



West African Neo-Pentecostal Perspectives on God's Immutability and Changeability

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ABSTRACT

This article explores West African neo-Pentecostal perspectives on God's immutability and changeability by analysing the perspectives of leading indigenous neo-Pentecostals in Ghana and Nigeria. The paper's importance stems from its neo-Pentecostal delineation of God's immutable nature and its proposition of God's relational receptiveness to his creation. Using a literature approach, the study reveals how West African Pentecostals understand God's immutability and changeability. The paper reveals that some neo-Pentecostals embrace the doctrine of changeability, believing that God may alter His decisions in response to prayer and fasting. It underscores African Pentecostal teachings that suggest that God can be influenced by human prayer, decisions and actions. However, the paper argues that not every claim of God responding to human fulfillment of divinely ordained conditions should be seen as rejecting divine immutability. Within neo-Pentecostalism, the doctrine of God's immutability remains fundamental, even amid the movement's innovative tendencies. Framed as conflicting doctrines within traditional Christianity, the debate over God's immutability and changeability among West African Pentecostals enriches global Pentecostal theology by showing how these teachings deepen believers' understanding of God.

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INTRODUCTION

The doctrines of divine immutability and changeability are topical in traditional Christianity. For many years, discussions on immutability and changeability have characterised the systematic study of the divine nature of God. The paradoxical character of the doctrines has given room to questions such as: Can the immutable, perfect being change? If he can change, what makes him do so? Historically, these questions have received considerable theological and philosophical responses from scholars.¹

Similar interrogations characterise and dominate contemporary West African Pentecostal debate about God. Such interrogations seem worthy of investigation for various reasons. Key among

¹ W. Wainwright, "Concepts of God. In: The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy," 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/concepts-god/>; St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Albert Cook Outlier, Trans.) (New York: Dover Publications, 2002); G.F. O'hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); I.A. Dorner, R.R. Williams, and C. Welch, *Divine Immutability: A Critical Reconsideration* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); Bruce A Ware, "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29, no. 4 (1986): 431-46; J. Miley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1892).

the reasons is the fact that “Pentecostals have their own ethos to bring to the theological table.”² Their doctrine affirms the truth of God’s eternal and absolute being, which remains foundational to the Christian faith.³ It has profound implications for contemporary Christians, as it shapes their considerations, discernments and experiences about God.⁴ Pinnock’s verdict is that a “Pentecostal talk about God” has the perfect ingredients for a theological recipe that allow them to speak authoritatively about God.”⁵ It contains the essential elements of a theological framework that enables contemporary Pentecostals to speak about God.⁶ According to Vondey, “a systematic articulation of pentecostal doctrine must take account of Pentecostals’ own articulation of their theological story.”⁷

When doing this, it is important to be cautious and avoid speculation. R.R. Putman remarked on doctrinal discussions: “Discussions about doctrinal disagreement are not speculative or purely academic matters. These are spiritual conversations which are sometimes met with real spiritual warfare.”⁸ The same can be said about discussions on God’s immutability and changeability in Pentecostal Christianity. While we are mindful of this dimension, we are also influenced by the fact that a non-purely academic dimension to God’s immutability and changeability may render it false and destructive. Therefore, this article presents the academic dimension to avoid speculation and to empirically contribute to the Pentecostal theological discourse.

Recent academic Pentecostal theological discussions have focused on themes such as salvation, baptism in the spirit, sanctification, divine healing, the impending arrival of the kingdom of God, prophecy, deliverance, exorcism and believers’ prosperity.⁹ The first five themes constitute what has become known as the Pentecostal “full gospel”, a consistently used framework for narrating Pentecostal experiences. The full gospel emerged from the Wesleyan Holiness tradition, taking shape as either a four-fold or sometimes a five-fold pattern. Regardless of the pattern of emergence, salvation –or the gospel of regeneration –is the very foundation of the full gospel. However, theological discussions on concepts such as immutability and changeability appear to be limited in West African Pentecostal theology. This gap can be attributed to the dominant emphasis on the full gospel in global Pentecostal systematic theological debates.

The paper examines West African Pentecostals’ perspectives on God’s immutability and changeability. In doing so, it explores the teachings of leading indigenous Pentecostal Christians such as Mensah Otabil of the International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) in Ghana, and Daniel Kolawole Olukoya of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFMM) and Matthew Ashimolowo of the Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) in Nigeria. The purpose is to contest, through what they teach, tensions that arise from discussing the doctrines of immutability and changeability. Many adhere to the view that the fundamental debate on immutability and its opposing argument, changeability, within the history of systematic theology is not inherently Christian. For O’Hanlon, present-day theological enquiry into the doctrine of divine immutability is a radical attempt to reassess the validity of the classical position on the doctrine.¹⁰ However, establishing a modern Pentecostal

² Terry L. Cross, “The Rich Feast of Theology: Can Pentecostals bring the main Course or only the Relish?” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16 (2000): 29.

³ Miley, *Systematic Theology*.

⁴ David Cuning, “Descartes on the Immutability of the Divine Will,” *Religious Studies* 39, no. 1 (2003): 79–92.

⁵ Ray David Griffin, John B. Cobb, and Clark H. Pinnock, *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶ Marius Nel, “Pentecostal Talk about God: Attempting to Speak from Experience,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017).

⁷ W. Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

⁸ R.R. Putman, “How (and How Not) to Discuss Doctrinal Differences,” 2022.

⁹ W. Vondey, *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2020); Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*; J. Kwabena. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Perspective* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013); Paul Gifford, “Healing in African Pentecostalism: The ‘Victorious Living’ of David Oyedepo” (Oxford University Press, 2011); A. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004); E.K. Alexander, *Pentecostal Healing* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Avicenna, *The Book of Healing*, ed. Marmura Michael E. (Translator), 1st ed. (Brigham Young University - Islamic Translation Series, 2005); John Christopher Thomas, “Pentecostal Theology in the Twenty-First Century,” *Pneuma* 20, no. 1 (1998): 3–19; S. J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality a Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); D.W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).

¹⁰ O’hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*.

theological position on the subject not only revitalise the classical position on the doctrine but also spotlights the Pentecostal position and integrates this position into the conventional theological position on divine immutability. Significantly, the paper underscores the African Pentecostal experiential descriptions (experiences of encounter and external experiences) about God's immutability and changeability today. Given that the doctrines of God's immutability and changeability are conflicting, the paper underscores their distinctiveness. The paper employs a literature-based approach to examine how West African Pentecostals perceive God's immutability and changeability. To explore this phenomenon, it analyzes relevant and widely discussed works on divine nature, Pentecostal systematic theology, and African Pentecostalism.

WEST AFRICAN NEO-PENTECOSTALISM

West African Pentecostalism is a popular strand of Global Pentecostal Christianity. It is by far among the most debated Christianity today due to its popularity, perplexing nature and influence. Asamoah-Gyadu asserts that the religion's popularity and perplexity stem from its ability to adapt to different cultures and societies, providing a contextualised expression of Christianity. In Ghana and Nigeria, where the religion is popular, Pentecostalism is an enormously diverse phenomenon but with a specific emphasis on redemption in Jesus "as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit."¹¹ This form of Christianity demonstrates several pneumatic elements like speaking in tongues, divine healing, vision, and varied miracles and prophecies.¹²

In the West African indigenous Pentecostal framework, the label "neo-Pentecostal" refers to the new wave of independent Charismatic movements that emerged five decades ago in response to the economic and political challenges of that period.¹³ While speaking in tongues stands out as a prominent aspect of West African Pentecostalism, reducing the religion to merely "evangelicalism plus speaking in tongues," as articulated by D. Dayton in Währisch-Oblau's work *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church*, presents considerable limitations.¹⁴ This is because a definition of neo-Pentecostalism must entail how Pentecostalism emerged from Catholicism, black oral religion, and holiness movements, as well as its evangelical and critical roots and how it has been defined by ecumenism as well as political, social and cultural criticisms. This is due to the fact that the progression, multiplicity and diversified character of Pentecostalism all over the world today confound attempts at narrowly defining the term.¹⁵

African Pentecostalism is built upon four key theological doctrines: baptism in the Holy Spirit, salvation, healing, and the anticipation of Christ's second coming. These doctrines reflect various characteristics of African Pentecostalism, highlighting its contribution to central theological discussions. Specifically, Pentecost serves as the foundational theological symbol of Pentecostal theology, with the full gospel as its core narrative, deeply rooted in the events of the "Day of Pentecost". Of particular concern to this paper and Pentecostal theology is what neo-Pentecostals teach about God's immutable nature, despite His known biblical characteristic features on the matter. It answers the question, "In what way(s) does God remain immutable and, at the same time, alterable (relationally receptive) in West African neo-Pentecostal Christianity?"

¹¹ J. Kwabena. Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

¹² J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, *Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Missionaries in Ghana's Development* (Accra: University of Ghana Press, 2009); C.G. Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity, New Edition: Pentecostalism in a Globalising African Economy* (Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹³ E. Manu, "Neo-Pentecostal mission healthcare and poverty reduction in Ghana". *Acta Theologica* 45, no. 1 (2025): 107; N. Cephas Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2006).

¹⁴ C. Währisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe: Bringing Back the Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁵ Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*; Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*; Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*.

Neo-Pentecostalism is defined by a worldview which allows for the continuing revelation of God in the believer's life. It is an experiential Christianity, which culminates in (Holy) Spirit baptism¹⁶ and ignites a transformation that signifies divine presence,¹⁷ from which they find a distinct theological tradition.¹⁸ These two crucial experiences, spirit baptism and conversion, are gained by the West African neo-Pentecostals. Asamoah-Gyadu writes that in West African indigenous neo-Pentecostal movements, the phenomenon takes a unique form in the sense that:

...Individual Christians are given what participants often express as “a ministry”, or enabling power and spiritual sensitivity, which is not necessarily impaired through ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies. Such spiritual power, participants testify, is granted through a confirmable experiential encounter with the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

A key thing about the movements is that it is in them that believers express God's immutability and changeability. The enabling power and spiritual sensitivity given by the Holy Spirit give believers the unction to interpret and understand divine nature. Interpreting and experiencing God's immutability and changeability are defined in terms of internal renewal and biblical knowledge that emanate from experiences of encounter and external experiences, respectively. In both ways, these experiences are often explained in terms of the functions of the *pneumatic charismata*.

From the above discussions, West African neo-Pentecostalism is a general term for believers who fall within the above-defined category of Christianity. Having been in existence for a little over five decades, it stands out as a swiftly growing manifestation of the Pentecostal religion in sub-Saharan Africa today.²⁰ Its independent character sets it apart from the renewal movements in Historic Churches.²¹ However, Charismatics are characterized as Christians who generally share with Pentecostals an emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit.²² In this work, neo-Pentecostal is synonymous with the independent Charismatic movement and Charismatic church.

To conceptualise the Pentecostal perspective on God's immutability and changeability, this study adopted the founders of three West African ministries (ICGC, MFMM, KICC). These ministries are neo-Pentecostal (or Charismatic) by categorisation. They were selected not for their longevity but for their teachings on divine nature. While the nature of God has not traditionally been a central theme in Pentecostal theology, recent teachings on the subject and conflicting appeals to divine nature by indigenous African neo-Pentecostal leaders and ordinary members make it a topic worthy of exploration.

DEFINING DIVINE IMMUTABILITY AND CHANGEABILITY

Considering God, two primary doctrines concerning his nature are pertinent: his immutability and changeability. These doctrines exert an influence on other attributes of God. Therefore, defining the doctrines elucidates their points of differentiation and theological influence, which is necessary for the neo-Pentecostal understanding of God's nature.

(a) The age-old doctrine of God's immutability, also known as classical theism, has enjoyed widespread acceptance among Christian theologians and believers.²³ It is one of the popular and

¹⁶ D.T. Mashau, “Ministering Effectively in the Context of Pentecostalism in Africa: A Reformed Missional Reflection,” *In Die Skriflig* 47, no. 1 (2013): 1–8.

¹⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*.

¹⁸ Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*.

¹⁹ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*.

²⁰ J. Soothill, *Gender, Social Change, and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*; M. Lindhardt, *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

²¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*.

²² Pew Research Center, *Faith on the Move. The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants*, 2012; Shelagh Roxburgh, “Witchcraft and Violence in Ghana,” *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, no. 224 (December 31, 2016): 891–914, <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.18387>.

²³ Colton Sims, “Does God Change His Mind? An Old Testament View” (Ouachita Baptist University, 2019), https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1739&context=honors_theses; Robert B Chisholm Jr, “Does God Change His Mind?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152, no. 608 (1995): 387–99; M.J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability* (Washington: CUA Press, 2008).

extensively discussed natures of God in Christianity. It is a central traditional Christian doctrine.²⁴ The doctrine argues that God cannot undergo real change.²⁵ It is a foundational doctrine in various branches of Christianity, highlighting the timeless steadfastness and dependability of God's character. This concept holds that God remains constant and unchanging, regardless of external circumstances or human actions. This central Christian orthodox claim states that God's immutability implies his constancy. Thus, God exists, and he is unchangeable. For this doctrine, God's relatedness is highlighted but in a constant and unchanging way.²⁶

Two broad, distinct yet related definitions of divine immutability have received the utmost attention in the theological circle today. They are (1) weak immutability and (2) strong immutability of God. The first argues that divine immutability means constant character and faithfulness in divine promises. The second states that God, in his essence and being, is wholly unchanging. The difference between the two definitions is that while the first admits divine immutability, it is only realised in God's promises and faithfulness to his people.²⁷ Meanwhile, the second attributes immutability to God in all aspects, as his being. Significantly, both forms of divine immutability are central to the current discussion on God's immutability in neo-Pentecostal Christianity today.

A historical investigation into the doctrine of divine immutability reveals some interesting perspectives. These perspectives continue to inform contemporary theological examination of the doctrine of divine immutability. Classical philosophers and doctrinal theologians like Plato (428-348), Aristotle (384-322), Augustine (354-430), Boethius (480-524) and Aquinas (1224-1274) have inferred God's immutability from his perfection, simplicity, the first cause of change, creation of time, and attributes which are not distinct from him. From their classical theistic arguments, it becomes clear that God's immutability is generated from a convergence of intuition about perfection.²⁸

In an attempt to provide a coherent account of what it means to say that God is immutable these days, Aben found that failure to harmonise God's immutability with God's relatedness with humans in a changeable world result in conceptual dissonance.²⁹ This may result in a dissonance between divine doctrines (God's infallibility, omniscience, impassibility), which would discredit the Christian message for stating contradictory doctrines about God. Today, the doctrine of divine immutability remains central in Christianity, though it has come under theological and philosophical criticisms. The immutable nature of God has been the reference point of many modern Christian thoughts. It serves as an important attribute through which God is approached for interventions to problems and needs, past and present.

However, criticisms such as the changing universe and historical response to circumstances have spearheaded the rejection of this doctrine.³⁰ The first criticism contends that since the universe changes through time, then this must include a change in the divine being. For critics, the world cannot change without God, who plays a part in it remaining static. Their position is that the world as it appeared in ancient biblical times has changed today. The current world and its advanced character will need a new God. In this regard, God must change to conform to today's understanding of the world.

The second argument against the doctrine of divine immutability holds that God responded to changing historical circumstances and prayer that would require some sort of change in him. This change is visible in how God in the Bible and current situations responded and failed to answer

²⁴ T. Pawl, "Divine Immutability," *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2009, <https://iep.utm.edu/divine-immutability/>.

²⁵ B. Leftow, "Eternity and Immutability," in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. W.E. Mann (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 48–77; B. Leftow, "Immutability," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Taylor and Francis, 1998); A. Norman Klein, "Toward a New Understanding of Akan Origins," *Africa* 66, no. 2 (April 7, 1996): 248–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1161318>.

²⁶ Yairah Amit, "'The Glory of Israel Does Not Deceive or Change His Mind': On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative," *Prooftexts*, 1992, 201–12.

²⁷ Pawl, "Divine Immutability."

²⁸ Leftow, "Immutability"; Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*.

²⁹ Tersur Akuma Aben, "The Doctrine of Divine Immutability as God's Constancy," 2001.

³⁰ Leftow, "Immutability."

humankind. This doctrine is contested by advocates of theistic mutualism, who support a more relational understanding of God's interaction with creation.

(b) The doctrine of God's changeability underscores the opinion that God is changeable and can be made to alter his decisions and covenant with people. The concept of changeability argues that living beings have the quality or state of being capable of modification or change. It refers to the capability of being adaptable, mutable or reversible in some or all characteristics. Divine changeability is a popular yet narrowly accepted doctrine formulated on the basis that, in certain situations in the Bible, God is perceived to have "repented" or "changed" his mind.

If God "repents" or "regrets," that seems to imply that God at an earlier point in time engaged in an activity with one result in mind. However, another result, which God did not anticipate and does not like, is the reality, and thus God is sorry that he carried out that earlier activity. If God "changes his mind," the average Bible reader could understand this to mean that God's final decision on an issue was unknown even to God himself; that God initially had one plan in mind, but then adopted another.³¹

Indeed, several biblical passages, such as Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14 and Jonah 3:10, categorically describe God as regretting or relenting. Contextually, biblical narratives on God's changeability fundamentally propose to readers that a change of mind by God is possible.³² According to theists, though these passages refer to God's anthropomorphic nature, many believers do not take them literally. Presumably linked to "Open Theism" (God does not know future events; divine future conditioned upon human actions), the subject of God's changeability questions the general subject of God's perfection and transcendence. Given this, the doctrine of the changeability of God is antonymous to his immutability.

The foundation for accepting this doctrine lies in the biblical passages that affirm God's immutability, despite global tensions that have ensued between its two forms: weak immutability and strong immutability. On the other hand, some biblical passages (Ex 32:14; Jer 26:3; Jon 4:2) present God as alterable. Based on the verbs "repent", "relent", "change [His mind]" or "turn [from]", some interpreters of the Bible affirm the alterable nature of God. In other cases, the specific concept of God as a father (Isa 64:7; Jer 3:19; Matt 6:9; Mk 14:36; 1 Jn 3:2) also draws believers' attention to God's changeability. Therefore, based on the semantic form of "repent" or "change" and the relationship of Jesus to God, which is mostly expressed through his designation of God as a father that many believers have come to accept wholeheartedly, the doctrine of God's immutability and changeability appears contradictory.

The paper conceptualises the doctrines of divine immutability and changeability to understand how God relates to his creation and as a means to establish the role of West African neo-Pentecostal Christians within his divine nature. God's immutability and changeability, as elucidated above, represent two distinct divine attributes. They underscore varying perspectives on how God is understood. Importantly, these two doctrines seem to vie for prominence within Pentecostal perceptions of God's nature. The unchanging and changing identity of God in West African Pentecostalism is explored with some common biblical passages and teachings from leading neo-Pentecostal figures for the sake of clarity.

NEO-PENTECOSTALISM AND GOD'S UNCHANGEABILITY

In Global Pentecostal Christianity, the belief concerning God's immutability is an important one. The religion shares in the doctrine of the immutability of God, despite its radical break with the past and adaptability to a given culture.³³ It acknowledges the relevance of the doctrine as it concerns the only one God from whom pneumatic signs and wonders originate. In African Pentecostalism, this has become possible due to the rise of Western Charismatic movements that made Pentecostal ideas, practices and doctrines more acceptable to traditional forms of Christianity.

³¹ W.A. Maier, "Does God 'Repent' or Change His Mind," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2004): 127-44.

³² Maier, "Does God 'Repent' or Change His Mind"; William D Barrick, "The Openness of God: Does Prayer Change God?," *Master's Seminary Journal* 12, no. 2 (2001): 149-66; John T Willis, "The 'Repentance' of God in the Books of Samuel, Jeremiah, and Jonah," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 16, no. 1 (1994): 156-75.

³³ Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity: Interpretations from an African Perspective*.

Among neo-Pentecostals, God and his divine character remain unchangeable. Many biblical passages affirm this unchanging nature of God. A number of them are discussed in this section of the work to show the Christian basis for this Pentecostal belief about God. They include passages from the Books of Numbers (23:19), 1 Samuel (15:29), Psalm (110:4), Malachi (3:6), James (1:17) and Hebrews (13:8), among others. Neo-Pentecostals (pastors, prophets/prophetesses) seeking to support the doctrine of divine immutability often refer to these passages as scriptural evidence. Pentecostalism, in all its variants, emphasises the direct, personal experience and understanding of this immutable God via baptism with the Holy Spirit (Vondey 2017, pp.170-130). The Bible instructs that God remains steadfast and does not alter his promises and decisions.

God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it? (Num 23:19).

Moreover, the Glory of Israel will not deceive or change his mind, for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind (1 Sam 15:29).

The above passages attest to the immutability of God's decisions in neo-Pentecostal belief. In addition to these two passages affirming God's unchanging nature to Pentecostals, there are also instances where God is described as immutable. The Book of Malachi (3:6), for instance, offers a strong statement about God's revelation of his name. The text reads:

For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished.

In Christian theology, the label Lord is understood to signify YHWH in Hebrew—The Unchangeable One: “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (cf. Ex 3:14; Isa 44:6; Rev 1:8). Among neo-Pentecostals, this God is good and perfect and does not require a change as the Book of James puts it.

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (Jms 1:17).

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb 13:8).

According to neo-Pentecostals, God is an eternal, living being. In this context, God does not die, relent or retire due to a circumstance. He is the source of life, and his life cannot be taken away from him or ended. Speaking on the theme of the International Central Gospel Church for the year 2024: “God”, Mensah Otabil mentions that God reveals himself through his creation since he is invisible. He teaches that God is a creator whose creatures do not change in being like him. For instance, animals and human beings who were created in Genesis are forever the same by nature. He further teaches that God is eternal and infinite; he is unmoved, he has nothing to become; he cannot love better, he does not improve or become better; he does not change his mind. For Mensah Otabil, there is nothing more because God has filled up everything that is, and there can be nothing beyond what he is.³⁴

In the neo-Pentecostal understanding, there is nothing humans will do for God to change his mind. For when God becomes changeable, then he is no longer God. However, in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures, God is presented and described in some human imagery in such a way that human beings would be able to understand his nature. This is known as anthropomorphism—the use of the ways of man to describe God. This does not mean that God has become a human, but he can be understood in human ways. The use of human ways helps to know and understand some concepts of God.

³⁴ Mensah Otabil, “Who Is God?,” February 15, 2024, <https://youtu.be/86frsWKOcYA?si=0dsPgIzxUSjAeEvp>.

Daniel Kolawole Olukoya, the founder of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries in Lagos, describes God as an unusual being who is determined by his constancy aside from his anthropomorphic features. He mentions that since the early biblical times, God has remained the same till now, with an unusual constant power with which he provides for his children.³⁵ In Olukoya's view, a change in God's constant power will render him an unusual being. Moreover, on Morning Glow, a television programme by Matthew Ashimolowo, the pastor teaches that God's nature primarily centres on his immutability. He explains that God is eternal and that due to this nature, no power exists to replace him.³⁶ This immutable nature of God is also attributed to Jesus Christ in Hebrews (13:8), signifying his oneness with God. From the above, it is evident that neo-Pentecostal biblical teachings firmly embrace and uphold the immutability of God. It can be said that, on the subject of divine immutability, Pentecostal theological contributions merely mirror a conventional biblical divine immutability framework, which positions the religion in the broader Christian context.

NEO-PENTECOSTALISM AND GOD'S CHANGEABILITY

The changeability of God is a prevailing doctrine among some independent indigenous Pentecostal churches. It is a subject that frequently arises in the minds of Bible readers, both laity and clergy.

Such a subject is the outcome of the translation of passages in the Bible that appear to describe God's ability to think.³⁷ Among neo-Pentecostal Bible readers and believers, the main understanding and teaching is that God, based on his mercy and gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus Christ in John 14:15-17, can relent or repent. This relentlessness from making strict decisions, in neo-Pentecostal thought, is made possible under the influence of the prophetic, prayer, fasting and divine love. The translation of some biblical passages, such as Genesis 6:6-7, Exodus 32:14, 2 Samuel 24:16, Jeremiah 18:8, Jeremiah 26:3, Jonah 3:10 and Jonah 4:2 has steered the changeability of God. Biblical passages like Exodus, Jonah and 1 Chronicles support this assertion as follows:

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...." (Ex 34:6-7).

And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, relenting from disaster" (Jon 4:2).

And God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But as the angel was doing so, the Lord saw it and was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand" (1Chrn 21:15).

In these passages, God puts a particular plan of action into effect, then grieves his decision and reverses it. God does it as a result of his love and mercy for his people and the entire creation.³⁸ In Exodus (36:6-7) and Jonah (4:2), God's mercy and love override his anger, hence his relenting response to his creation. The passages appear to assert a case of changing from one course or plan of action to another. Such a change seems even more possible in this era of modern Pentecostal and

³⁵ D.K. Olukoya, "The Unusual God.," 2022, <https://youtu.be/mX7Xv6nDptY?si=oK14VLwOdu9vxRnW>.

³⁶ M. Ashimolowo, "Nature of God," KICC Morning Glow, 2023, <https://youtu.be/1lItaWhRPFk?si=ct4JcHqspdpoeMLF>.

³⁷ Maier, "Does God 'Repent' or Change His Mind."

³⁸ Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*.

prophetic prayer, fasting and deific relationships.³⁹ The above texts, and their related texts such as (cf. Ex 32:14; Jer 26:3, 19; Ams 7:1-3), in the ordinary Pentecostal understanding specify that God changes, at least in his mind, anger and commands. Given this, the Bible, in the ordinary believer's view, is in favour of divine mutability.

The neo-Pentecostal framework concerning God's active engagement with creation and humanity seems to be shaped by the specific concept of God as a father (masculine and caring image) to whom practices such as prayer and fasting are directed. The clear depiction of God as a father (Isa 64:7; Jer 3:19; Matt 6:9; Mk 14:36; 1 Jn 3:2) ensures both divine healing and relational connection, potentially impacting divine responsiveness towards the believer.⁴⁰ As pneumatic Christianity revolves around experiencing the Holy Spirit as the active presence of Christ within the Church, the practice and belief of modern Charismatics have evolved to include praying and fasting to seek God's intervention, either to revoke his decision or to amend a family or generational curse or burden. This reflects the views of Geisler and Bounds on prayer.⁴¹

Two contrasting perspectives on prayer dominate the church today. The first perspective posits that prayer is a method through which God accomplishes his will on earth. Geisler writes that "effective prayer is, as John said, asking in God's will (Jn 15:7). Prayer is not a means by which we get our will done in heaven. Rather, it is a means by which God gets his will done on earth."⁴² The second perspective asserts that prayer is one of the tools through which the believer's desire is fulfilled in heaven. According to this view, prayer has the ability to influence God.

Prayer affects God more powerfully than His own purposes. God's will, words and purposes are all subject to review when the mighty potencies of prayer come in. How mighty prayer is with God may be seen as he readily sets aside His own fixed and declared purposes in answer to prayer.⁴³

This perspective perceives prayer as altering God's mind. It helps him in decision-making, as he is not omniscient. Thus, God sometimes exhibits uncertainty regarding the future, drawing from passages like Genesis (22:12) and 2 Kings (20:1-11).

Neo-Pentecostals do not consider themselves orphans, because they are the children of God with the Holy Spirit as their comforter (Jn 14:26), sealer of their salvation (1Cor 12:3; Rm 8:16) and revealer of God's thought (1Cor 2:10-16). Upholding this belief, neo-Pentecostals are empowered to seek divine liberation, healing, and breakthroughs by petitioning a merciful and loving Father (God) via prayer (speaking in tongues). Additionally, neo-Pentecostals perceive God through a Trinitarian lens, viewing the doctrine of the Trinity not merely as a concept about the abstract nature of God but rather as an understanding of his interaction with humanity and the consequent transformation in relationships among humans.⁴⁴ The Trinitarian doctrine remains a fundamental aspect within Pentecostalism.⁴⁵ It evokes contemplation of God's relational responsiveness, prompting considerations of divine mutability among Pentecostal Christians.

³⁹ See: Emmanuel K. E. Antwi and Eric Manu, "Chapter 4 Reception of "Prophet" in the New Testament and Its Impact on the Activities of the Neo-prophetic Movement in Ghana," in **Handbook of Christian Prophetism in Africa**, ed. D.N.A. Aryeh, K. Asamoah-Gyadu, and K. Holter (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2025), 59—79.

⁴⁰ Aloysius Nnaemeka Ezeoba, "God's Absolute Immutability Vis-a-Vis His Real Relation with the World," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 95, no. 1 (2024): 29–47.

⁴¹ N. L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997); E.M. Bounds, *The Reality of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980).

⁴² Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?* .

⁴³ Bounds, *The Reality of Prayer*.

⁴⁴ C. M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991); Earl Muller, "The Science of Theology A Review of Catherine LaCugna's" God For Us", *Gregorianum*, 1994, 311–41.

⁴⁵ M. Nel, *Pentecostals and the Doctrine of the Trinity: Some Hermeneutical Considerations* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023); Marius Nel, "African Pentecostal Spirituality as a Mystical Tradition: How Regaining Its Roots Could Benefit Pentecostals," *HTS Theologise Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020).

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the doctrines of divine immutability and divine changeability in the context of West African neo-Pentecostal Christian understanding of God. It has discussed neo-Pentecostal beliefs regarding God's dynamic nature and interactions with humans, aligning historically with notions of God's immutability or changeability.

The doctrine of divine immutability, per its description, refers to God's unchanging existence and identity (i.e., God's essence, God's attributes and will). Meanwhile, the doctrine of mutability argues that the Supreme Being has the state of being capable of modification or change, which, for some neo-Pentecostal Christians, is an indication of God's mercy. Within the global Christian tradition, some characteristic features of God stand out. For instance, God's personality, along with His role as creator, judge, redeemer/liberator, and healer, is particularly noteworthy. These features, among others, also point to his immutable nature.

Some neo-Pentecostals hold on to the doctrine of changeability, believing that God can change his decisions under the influence of prayer and fasting. They cite biblical passages like Exodus 36:6-7, Jonah 4:2, and 1 Chronicles 21:15 to support this view, where God reverses his decisions out of love and mercy for his creation. This perspective suggests that God can change his mind, at least in response to human actions and prayers. African Pentecostals often perceive God as a caring father figure, emphasizing prayer and fasting as means to seek divine intervention and amend curses or burdens. This doctrine prompts contemplation of God's relational responsiveness and the possibility of divine mutability among independent Charismatic Christians.

Nonetheless, the paper contends that not every assertion that God responds to human fulfilment of divinely established conditions should be interpreted as a denial of divine immutability. In neo-Pentecostalism, the doctrine of God's immutability is foundational, despite the movement's innovative nature. The religion emphasizes God's unchanging character, drawing support from biblical passages like Numbers 23:19 and Malachi 3:6. The unchangeable nature of God is seen as a core aspect of Pentecostal belief, with Jesus Christ depicted as eternally consistent in Hebrews 13:8. Charismatic Pentecostal leaders like Mensah Otabil and Daniel Olukoya reinforce this view, emphasizing God's constancy and eternal nature. Despite anthropomorphic descriptions in the Bible, neo-Pentecostals assert that God's essence remains unchanged, serving as a source of stability and assurance. In all, it must be understood that God is capable of a dynamic relationship, which we find in his three distinct persons of the Trinity and with the rest of creation. This relational receptiveness can be misconstrued as mutability in divine nature.

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Ethical clearance statement

This study did not undergo review or approval by an Ethics Committee. Also, written informed consent was not obtained from all participants prior to their involvement.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on reasonable request from the corresponding author, E.M. The data are publicly available on participants' websites. The data do not compromise the privacy of participants and the selected neo-pentecostal churches.

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