

Christianity and economic status in Western Kenya from Weberian and Marxian perspectives

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<https://doi.org/10.51867/ajernet.7.3.154>

ABSTRACT

Religion is deemed to be an important structure within the societal setup, as it influences human behaviour, social interactions and economic practices. Christianity, a religion that is one of the largest in the world in population, has throughout history shaped the perception of and approach to work, wealth creation, poverty and by extension, social responsibility. The main objective of this study was to assess the extent to which Christianity relates to economic empowerment or economic vulnerability among Christians in Western Kenya using Weberian and Marxian theoretical perspectives. The study was guided by Wealth, Marxian & Weberian theory, which discuss the role of religion in economic development. The study was anchored on a qualitative descriptive design. The research was conducted in four Counties of Western Kenya: Busia, Bungoma, Kakamega, and Vihiga. The study targeted 4065 church members, which included members and their clerics. A total sample of 408 respondents (384 members & 24 clerics) who took part in the study. Data collection was conducted through Focus Group Discussions for members and Interviews for clerics. Qualitative data was analysed thematically through the identification of patterns and themes that were recurrent. Findings established that there is a distinct economic asymmetry between church members and clerics across various indicators such as education level, income level, assets owned and livelihood standards. Findings further reveal that development aspects vary across denominational affiliations, with mainline churches such as the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church doing very well in this area compared to African Initiated Churches, which struggle with the identity of their assignment. Finally, findings support that Weberian thoughts are ideal on enhancing economic status through education, hard work, discipline, thrift and economic responsibility. However, the difference between the clerics and the members demonstrates Marxian thought on class structures, as clerics seem to enjoy greater economic balance than members overall. The study recommends that, to bridge the gap between spirituality and economic reality, churches within the study region should establish transparent, formalized economic empowerment initiatives. Such initiatives can include: audited micro-finance funds, vocational training, and agricultural support to systematically uplift vulnerable congregants instead of relying on informal fundraising techniques.

Key Words: Economic Status, Christianity, Poverty, Wealth, Marxian & Weberian Perspectives

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is deemed to be an important structure within the societal setup, as it influences human behaviour, social interactions and economic practices (Barro & McCleary, 2003). Christianity, a religion that is one of the largest in the world in population has throughout the history shaped the perception of and approach to work, wealth creation, poverty and by extension, social responsibility (Weber, 1930; Freeman, 2012). Within the circle of Christian traditions and practices, economic aspect of life has been interpreted through competing perspectives. The interpretation is dualistic with some Christians looking at wealth creation, hard work, stewardship and responsible resource management, while others lean towards humility, simplicity and spiritual value that overrides material limitation (Togarasei, 2011).

Sociologists have endeavoured to discuss the dualistic approach of the economic aspect of Christians through the Weberian and Marxian lens. Weber argues that Christianity is engraved with values, such as discipline, commitment to work, rational economic behaviour and education, which contribute immensely to individuals and societal economic development. Weberian school of thought advocates for positive values that encourage individuals to cultivate behaviours that support wealth creation and economic advancement. However, Marx presents another angle of argument pertaining religion and economic aspect of individuals (Becker & Woessmann, 2009). Marx argues that religion, in this case, Christianity, is just a social structure that contributes to maintaining economic inequality by converting attention of the working class to spiritual rewards for the benefit of their masters. These two perspectives, which seem to contradict each other provide a very imperative frameworks for understanding the role that Christianity play on economic empowerment or economic vulnerability (Gutiérrez, 1988).

Globally, Christianity is practiced differently, with its dominance varying across regions. Generally, it is approximated that close to 2.3 billion people practice Christianity. In various nations in Europe and America, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, France, the United States, Canada and Brazil, Christianity has played a major role in the establishment of developmental landmarks such as hospitals, legal systems, educational systems and charitable organizations (Ferris, 2005).

In African, Christianity is deeply ingrained in social and economic practices of the adherents (Gifford, 2015; Togarasei, 2011). Depending on the denomination and the doctrinal foundations, some religious institutions are not only deployed as centres of worship but also as engines for education, healthcare, social support services and community empowerment and development (Freeman, 2012; Mwangi et al., 2025). African Christianity presents a unique form of Christianity, through the blending of African traditional culture and faith, resulting in AICs. It is therefore upon this that Christianity in Africa is deemed to be somehow complex, as the practices differ totally despite professing Jesus Christ as the source of faith. Even though this is the case, the Roman Catholic Church remain strong in the region, with other denominations, especially, Protestant denominations registering their growth at a higher rate.

In Kenya, Christianity is the predominant religion, accounting for close to 85% of the population. Western Kenya epitomizes the essence of Christian pluralism, with almost every denomination represented in the region. Represented by 4 counties, Busia, Kakamega, Vihiga and Bungoma, the Western region boasts of varied economic activities, ranging from businesses, farming and employment. The region's poverty rate is about 46%, despite Christianity standing at 96%, implying that there is a disconnect between the perceived ideals of the impact of Christianity on economic status and the lived realities of the Christians.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Existing evidence places Christianity as a force that shapes individuals' decision-making ability, social values and community practices that endeavour economic development of an individual and a society at large. Given Christianity's dominance in the Western region, one would imagine it should be doing well economically. Previous studies bordering on Christianity and economic development (Mwaura & Nzengya, 2022; (Kelvin et al., 2026) have largely been done along theological interrelations, church development programmes or the general interactions between wealth, poverty and religion. Little attention has been directed to exploring the actual economic status of Christians at the household and community through a Weberian or Marxian sociological lens. This study sought to establish whether there is a demonstration of economic development, vulnerability or a combination of both among Christians of the Western region of Kenya.

1.2 Objective of the Study

To assess the extent to which Christianity relates to economic empowerment or economic vulnerability among Christians in Western Kenya through Weberian and Marxian theoretical perspectives.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by two complementary theories: the Weberian and the Marxian.

2.1.1 Weberian Theory

Weberian theory was advanced by Max Weber (1864-1920) through his work "The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism." Weber, in his work, argues that religion possesses crucial religious values that immensely promote individuals' economic empowerment. According to Weber, values such as embracing education, thrift, rationality, taking work as a vocation, hard work and discipline propel individuals to greater economic heights. He posits that religious beliefs shape one's attitudes and practices, which translate to productivity, wealth accumulation and responsible economic decision making.

In the context of this study, Weberian theory provides the lens through which the role of Christian beliefs, values and practices can be examined, bringing out their association with the economic empowerment of Western Kenya Christians. In particular, the theory guides the study on assessing whether Christianity and associated beliefs can be reflected through economic achievements as measured through indicators such as employment, income level, asset ownership, access to essential services and attainment of education.

2.1.2 Marxian Theory

Marxian theory was coined by Karl Marx (1818–1883) during his sociological work on economic status and religion. In his view, Marx argues that religion is just an ideological tool used to advance the selfish agenda of the ruling class to justify social inequality and exploit the working class. He argues that religion acts as "opium of the masses" as

it numbs people's reasoning to fix their attention to spiritual explanations with the rewards afterwards, shunning material gain. From Marx's perspective, the spiritual explanations offered can sometimes encourage Christians to accept economic hardships while limiting meaningful engagement with structural factors that exacerbate poverty.

This theory was crucial for this study as it provided a framework for analysing economic vulnerability among Christians in the Western Region of Kenya. The theory, in particular, helped in examining whether religion plays a role in propagating poverty, limited employment, unequal access to resources and other economic inequalities, as observed by Karl Marx. Therefore, the integration of the two theories will lay a background for assessing how Christianity relates with economic status of individuals by either providing solutions to economic challenges or laying the foundation for economic vulnerability.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

A study by Theodros Assefa Teklu (2024) on "Theology and Poverty" offers an in-depth analysis of poverty, exploring both material and spiritual poverty in light of biblical discussion and Christian history. Theoretically, the study was anchored in biblical exegesis, drawing on historical and liberation theologies to explore how the church perceived and addressed poverty. According to Teklu, scriptures portray poverty as lack of both material and spiritual enablement and wealth as a gift from God but not an indicator of divine favor. Findings of the study indicate that poverty is always associated with systemic injustices and churches are looked upon as structures that should confront these injustices. The study emphasizes the church's responsibility to undertake workable efforts to alleviate poverty and promote equality. The study concluded that poverty has often been conflated with spiritual strength rather than understood as the systemic injustices that the church should address to alleviate it.

Ghosh (2017) studied "The Theory of Alienation by Karl Marx and His Critique of Religion: An Introspection." The main purpose of the study was to analyse Marx's theory through textual analysis in order to establish a connection between his ideas of alienation and religion. Results of the study indicate that, for Marx, religion is a manifestation of the alienation created by the capitalist mode of production, in which individuals are separated from their true essence (labor). Marx viewed religion as an ideological tool that masks the reality of exploitation, offering false hope to the oppressed rather than empowering them to challenge their conditions. Ghosh also highlights that Marx did not consider religion merely an illusion but a reflection of the societal structure, shaped by economic forces. Marx's later works, particularly in "Capital," critique the role religion plays in supporting capitalist structures. The study concludes that sociologists should emphasize the importance of comprehensively relating religion to alienation in support of capitalist structures, thereby affecting individuals' progress.

Igboin (2014) conducted a study on Karl Marx on Religion: The Perspective of Boko Haram in Nigeria." The study explored Marx's perspective on religion and its application on radical Islamic group, the Boko Haram, in Nigeria. The study used a qualitative research approach to draw lessons from the socio-political interactions of religion, power, and control. Findings of the study indicate that religion, perceived by Marx as the opiate of the masses, numbs the oppressed and is not so much applicable in modern contexts, such as Boko Haram. The study reveals that sometimes, religion has been used as a force of revolution and violence, as is the case with Boko Haram. This implies that religion is a catalyst for social and political change rather than stifling it. These findings, therefore, complicate the Marxian perspective in contemporary society, limiting its application to isolated cases. The study thus concludes that the view that religion is a mere tool of slavery should be reconsidered when discussing issues affecting society and religion at large in environments characterized by modernity.

The social capital theory and functionalism emphasize the role of religious institutions in shaping societies. The study deployed qualitative research, specifically a case study approach and collected data through observation and interviews with members of the church. Findings of the study indicate that NJC encourages community cooperation, labor participation and education to its members as ways to counter economic problems. Additionally, findings indicate that despite the church promoting economic participation and spiritual devotion, some of the members still struggle with balancing material prosperity and religious teachings. The work was related to this current study since it shows how local religious innovation may influence economic life and community norms.

Functionalism theory, which explains the role that various institutions within society play to stabilize society, guided the study. Findings of the study indicate that churches in Busia engaged in various programs, inter alia, micro-projects, livelihood support, health services and education, with a specific focus on women, to ensure that they are empowered. Furthermore, results show that despite the positive impact of the programs, a few challenges like limited funding, distorted coordination, and overdependence on external donors for sustainability persist. The study concluded that the role that churches in Busia counties are playing is significant to empowerment, calling for more efforts to alleviate poverty through Christianity.

Obwoye et al. (2017) explored "The Success of Church of God-Kenya in Poverty Alleviation in Emuhaya District, Western Kenya." Study findings indicate that the church of God has implemented church-led poverty alleviation programs through establishing microfinance activities and vocational training, which have significantly impacted the

livelihoods of some of its members. In addition, the study findings indicate that the programs that some of the churches are running for economic empowerment have enabled members to enhance their saving habits and perfect the art of taking business loans to boost their businesses. The study thus concluded that by engaging its members in such activities, the church of God has played a significant role in poverty alleviation while ensuring its main goal of spiritual nourishment.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study was anchored on a qualitative descriptive design, which was imperative in examining the lived economic realities and varied theological perspectives across churches in the western region of Kenya. The research design played a critical role in enabling the researcher to capture rich qualitative insights from FGDs and Interviews without variable manipulation or endeavouring rigid statistical modelling.

3.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in four Counties of Western Kenya: Busia, Bungoma, Kakamega, and Vihiga. These Counties were selected due to their high poverty index and highly diversified Christian religious beliefs and practices, including Mainline Christian churches, African Initiated Churches, and the Pentecostal Charismatic Churches. Each county was represented by urban and rural settings, enabling diversified data collection (Gifford, 2015).

3.3 Study Population and Sampling

The study targeted all Christians who live in the four counties of study, which included church members and clergy. A total sample of 408 respondents (384 members & 24 clerics) who took part in the study. To attain the sample, the researcher first sampled the churches through stratified sampling, placing churches into three major denominational affiliation, which were mainline churches (Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Friends Church and Salvation Army), Pentecostal Charismatic Ministry (Deliverance Church, Redeemed Gospel Church, Winners Chapel and Word of Faith Church) and African Initiated Churches (African Divine Church, Legio Maria, Dini Ya Msambwa and African Israel Church Nineveh). This yielded a total of 12 churches. The researcher went for diversity of denominations to enable him to capture a clear image of Christianity within the study area and capture diverse economic realities among Christians. This was imperative as the study area enjoys diversity in theological, social, cultural and religious inclinations, all intertwined, affecting the economic outcomes of Christians. The researcher ensured that the sampled churches had more than 150 members to obtain a concentrated sample and avoid missing enough members for FGD.

3.4 Data Collection

The study yielded both primary and secondary data. Primary data collection was done using focus group discussions guide and interview guides for members and clerics respectively supplemented by observation checklist. Secondary data was collected from journal articles, books and other relevant sources. These data collections methods were imperative as they helped the researcher to obtain both respondents perspectives and experiences and supporting contextual information.

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed thematically through identification of patterns and themes that were recurrent. Demographic and economic data were summarized using frequencies and percentages to capture the real information and presented through tables and narrative discussion.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study considered various critical ethical issues regarding human subject research. First, the researcher ensured that participants voluntarily participated in the study through informed consent. Additionally, participants were informed that they were at liberty to withdraw from the study any time they felt uncomfortable. Given the nature of the study, as it was touching sensitive economic issues, confidentiality was strictly observed by the researcher, who only assigned random numbers to respondents for anonymity purposes.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Christians Economic Status in Selected Churches within Western Region, Kenya through Weberian and Marxian Lens

The assessment of Christian's economic status was done on the basis of educational level, income, asset ownership, livelihood sources and condition of household. Additionally, the study sought to align the findings along clerics and members economic status particularly to analyse Marxian arguments on the topical issues. This was imperative to establish the empowerment and vulnerability aspects of Christian's economic status, given that conceptual arguments in context.

4.1.1 Educational Level and Economic Status of Christians

Findings on educational of clerics and church members are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1

Respondents Level of Education

Level	Clerics		Members	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	3	12.5%	156	40.6%
Secondary	5	20.8%	115	29.9%
Diploma	3	12.5%	54	14.1%
Bachelors	7	29.2%	21	5.5%
Masters	3	12.5%	9	2.3%
PhD	2	8.3%	5	1.3%
Others	1	4.2%	24	6.3%
Total	24	100%	384	100.0%

Source: Field Data (2025)

The study sought to establish the educational level of Christians in selected churches. Findings indicated that only 156 (40.6%) church members had studied up to primary level, 115 (29.9%) secondary, 54 (14.1%) diploma and only 21 (5.5%) held a bachelor's degree. The researcher observed that the majority of the respondents who had not acquired education beyond the primary level hailed from AICs. Clerics demonstrated a high level of educational engagement; 3 (12.5%) respondents from the cleric's category studied up to the primary level. This implies that they did not have the opportunity to pursue secondary education. During the interviews, the researcher observed that all three were from the AICs stratum.

In this case, it can be presumed that this limitation is a challenge as it limits individuals' economic opportunities. In the same breath, 5 (20.8%) of the clerics reported having attained secondary education. Among the 5 clerics, the researcher, through observation, noted that two were from the AICs, while one was 2 were from the Pentecostal Charismatic church, and one was from one of the mainline churches, Friends church. Additionally, 3 (12.5%) clerics indicated that they had attained diploma certification, implying that they stood a chance of being employed in jobs that required at least a diploma. Cumulatively, indicated that 12 (50%) clerics had attained bachelor's and above accreditation, with 3(12.5%) bachelor's degree, 4 (16.67%) Master's, 3 (12.5%) PhD while the remaining 3(12.5%) had no educational background. The researcher noted that Mainline churches, particularly Catholic and Anglican churches, placed much emphasis on education, setting minimum requirements for their clerics at the degree level, which is the opposite of the AICs and some Pentecostal churches, which emphasize dependence on God and the Holy Spirit rather than education. In this case, 8 of the 12 clergy members were from mainline churches.

During the interviews and FGDs, the majority of respondents indicated that they loved education, despite some of them failing to attain the highest level possible. They argued that they have decided to invest in their children totally. Additionally, church members insisted that they were encouraged by the teachings of a holistic approach to life that clerics delivered, saying that such teachings play a pivotal role in ensuring balance between spiritual matters and normal life. The majority of members and clerics who were parents indicated that education was a major milestone in economic development in contemporary society, insisting that it is only through education that the world can be transformed. This was a pure approval of Webber's argument that educational attainment was a major tool for economic empowerment, with Christianity playing a major role in ensuring that it suffices. As discussed earlier, that religious movements value education as one of the means to fight poverty, besides hard work and community cooperation. His study therefore, fully supports the argument that Christianity has a significant contribution to economic empowerment when teachings are accompanied by practical investment in human capital development.

4.1.2 Income Level and Livelihood Sources

Findings on income level are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2
Respondents Income Level

Income	Clerics		Members	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<1000	0	0	12	3.1
<5000	2	8.3	80	20.8
<10,000	3	12.5	77	20.1
<15,000	5	20.8	121	31.5
<20,000	3	12.5	22	5.7
<30,000	6	25.0	41	10.7
<50,000	2	8.3	10	2.6
>50,000	3	12.5	21	5.5
Total	24	100%	384	100.0%

Source: Field Data(2025)

Income levels findings in this study demonstrate more of economic vulnerability among ordinary church members. For instance, 121 (31.5%) indicated that they earn less than KSh 15,000 per month, 80 (20.8%) earn around Ksh. 5,000, while 77 (20.1%) earn around KSh 10,000. For clerics, 2 (8.3%) earn around KSh 5,000, while 3 (12.5%), earn below KSh 10,000. Furthermore, only 41(10.7%) members earn around Ksh. 30,000 and only 31 (8.1%) have a monthly income of Ksh. 50,000 or more. Findings also revealed that 5 (20.8%) clerics earned around KSh 15,000, while 3 (12.5%) clerics earned around KSh 20,000. This means that clerics are not necessarily wealthy, but their income levels are more evenly spread across the lower- and middle-income categories. Unlike members, whose income is heavily concentrated below KSh 15,000, clerics have a stronger presence in the categories below KSh. 20,000 and below KSh. 30,000. For clerics, 5 (20.8%) indicated that they earned more KSh. 50,000 and above. Comparatively, it is evident that clerics are far better on the element of income than members.

Such income vulnerability that is exhibited by members, where three-quarters earn less than 15,000, forms a basis for explaining the prevalence of mutual aid mechanisms within religious settings in Kenya. Kenya is among the nations that are known to embrace a system of fundraising dubbed Harambee, with churches doing more of these than other institutions. Even though this as a political tool for development, religious leaders quickly adopted it to fit their needs, especially during special occasions such as funerals, weddings and developmental programs. Even though most of the churches tend to call it fundraising instead of Harambee for the fear of the meaning behind the name, the concept still remains the same. However, even though this is seen to be the case, the majority of these programs for raising funds operate differently across various groups based on their abilities. Within religious communities, assistance may operate on an ad hoc basis and often privileges an "inner circle" of leaders and economically better-off members, which can reinforce rather than alleviate class divisions (Zidaru, 2025).

From a Weberian perspective, the findings may suggest that religious values alone do not automatically lead to wealth accumulation. Weber emphasized hard work, discipline, saving, and rational economic behaviour as important factors in economic advancement. However, the results show that many Christians remain low-income earners despite their religious affiliation. This implies that a work ethic must be supported by education, opportunity, employment, capital, and access to productive resources. The finding is in line with Lonardoni and Bolay (2016), who established that poverty is not just interpreted through a spiritual perspective but also within broader structural conditions. From a Marxian perspective, the findings reveal class differences within the Christian community. Ordinary members appear to be in a lower economic class, while clerics are relatively better positioned. This may suggest that religious communities can still reflect broader social and economic inequalities. Marx would likely argue that the income gap between clerics and members demonstrates how economic structures shape people's living conditions, regardless of shared religious identity.

4.1.3 Assets Ownership

Table 3 below presents findings on asset ownership for both church members and clerics.

Table 3
Asset Ownership

Type Asset	Members (n=384)	Percentage (%)	Clerics (n=24)	Percentage (%)
Land ownership	203	52.9	20	83.3
Livestock ownership	103	26.8	17	70.8
Motor vehicle ownership	52	13.2	13	54.2
Own business	86	22.4	9	37.5
Rental houses	21	5.5	10	41.7
Permanent house ownership	94	24.5	16	66.7

Source: Field Data, (2025)

Asset ownership and household conditions were also assessed in this study and findings reveal that most respondents were asset poor. Findings show that the most common asset owned by the clerics is land, which stood at 20 clerics, representing 83.3%. high percentage implies that clerics have access to an asset that is termed as one of the most valuable forms of assets within the Kenyan Republic. In most places in the world, land is not just perceived to be a place of settlement, but a very productive resource all around. Land value is demonstrated through crop production, livestock rearing, real estate business, inheritance and as loan collateral property. Concerning members, only 203 (52.9%) own land, which is a lower percentage than that of clerics. This may be attributed to the fact that the majority of the clerics are male mature individuals, most of them with families already, save the Catholic clerics, who refrain from marriage. This means that they have already started life, meaning that they either have bought land or inherited it, as the African culture dictates. However, on the side of church members, some of them are students who are still attending their tertiary education and therefore, they have not settled for investment. Additionally, some of the respondents in the church members' categories are women, who, in some African cultures, are excluded from land inheritance unless they buy their own land.

In the second place among the assets owned by the respondents, 17 (70.8%) clerics indicated owning livestock. As established earlier, land ownership is an advantage for livestock rearing, therefore giving the clerics with enough land an opportunity to venture into the work. Livestock contributes immensely to individuals' economic status as it provides food, organic manure for crop production, acts as a money-saving project and security for emergencies and loans from micro-financial organizations. In contrast, only 103 (26.8%) church members reported owning livestock. Again, just as the case was in land ownership, there is a huge gap between the clerics and their church members. Even though there are many other reasons why few church members own livestock, the element of land ownership here plays a major role, as livestock rearing cannot be done in a vacuum. During the focus group discussion, 65% of the clerics emphasized the need for livestock rearing with almost similar sentiments as the narration below states:

"I inherited the culture of livestock rearing from my late grandfather, whom I used to take care of his livestock. He valued his cattle above all, and always assured me that it was the best way to secure your wealth and earn respect from fellow men. Additionally, the rich men in the bible were counted rich through such activities as livestock rearing, as the case of Abraham is. Therefore, as a church leader, I always encourage my congregants to ensure that they have at least a cow, a sheep, a goat or a chicken, which they can use in times of emergency and in addition to increasing food stability," (Cleric 7, Personal Communication, 7th October, 2025)

The narration in context emphasizes two issues: first, the impact of African culture on livestock rearing, and second, the importance of livestock keeping. In an African setting, having animals is an indication that one is rich. Different communities in Kenya attach different values to different animals, depending on prevailing cultural orientation and the type of animals that can be reared in a given geographical location. In western Kenya, cattle rearing is seen as one of the best livestock rearing projects that one can engage in, as the value of cattle and associated products is high. Additionally, some people would end up rearing sheep, goats, chickens and other animals for various purposes. Bulls are valued among the African communities because they are used for land tilling, have a high market price and are highly rated in matters of African rituals.

Furthermore, the study sought to establish whether clerics and church members owned motor vehicles. The result showed that 13 (54.2%) own a motor vehicle. Additionally, the data shows that only 52 (13.2%) of church member owns motor vehicle. Just as it was in the case of other assets owned by the clerics and church members, the study shows that the gap between the two groups is wide. This indicates a major economic status imbalance between the clerics and their members. In most churches, members strive to ensure that their pastors have a better life, as a way of giving them ample time and peace of mind to deal with leading the flock. However, this aspect of pastors owning motor vehicles,

mainly obtained through congregational means, has sparked a lot of outrage among Christians, citing the problem of pastors gaining by manipulation, supporting economic vulnerability, as Marx argues.

The lower percentage of church members who own a motor vehicle means that the majority of them struggle with mobility and logistical issues when transacting their daily activities. Motor vehicles are important for enhancing business and speeding up transport from one point to another. In this study, the researcher noted that among the 13 clerics who owned a motor vehicle, 9 had their personal vehicles, while the remaining 4 had motorbikes. However, on the side of the church members, 11 individuals owned personal vehicles while the remaining 41 individuals owned motorbikes.

Still on assets owned, the study sought to find out whether the respondents own one home or more. This is an important indicator as owning more than one home implies that an individual has accumulated wealth. Findings show that 26 (7%) church members and 3 (0.8%) clerics own more than one home. This finding indicates that the majority of Christians lack the capacity to explore options of having more than one home, which means that in case of any serious calamity, they are left in a state of homelessness. Furthermore, the study established that 10 (41.7%) clerics and 21 (5.5%) church members indicated that they have rental houses. Rental houses are among the key indicators for economic stability amongst a population, given that they generate a passive income for the owner. Additionally, the findings indicate that clerics are better-placed in this area than the members, implying that they have more financial muscle than their members.

However, the researcher, through observation, realized that the majority of individuals who indicated that they owned rental houses were those who acquired land within the urban setup, which gives them an advantage to get clients who stay within the centers. The findings align with Lonardoni and Bolay's (2016) findings, which established that the rental houses business flourishes more in urban setups than in rural setups, as the majority of people migrate to urban areas in search of better living standards. This gives rise to housing demands, therefore helping the landlords to make passive income every month.

In line with that, the study also sought to find out if respondents owned businesses. Just as it was in the case of other assets or wealth owned, the study established that clerics had an upper hand, with 9 (37.5%) clerics indicating that they own a business compared to 86 (22.4%) of church members who indicated the same. However, this was a good indicator that most of the church members depend on other sources of income to survive. However, some members indicated that they had businesses but closed them some time back due to tough prevailing economic conditions that affect businesses. For instance, 38(10%) church members indicated that they had businesses that caused significant losses to the extent of being auctioned as they failed to service the loans they had taken. This is a clear indication that business requires some knowledge which can be inculcated into individuals even through the church platforms, especially the financial discipline issue.

Findings from the assets owned indicate that, on an overall basis, clerics own more assets compared to ordinary church members in all the categories listed. This is an indicator that clerics are better placed in terms of the wealth they own in comparison with their members. Despite the fact that members have varied sources of income such as side hustles, sponsorships, small-scale businesses and others, clerics seem to have long-term asset ownership. This is a major difference, as the assets can help them create more wealth than their members, thereby protecting themselves from the threat of poverty. In general, the data portray a vulnerable member and an empowered cleric, despite members being the most important part of the church.

These findings, from a Weberian perspective, indicate that clerics have demonstrated that wealth accumulation can be an ideal venture for Christians, given that they lead by example. This is demonstrated as they lead in everything, from ownership of land, farming, motor vehicles and businesses. Generally, as Weber opined, such is a clear demonstration of wealth accumulation through discipline, education, leadership influence and economic creativity.

However, from a Marxian perspective, the findings reveal something else: the idea of two different classes among Christians and their pastors. Clerics own everything more than their followers, yet the congregants contribute immensely to their welfare. Realistically, the Marxian perspective here demonstrates that social welfare should be the other way round, the pastors helping their members, given their economic position. This scenario, where the pastors are richer than their followers, generally strengthens Marxian arguments that religious communities promote social and economic inequality. The finding is consistent with Ghosh (2017) interpretation of Marxian thought, explaining that it operates within existing economic structures and sometimes, social inequalities override the goodwill to eradicate the structures.

Findings from the study indicate that 16 (66.7%) clerics and 94 (24.5%) church members own a permanent house. The finding shows that the majority of church members still live in muddy houses, as opposed to the clerics, who make up only 33% reside in a mud house. A permanent house is an indicator that someone has some sort of financial stability, as the cost of building even a small permanent house is high. However, the study findings show that house ownership is high among the two groups of respondents, with 305 (79.4%) church members and 22 (91.7%) clerics

indicating that they own houses. It is worth noting that the houses owned are of any standard in this case, so long as one has a shelter.

The researcher established that the majority of church members who indicated that they do not own a house were mainly youth, who were mostly still pursuing their academics. Furthermore, the study established that the two clerics who did not own a house were based in urban centres and established themselves there. For instance, one of them hinted that he has acquired land and was opting to build there, given the family land wrangles back at home.

Results further indicated that 24 (100%) clerics and 342 (89.1%) church members own mobile phones. This is an indicator that a mobile phone is an essential piece of equipment for an individual in contemporary society. In this regard, the researcher can opine that communication was not a problem. This implies that the church members and clerics could easily interact devoid of the distance to share information on various topical issues, economic empowerment included.

Findings further indicate that 13 clerics or 54.2% and 147 church members, or 38.3%, indicated that they own modern furniture. It was important to establish this because the type of furniture owned reflects the economic status of an individual. Modern furniture includes high-cost seats, good quality tables and storage equipment such as a wall unit. Additionally, findings revealed that 13 clerics, or 54.2%, own modern beddings, while only 106 members, or 27.6%, reported the same. This indicates a clear difference in household comfort. Bedding is a basic household need, but modern bedding often requires additional expenditure. Therefore, the low percentage among members suggests that many may prioritize essential survival needs over household comfort items. In most cases, micro-finance uses these types of assets to evaluate the amount of loan they can give to an individual as the assets can act as collateral. Such an asset is considered easily disposable by the loaning organization, making it easier for them to auction and recover their money in case one fails to service the loan as obligated.

The study established further that cultural beliefs in case of AICs played a bigger role in determining the type of asset one owned, as most of the AICs faithfuls believed that land was the sole asset that was important to own. However, according to the majority of AICs faithfuls, most of the assets that denoted luxurious lifestyle were not godly at all. Infact 30% of the respondents pointed towards the saying “it is easy for a camel to go through a needle hole than a rich man entering heaven.” This was a mind-set that was in some respondents from rural set-up and AICs by extension, according to researcher observation.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings presented in this study, it is evident that Christianity does not exclusively operate as an economic empowerment force or economic vulnerability source. Rather, the Weberian and Marxian perspectives are dynamic and dependent on other factors that such as regional economic activities (farming, businesses and employment) and the efforts of other players such as government and organizations that are not FBO based. This study therefore concludes that the economic status of the Western region Christians cannot be clearly understood just on the basis of Christianity alone.

5.2 Recommendations

To bridge the gap between spirituality and economic reality, churches within the study region should establish transparent, formalized economic empowerment initiatives. Such initiatives can include; audited micro-finance funds, vocational training, and agricultural support to systematically uplift vulnerable congregants instead of relying on informal fundraising techniques.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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