prophet

Generally, in the church, authority is vested in the position of the pastor-prophet, as an individual specially elected and/or affirmed by believers of a Christian community and ordained into positions.⁹¹ In many neo-Pentecostal churches the practices are similar, where charismatic individuals who established churches out of their movements become legitimate leaders, particularly by proving their calling and empowerment through a personal encounter with

⁸³Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, 85.

⁸⁴Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 135. See also Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 168.

⁸⁵Hackett, “Discourses,” 61, 70.

⁸⁶Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 134.

⁸⁷Robbins, “Globalization and Pentecostalism,” 128.

⁸⁸Daswani, “On Christianity,” 467.

⁸⁹RPJ, senior pastor and deliverance minister.

⁹⁰Hasu, “Politics of Warfare,” 24.

⁹¹Gbekor, “Examining Authority,” 366.

God and also through a visible exercise of charisma.⁹² Consequently, their callings are affirmed by the community of believers they lead. Accompanying these positions is supernatural power and/or authority that will make the individuals manifest power and function properly, and this ‘may manifest in preaching powerful and captivating messages, giving prophetic messages, performing acts of healing, deliverance and miracles’.⁹³ These findings support that authority is largely vested in position.⁹⁴

In neo-Pentecostalism, the emphasis on the ‘gifts of the Holy Spirit’ such as healing and prophesying,⁹⁵ as well as charisma mean that ‘Pentecostals emphasize the experience of and manifestation of a number of charismata, spirit gifts or grace gifts’.⁹⁶ available to the functioning of the church. Therefore, beyond the institutional recognition of an official position of the pastor-prophet, which is not automatic for the ministry of deliverance, central to being a deliverance pastor-prophet in neo-Pentecostalism is charisma to function authoritatively – charismatic authority. This enables the pastor-prophet ‘to perform certain services or ministries beyond human ability’.⁹⁷ This has been supported by an informant that: ‘No human being heals. We are channels. When you pray, the Lord is the one that does the work’.⁹⁸ Therefore, the position of the deliverance by pastor-prophet in neo-Pentecostal churches, is mostly underlain by what is commonly described as spiritual authority.

The analysis, thus, suggests that authority in neo-Pentecostal deliverance practices is located in both legitimacy (position) and functionality, where one is assuming legitimate claim to authority and the other is the ability to exercise the authority gained.⁹⁹ Schnepel cites Weber as indicating that the sole basis of legitimacy for charismatic authority is ‘personal charisma as long as it is proved; that is, as long as it receives recognition’.¹⁰⁰ Authority in neo-Pentecostal deliverance practices, therefore, largely hinges on the charisma of the pastor-prophet which has been acknowledged and accepted by deliverance seekers as inspired by divine or supernatural powers,¹⁰¹ and to which they are voluntary willing to suspend their judgment and to commit their decisions and responsibilities.¹⁰²

Pastor-prophets ability to ‘see’

Related to charisma and supernatural authority, referred to in Pentecostal diction as ‘anointing’ or ‘unction’ on the pastor-prophet, this form of authority

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid., 367.

⁹⁴Grimes, “Power, Influence,” 725; Gbekor, “Examining Authority,” 366;

⁹⁵Ganiel, “Pentecostal and Charismatic,” 131;

⁹⁶Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 7.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸ARA, apostle and deliverance minister.

⁹⁹Gbekor, “Examining Authority,” 365.

¹⁰⁰Schnepel, “Max Weber’s Theory,” 33.

¹⁰¹Blau, “Critical Remarks,” 308; Schnepel, “Max weber’s Theory,” 34.

¹⁰²Grimes, “Power, Influence,” 726.

is largely derived from the position and abilities of the pastor-prophets as an anointed person of God. This is confirmed by a neo-Pentecostal deliverance pastor when he submitted that 'a deliverance minister has some authority from God which we call anointing'.¹⁰³ This form of authority or anointing, which is 'the Holy Spirit often working through the specially anointed people of God',¹⁰⁴ is manifested in many ways and one is the ability to 'see'. The suggestion is that supernatural power upon the pastor-prophet manifests in forms of extra-ordinary abilities (authority). This is central to Weber's understanding of charismatic authority which centres on charisma defined as 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities'.¹⁰⁵

In neo-Pentecostal deliverance practices, authority is also derived from and located in the pastor-prophet's knowledgeable ability of the predicament of the seeker, particularly the causes/sources of the affliction in order to attack its stronghold effectively. This is what Omenyo and Atiemo identified as clients' or deliverance seekers' claims of their prophets' ability to see, which includes claims to the understanding and interpretation of dreams.¹⁰⁶ Asked how they determined afflictions of deliverance seekers and their sources to be able to intervene, a pastor-prophet informant noted that 'You must be a spirit-filled person that hears from the Lord concerning people's issues',¹⁰⁷ while another suggested 'You need to have knowledge of the source of the affliction and its dynamics in order to attack their stronghold'.¹⁰⁸ This knowledge, the informant suggested, is revealed to them by God. This knowledge 'gives the man of God the mind of the enemy',¹⁰⁹ and provides the pastor-prophet the ability to have insight into the predicament of the seeker, particularly the root cause of the problem, to be able to help the seeker to break free.¹¹⁰ It is from this spiritual and revelational ability of the pastor-prophet to be able to locate the source of the affliction – and communicate same convincingly to the believers, usually in ways that the seeker confirms to be true, that the authority of the man of God is derived. It is this authority and power, which pastor-prophets portend to be purveyors of, that make pastor-prophets in deliverance ministries the 'focal point of attraction and importance'.¹¹¹ It must be underscored, however, that these are not without negative consequences and implications. These also come with developing a 'dependency syndrome' among their followers who

¹⁰³REB, retired senior pastor and deliverance minister.

¹⁰⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, "Missions," 390.

¹⁰⁵Weber cited in Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory," 33.

¹⁰⁶Omenyo and Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Spaces," 66.

¹⁰⁷ARA, apostle and deliverance minister.

¹⁰⁸RDD, deliverance minister and prophet.

¹⁰⁹RPJ, senior pastor and deliverance minister.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Tweneboah, "Witchdemonic Accusations," 390.

look up to them as people of power with the abilities to protect and provide solutions to all their problems.¹¹²

One then understands why it has been suggested that neo-Pentecostalist deliverance activities are replete with notions of spiritual and otherworldly causation of hardship and predicament in Africa, and which detract and distract from the practical realities and structural causes of predicaments and difficulties in Africa.¹¹³ However, it is not always so; (neo) Pentecostals believe that human afflictions and predicaments, ‘whether caused naturally or supernaturally, can be dealt with through the power of the Holy Spirit often working through specially anointed people of God’.¹¹⁴ With deliverance seekers believing in the possibility of their predicaments being caused by otherworldly forces and the potency of the Holy Spirit working through pastor-prophets to bring deliverance, pastor-prophets exercise authority on collective interest and identification of goal worth pursuing in that interest.¹¹⁵ Therefore, as a form of control and/or exercise of authority, this underscores the Weberian view that in authority relationship, the authorized suspends ‘his own critical faculties for choosing between alternatives and uses the formal criterion of the receipt of a command or signal as his basis for choice’.¹¹⁶

Affirmations of effective and successful deliverance

Beyond knowledge of deliverance seekers’ predicament(s) and/or source, suggestions from informants indicate God reveals modes and means of deliverance to them for the benefit of the community of believers. This knowledge, which is available to a select few who are chosen to mediate between God and the community of faith, is a revelation of supernatural knowledge that enables the pastor-prophet with the authority to execute same.¹¹⁷ Therefore, from the neo-Pentecostal perspective, authority of the pastor-prophet is also derived from and/or located within the ability to effectively intervene and achieve results with the most appropriate intervention. An informant affirmed, ‘the role of the deliverance minister is to make deliverance successful’.¹¹⁸ Hence, while the authority and power to engage in deliverance practices are derived from God, through Jesus Christ,¹¹⁹ in neo-Pentecostalism, successful deliverance depends on the level of anointing of the pastor-prophet practitioner,¹²⁰ where the level of anointing determines the efficiency of the intervention and its success.

¹¹²Omenyo cited in Tweneboah, “Witchdemonic Accusations,” 390.

¹¹³Kgatle, “Power dynamics,” 1.

¹¹⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, “Missions,” 390.

¹¹⁵Grimes, “Power, Influence,” 72.

¹¹⁶Blau, “Critical Remarks,” 307.

¹¹⁷Gbekor, “Examining Authority,” 367.

¹¹⁸ARA, apostle and deliverance minister.

¹¹⁹Gbekor, “Examining Authority,” 366.

¹²⁰Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, 188.

Considering that the success or not of deliverance is at the end of the process or practice, one of the most credible forms of their verification is through testimonies, particularly testimonies from deliverance seekers. Through testimonies, those ‘who have been healed by Pentecostal and charismatic preachers often testify about their experiences at Pentecostal and charismatic services’.¹²¹ Considering that legitimization of position and activities of a leader establishes or is a locator of authority,¹²² these testimonies are forms of affirmations and legitimization of the authority of the pastor -prophets. Thus, beyond indications by informants that clients and/or deliverance seekers direct or bring other clients to them, which are forms of affirmation of authority in themselves, what has become obvious is that authority of the pastor-prophets are also derived from public affirmations and testimonies from clients.¹²³ It is for these reasons when publicly broadcasting their deliverance activities, particularly using the social media, deliverance successes through testimonies of believers or by the pastor-prophets themselves are central.

From testimonies and narratives of deliverance seekers serialized from the online testimonies of the Alpha Hour, we notice affirmations such as: ‘Chief Alpharian, [referring to the pastor-prophet] the hands of God are upon you. Chief Alpharian, the power of God is truly resting upon you and abiding with you;’¹²⁴ ‘May God continue to use you Pastor Elvis, for allowing God to use you greatly to save this generation;’¹²⁵ ‘the God of Alpha Hour has come through for me;’¹²⁶ and ‘When you pray on this altar, truly the fire burning on it will swallow your prayers and answers will follow’.¹²⁷ These are some of the statements from deliverance seekers that legitimize the activities of the pastor-prophet, thereby locating authority. A deliverance seeker who attended an in-person prayer and deliverance session narrated how the pastor-prophet mentioned that those who were expecting the ‘fruit of the womb’ (conception) should raise their hands, to which she obliged. The deliverance seeker indicated she stepped forward, received a touch from the pastor-prophet and was later tested positive for pregnancy from natural conception.¹²⁸

Similarly, a deliverance seeker affirmed her deliverance through prayers from the pastor-prophet, from a rare disease (name withheld) which doctors indicated was incurable and only manageable with medications. The deliverance seeker indicated the pastor-prophet mentioned healing and deliverance for someone with the specific case in one of the episodes in September 2022. Another prophecy followed in January 2023, which was more specific on

¹²¹Ganiel, “Pentecostal and Charismatic,” 131.

¹²²Schnepel, “Max Weber’s Theory,” 33; Grimes, “Power, Influence,” 725; Gbekor, “Examining Authority,” 366.

¹²³Omenyo and Atiemo, “Claiming Religious Spaces,” 60.

¹²⁴Alpha Hour deliverance seeker 289, audio testimony.

¹²⁵Alpha Hour deliverance seeker 307, audio testimony.

¹²⁶Alpha Hour deliverance seeker 305A, audio testimony.

¹²⁷Alpha Hour deliverance seeker 305B, audio testimony.

¹²⁸Alpha Hour deliverance seeker 291, audio testimony.

someone with such a rare disease (with vivid description by the pastor-prophet) after which prayers were made. The deliverance seeker testified she had not taken any medication since that September, yet her body is back to normal functioning.¹²⁹ It is important to underscore that Pentecostals believe that it is God who reveals these prophecies through the Holy Spirit,¹³⁰ and therefore, they take them seriously. This is, particularly, so when these prophecies are affirmations of what the believer already knows or looks forward to. Hence, the accuracy and genuineness of a prophecy or prophetic direction, particularly its practical manifestation, legitimizes the authority of the pastor-prophet in neo-Pentecostalism.

With vested supernatural authority (charisma) in the pastor-prophet, the emphasis is on deliverance seeker's satisfaction with the abilities and activities of the pastor-prophet, where the supernatural authority manifests to successfully ensure deliverance from the affliction and predicament of the deliverance seeker/client. Largely, this has to do with how deliverance seekers tell or narrate their experiences regarding the activities of the pastor-prophet, such as how they unsuccessfully sought for remedies elsewhere but have had success with the current pastor-prophet. It also has to do with how those who achieved results or have seen/heard the success story of others have led potential deliverance seekers to the pastor-prophet. This may be described as clientelist or a consumerist approach to legitimizing pastor-prophet authority, as legitimacy of authority is based on client's satisfaction with the interventions and, therefore, authenticity of the pastor-prophet and his/her ministry. However, when one considers the context of deliverance as distressful afflictions and predicaments, the leader who shows charisma and who would draw loyalty and enthusiasm of the distressed and suffering, according to the Robert Tucker, is the one 'who comes forward in a distressful situation and presents himself or herself in a convincing way to the sufferers as one who can lead them out of their distress by virtue of special personal characteristics or formula for salvation'.¹³¹

Deliverance seekers cooperation with pastor-prophets

Affirmations within which vested authority can be further gleaned is from deliverance seekers' cooperation manifested through their continuous presence at deliverance sessions and virtual platforms and, particularly, their willingness to comply with what these pastor-prophets require believers to do if they will enforce rupture and attain deliverance. An informant indicated he received a prophetic direction (*akwankyere* of) generally for his church members to use for breakthrough. A member of the church who was having visa challenges joining the partner in a foreign country confirmed following the direction and, not long thereafter, had the visa approved and had united with the

¹²⁹Alpha Hour deliverance seeker 304B, audio testimony.

¹³⁰Omenyo an Atiemo, "Claiming Religious Spaces," 65.

¹³¹Tucker cited in Epley, "Weber's Theory," 8.

partner.¹³² This reflects a situation of the deliverance seeker's voluntary cooperation with the pastor-prophet with the conviction that God uses him to ensure deliverance in the lives of believers. Here, because authority 'involves unconditional willing obedience on the part of subordinates',¹³³ we encounter pastor-prophet authority as that which deliverance seekers voluntarily identify and comply with, for which pastor-prophets do not need to compel deliverance seekers to conform to certain demands and responsibilities because 'their voluntary compliance would serve as an easier method of control over them'.¹³⁴

For instance, a deliverance seeker suggested the pastor-prophet revealed and prophesied regarding the healing from blurred vision of the daughter in an earlier episode of prayer session, which the deliverance seeker (mother of the child) indicated she took seriously (claimed it). The deliverance seeker also indicated using Alpha Hour 'point of contact water' to wash the daughter's face and poured some into her bathing water daily. The deliverance seeker confirmed the child has now regained her vision.¹³⁵ Another deliverance seeker testified of being delivered and/or healed from many years of gynecological disorders, following a continuous use of Alpha Hour 'point of contact water' for bathing and drinking some each night.¹³⁶ These confirmations and affirmations of the trusted abilities of the pastor-prophet, providing reasons for which deliverance seekers trust and submit to his authority by following his directions and requests are qualities underscored by Weber that charismatic leaders are obeyed 'by virtue of personal trust in his revelation, his heroism or exemplary qualities'.¹³⁷ This further reflects and suggests how 'affectual action is the basis of charismatic authority',¹³⁸ and that the judgment of the quality of charisma 'depends on how it is regarded by those subject to charismatic authority'.¹³⁹

From the discussion, particularly from seeker affirmations, it is evident that supernatural authority and vested authorities are necessary if the pastor-prophets would be successful in their deliverance activities. However, it also became clear from the discussions that vested authorities are secondary to supernatural authority as the vested is consequent to the supernatural. Usually, it is the supernatural power and/or authority exhibited by the deliverance pastor-prophet that serve as grounds for deliverance seekers to follow the activities of these pastor-prophets. It has been suggested by our informants that the faith of a deliverance seeker and their presence at deliverance sessions are normally required for deliverance, This presence at deliverance sessions

¹³²ARA, apostle and deliverance minister.

¹³³Blau, "Critical Remarks," 307.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Alpha Hour deliverance seeker 298A, audio testimony.

¹³⁶Alpha Hour deliverance seeker – text testimony.

¹³⁷Weber, cited in Schnepel, "Max Weber's Theory," 32.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid., 33.

would suggest they are vesting authority in the pastor-prophet through cooperation. However, these informants also suggest it is not always the case. An informant noted that, ‘... at times the person being delivered who has lost consciousness, who does not know what is going on, his faith is not even needed’.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, supernatural authority and attaining victory over life’s predicaments, such as suffering and sickness as grounded in the neo-Pentecostal theology of salvation, becomes the barometer for the acceptance and legitimacy of the pastor-prophets. This allows pastor-prophets to enter the lives of deliverance seekers and receive their cooperation towards deliverance. It is important to underscore that while these orientations of both neo-Pentecostal pastor-prophets and their followers cast them as triumphalist,¹⁴¹ they have also become grounds for diverse forms of abuses in neo-Pentecostal churches in recent years, particularly abuses of power, and have drawn much academic and media attention.¹⁴²

Conclusion

It is indicated that the growth of the (neo) Pentecostal deliverance churches in Africa are largely due to their deliverance activities and the abilities to engage the cosmic dimensions of life.¹⁴³ This is because ‘testimonies of healing from sickness and deliverance from supernatural evil, tend to be major theological themes that draw people into Pentecostal Christianity’.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, one can conclude that believers and followers’ affirmations of pastor-prophets’ supernatural capabilities ‘to see’ and intervene successfully, particularly using symbolic practices and use of material objects, such as points of contacts, legitimize and locate their authority. These are what render the deliverance pastor-prophet the most physically visible and active actor in the deliverance encounter, although theologically not the ultimately active. The deliverance seeker, who is the central focus of the deliverance practice is also rendered an active, though not ultimate, provider of authority through affirmation and cooperation and yet, a passive recipient of same through mediated power. Therefore, when considering agency in the deliverance encounter, the most active agent who facilitates and has the authority to achieve results, even without the active participation of the deliverance seeker in the process, is the pastor-prophet. This is because the pastor-prophet does not only receive hidden knowledge and insight into the affliction and/or predicament of the deliverance seeker, but using his/her authority (revelation), the pastor-prophet ruptures the seeker from the

¹⁴⁰ARA, apostle and deliverance minister.

¹⁴¹Kgatle, “Triumphalist theology,” 142; Quayesi-Amakye, “Prophetism,” 164.

¹⁴²Kgatle, “Triumphalist theology,” 148–9. See also Tweneboah, “Witchdemonic Accusations”; and Mashau and Kgatle, “Prosperity gospel”.

¹⁴³Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World*, 10.

¹⁴⁴Asamoah-Gyadu, “Missions,” 390.

affliction. This accounts for the reason why focus and attention are always on the pastor-prophet as the centre of action or activity in the deliverance process, though not necessarily the sole actor.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Inez and Julius Polin Institute for Theological Research, Abo Akademi University, Turku, Finland.

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