

## Evaluating the Contribution of African New Pentecostal Independent Churches on the Wellbeing of Church Members: Case of Zion Temple Celebration Center in Rwanda

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### Abstract

Zion Temple Celebration Center (ZTCC) as a Pentecostal independent church in Rwanda which originated from the shadow period of 1994 genocide has attracted a large number of members from other existing churches and other new converted members. In this essay's contribution responds to the following questions: (i). Does the motivation of ZTCC members to pay tithes and give offerings associated with the church teachings and programs? (ii). Do these teachings and programs empower church's members in improving their social and economic conditions? The research revealed that through biblical messages, ZTCC had built a foundation by which development process can be lay on within a community that was coming from a desperate situation to the level of embracing self-acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation. The methodology of clustering teaching programs in respect of subgroups (youth and young professionals, businessmen, couples, widows, etc.) that attend church services has converted the abstract of biblical messages into applicable and achievable principles in day to day life with aim to improve their living conditions and be more proactive. In fact, there are signs of evidences that show the contribution of ZTCC in life improvement of its members more building capacity at individual level than at community level as a whole. The trust and attachment to their church has made members to feel committed to sustain church's expenses by paying tithes and offerings. But also making the church a kind of training center where members and other people come to learn about skills and knowledge to deal with life issues and some of the solutions to apply increased the number of church members and make some of them loyal to the point they would consider the church as their own institution more than being plugged only to spirituality.

**Keywords:** Religion; Development; New Pentecostal church; Zion temple; Rwanda

### Introduction

Differently from what has been defined as new Pentecostal churches by several scholars [1,2] in the Rwandan context the term refers to churches which were established in the post-genocide period linked to the reality of peace-building and the reconciliation process [3,4]. These churches were involved in a process aiming to bring up communities and church members in particular from post-genocide desperate conditions to spiritual, social and economic stability. According to Kubai [4], most of these new Pentecostal churches that started in the post-genocide period are said to support their members not only spiritually but also socially and materially. These churches have been encouraging their members to be active in national programs such as unity and reconciliation stressing forgiveness as a religious imperative.

Among those new Pentecostal Churches, Zion Temple Celebration Center (ZTCC) has attracted a large number of members from other existing churches, such as Catholic Church, Anglican Church and other new converted members. According to its leadership<sup>1</sup>, ZTCC was found in 1999 in Kigali during a period of heavy wounds of the 1994 genocide with a mission to transform communities and nations to become a dwelling place for God by applying biblical principles.

Started by nine founders named "pioneers" of the church vision and 120 members, ZTCC has witnessed a remarkable expansion in the last decade by opening 35 churches countrywide and in neighbor countries such as Burundi and Congo. ZTCC has also extended its field to the USA and Europe. Its members are currently estimated at 50,000 people worldwide whereby two third are based in Rwanda. In addition, ZTCC does not rely on grants or donations from outside, rather members contributions sustain the operating costs of the church, including salary of pastors and construction cost and other financial support that the church provide to Bethsaida Health center, authentic international school and authentic radio all owned by ZTCC.

### Research Question and Methodology

Bazuin [5] in his study argued that the most interesting aspect to investigate religion and its effects is beyond looking at the veracity of people's beliefs about the supernatural, rather to understand how these beliefs and behaviors affect how they view themselves, their neighbors, their society, and the myriad of social challenges that face post-conflict societies. He quite marry Durkheim theory that defines religion as one of the main parts of the social system by providing social control, cohesion and purpose for people as well as another means of communication and gathering for individuals to interact and reaffirm social norms [6]. The hypothesis can be confirmed or not depending

<sup>1</sup> During the conversation I had with ZTCC leader on 30 March 2016 in Jerusalem preparing the formal interview, Adress: Jerusalem, Kyriat Yahovel, Uruguay Street, Building 3, App. No 10.

on religion core values and the ways they are put into practice in day to day life.

In this essay, I will bring my contribution by responding to the following questions:

- Does the motivation of ZTCC members to pay tithes and give offerings associated with the church teachings and programs?
- Do these teachings and programs empower church's members in improving their social and economic conditions?

Interview guide in this essay is split into two sides, one for church leaders and the other for church members. With church leaders, we were pinpointing questions<sup>2</sup> related to mission statement interpretation, components of teachings and programs provided to members, platforms and tools used to make it, shift in themes along the time from phase to phase as listed in AWM magazine<sup>3</sup> and issues related to source of financing to maintain the church and its expenses. In regard with the category they belong to (youth, couples, business, etc.), church members questions relate to sorts of benefits gained since they joined ZTCC, feeling of sense of community as member, the attitude of responsibility toward communal programs, and the cost (money, time, in-kind, etc.) it requires to make the church function.

Two different sources of data/information were used (church leaders and church members) with informants from various groups (couples, women, men, youth, businessmen and other professionals). Through semi-structured interview conducted from three church leaders who are implementers of church's mission including pastors and other team leaders, a clear view of strategies used to contribute to rebuilding church's members was assessed. In addition, ten church members from various categories (age, gender, social and economic class, etc.) were interviewed to examine what make them to be loyal to ZTCC and understand more the motives of paying tithes and giving offerings. This essay also includes a literature review from several authors as well as my own analysis on the data and information collected from informants.

In this regard, I would like to disclose to my readers that I have been ZTCC member since four years. On one side, this falls under ethical consideration to disclaim biased language as much as possible in the process of data collection and analysis. On the other side, it gives me an in-depth understanding of the general context of the church.

I have conducted interview with two ZTCC pastors (including the overseer and founder of the ZTCC) and two team leaders (one for Asaph choir singers and the other for youth) during their recurrent visits in Israel that normally happen in September and March every year, respectively during Sukkot and Purim holidays<sup>4</sup>. The aim was to get information about the inputs and strategies that ZTCC has put in place in order to contribute in rebuilding social and economic wellness of its members in particular and Rwandan society in general. The same technique was used to collect information from two women who are ZTCC members. The intention was to assess their personal perception of church's empowering messages since they joined ZTCC and their level of satisfaction with ZTCC's teachings and programs.

Apart from the face-to-face interview conducted with four church leaders and two church members interviewed, two other ways were used to select informants with whom interview was done online: First, through church leaders and team leaders, I was linked to other church members whom I can access for an online interview. Secondly, through my personal network, I managed to conveniently select informants from different church social networks (Whats App group and Facebook). Thus, two young professionals and two businesswomen were interviewed.

The next lot of interview was made in July with a face to face contact when was back in Rwanda. This was the big part of the interview and observation. In the three weeks following the week I arrived in Kigali-Rwanda, I first participated in Sundays and evening church services that happen on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:00pm to 7:30pm as a participant-observer. Also I interviewed eight church members conveniently selected but four were able to be part of the whole interview as it was planned. Other two interviewees were willing but other personal commitments made before obstructed to have the planned interview happen.

As the interview was made by open ended questions, data/information was captured in a notebook, and a probing technique has been used either in face-to-face interview or through call interview. Afterward, all the data were compiled and analyzed. Any information provided without being associated to any question was also taken into consideration in the analysis process and has allowed a more comprehensive and insightful analysis and discussion of the findings.

## Findings

Findings were subdivided into three main phases. Findings in the first section are associated to ZTCC's contribution in terms of restoring personal hope and social construct of its members. The second section is dedicated to dealing with behavioral change for widening social responsibility and expanding economic opportunities. This has to do with various messages used to empower church members through different platforms available in church structure. The third part summarized the main reasons and motivation that push church members to pay tithes and give offerings in way it confirms the statement of ZTCC leader that it is fully financed by its members' contribution.

## Road from self-acceptance and forgiveness to reconciliation and social cohesion

According to ZTCC leadership, one of their roles among their members and in the community in general during post-genocide period was to bridge Christian values with the national needs, which was the road toward reconciliation. In their beliefs, this should start by people's self-acceptance before forgiveness and reconciliation between people.

According to Schreiter [7] the process of reconciliation is preceded by the basic theological perspective which is self-acceptance before moving to vertical reconciliation (people and God) and horizontal reconciliation (individuals, groups or communities among

<sup>2</sup> List of interview guiding questions is an appendix No 1.

<sup>3</sup> Autherntic Word Ministries (AWM), Embracing godly values to accelerate Africa's transformation, Africa Arise and Shine Magazine, Issue no1, August 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Interview happened in two sites on 25th and 26th March 2016 at Dan Hotel, and at AWM office, Uruguay Street, Building 3, App. No

themselves). Brounéus [8] argued that the theological context of reconciliation is that human justice is limited. Therefore its way has to be paved first by the reconciliation with God.

The first step was to trace a strong pillar of trust between church members and leaders so that the latter can be the right channel to drive the change among the former. Similarly, in development practitioners' perspective, in order to build a relationship between the marginalized group and the development institution, it is important to identify ways to effectively collaborate, and build trust and respect, as an ongoing effort for all involved in the community engagement process [9].

Moreover, for communities with roots in religious belief as it was the case in Rwanda whereby 90% are Christians, church leaders were supposed to be among trusted opinion leaders and be role models to their members and to the community in general. According to Quayesi [10] spirituality allows church members to make sense of life. It is at the very central part of the life and culture of the individual and of the community.

In the interview with the overseer and leader of ZTCC, he started by saying that:

*P.G.: "Our priority in 1999 was first to deal with mental issues, because people first needed someone who could honestly listen to them."*

The plan of ZTCC was to deal first mainly with issues related to healing of the emotional part of people and counseling with the aim for despaired members to first accept who they are, and then move to mutual reconciliation. Asked about the channel through which this was done, he replied by saying:

*P.G.: "Through deliverance prayer, one-on-one conversation, group prayers or other convenient platforms whereby people express all the hard way they went through during war and genocide period, or through open preaching, or praise and worship time."*

According to Smith [11], some sociologists are very critical of introducing the concept of forgiveness and personal healing because of its abstract, yet the precepts of many religious and psychological principles towards reconciliation are grounded on forgiveness and redemption. These principles are premised on the belief that forgiveness is good in and of itself, that it is strengthening, and it is necessary for the salvation and healing of the injured person, his relatives and neighbors.

In the same context, ZTCC leader concluded the answer to my question by summarizing that all forms of violence are like diseases and have to be treated as any other sickness that has root and immediate causes as well as symptoms:

*P.G.: "The first phase was dedicated to deliverance, sharing empathy, teaching on forgiveness, confession and reconciliation, and prayer and fasting."*

In this regard, the above statement from ZTCC leader supports the argument that teachings through religious codes can be drivers for personal reassessment and catch up with the lost life trend, especially once done in unity with others. According to Cohen [12] religious practices and sense of community among members may be particularly well-suited to help people meet their goals toward well-being. For example, the teachings of many religions regarding fellowship, cooperation, and pro-social behavior make foundation of social support of religious groups by promoting positive coping strategies, or reduce loneliness.

When asked about the process of teaching and discipleship of his members, a ZTCC pastor of a local congregation said the following:

*M.F.: "For real church members, not just fans..., we first build their inner person, which involves communion with God and mutual relationship, and then we focus on external aspect of life. In three words it combines: prayer, think and act."*

My next point to him was to know the bridge from spirituality to aspects of development (economic, educational, health...). Here is what believes that:

*M.F.: "If someone is not in good relationship with God, it can be difficult to please his family, his community and the society in general, because his moral values might not match with what is required to be supportive to others."*

In order to deeply deal with the issue of loneliness and depression due to the past bad experience, ZTCC initiated a system of "families"; each family being made by 12 persons symbolizing 12 disciples of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and also related to 12 tribes of Israel or sons of Jacob as a way of mutually treating and solving their social, psychological and economic problems in a sustainable way. Looking from outside, the group (family) seems simply like any other group. However, ZTCC leaders claim that the prospect of spiritual and social togetherness was to make church members manage to handle some initiatives that require even economic and financial means.

A young leader of the youth wing of ZTCC raised in the same church expressed the following:

*J.B.K.: "On annually basis, ZTCC members have been undertaking a mega conference "Africa Arise & Shine" with a budget of around 100 000 USD. It has been financially sustained by members' contribution, due to mutual accountability and social cohesion founded on common belief of the outcomes of the conference."*

Apart from the information collected among ZTCC members, during my personal observation, I would say that ZTCC teachings and programs were relevant to the actual situation that most Rwandans were in. Those teachings have played a big role in reconstructing the sense of life of its members in a way that most of them seem to have basic direction. According to ZTCC leaders, the next shift in church program was to teach them to know appropriately what to do in order to improve their social and economic life.

### **Behavior change for social responsibility and economic expansion**

According to Emedi [13] the church is ambivalent in its choice of the extent of its social role in the community. On one side, its social involvement is considered as deviation from the primary mission of evangelism, while on the other side it raises the issue of balance between evangelism and its social responsibility in the community.

In the context of ZTCC, both sides were given a certain consideration. The approach used by ZTCC in contributing to rebuild its members and Rwandan society in general, both components (evangelism and social responsibility) were complementary each other. In fact, the content of evangelism (relationship between God and people) facilitated the social and economic change among church members through specific teachings' themes.

Moving from basic teachings related to self-acceptance, forgiveness and social cohesion to behavior change and economic expansion has

been an ongoing process. As far as the church has been receiving a significant number of new members who, some of them were in need to go through basic teachings, it was very important to make the basic teachings a recurrent program. Nevertheless, it was again essential to move forward to the next step with those who already have built such confidence and bring them to be open to the big picture of changing their lives socially and economically, and therefore be involved in national development program.

*P.G.: "At national level, we realized that we are part of Rwandan society and need to play our role. Therefore, we opened a Health Center that serves more than 48,000 people in Kicukiro Sector. We opened a school Authentic Academy (Nursery, primary and secondary levels). In order to spread our vision and sell it out at continental level, we initiated an annual conference called "Africa Arise and Shine conference" that started in 2000 until today, with the aim to sensitize Africans to be initiators and action takers of the change that we want in Africa."*

The gospel preached is parallel but not similar to the one that was labeled as "gospel of prosperity". According to Gifford [14] the main point of this gospel of Prosperity is that God wants a Christian to be wealthy. In other words, true Christianity necessarily means wealth or brings wealth. On the contrary, poverty is the sign that someone is a sinner, or at least a deficient faith or inadequate understanding.

In this viewpoint, there are some characteristics of "gospel of prosperity" that feature within ZTCC's approach of helping its members from poverty, but it stands on a different foundation whereby being wealthy is not the main goal for a Christian in ZTCC, rather being grounded on biblical values is what is intended. Economic expansion should be considered as a result of applying godly principles under God's value system.

*P.G.: "Our teachings to uplift members' lives had started first by changing the behavior; being principle minded and putting in action. The divine emphasis claimed as God's purpose in the whole process, is to be supportive and compassionate to others, by not just giving them the fish, but giving them the net and teaching them how to fish by themselves. In this regard, we give recommendations (not technical but based on God's principles) to young professionals, orientation to business starters, etc."*

It was noted that ZTCC members are clustered into different groups in which relevant teaching programs are offered in order to empower them on how to deal with life issues and handle difficulties on the way. Among the groups, I focused on the youth, businessmen and businesswomen, couples and families in general, vulnerable groups such as widows and orphans and children program.

## Youth empowerment

Demystifying and contextualizing the content of religious teachings has made ZTCC members especially the youth to believe that all things are possible. The only thing that you need is to move from believing to thinking (planning) and action. A youth leader testified that:

*J.B.K.: "There are plenty of examples of church youth members who started initiatives after being freed by the long journey of teachings. For example, after I have understood and internalized that Jacob in the Bible worked for his uncle for 14 years and his salary was always*

*confiscated, I decided to not be employed by anyone. I opened my own consultancy firm which I run now"*

In order to prepare the next generation, teachings for young people were split into two categories. For example, teachings for junior youth group needs to build their foundation by giving them knowledge of how to deal with "pop culture" that would deflect them from the right path, drug abuse, movies with bad behavior and actions, but to be more discipline oriented. Moreover, young adults are subject to good and proper career guidance, code of conduct and ethics, professionalism and consistency in whatever you do. Belief is the only denominator of every knowledge and skill taught to them. To confirm that, a young professional rose in ZTCC was asked about what he had benefited by being church members, especially in the youth<sup>5</sup>.

*N.E.: "Normally being ZTCC member starts in spiritual realm, but it also affects our outwards. As a young professional, I learnt from ZTCC teachings for youth wing how to overcome fear, activate my talents and gifts starting by the little that I have for the service of the people. I now have established an NGO to support vulnerable people. My beneficiaries are not church members but from outside in Rwandan communities."*

*A young university graduate asked about the source of his motivation to be highly involved in his community by conducting meeting to fight against drug abuse and other malpractices intoxicating young people's destiny. Here is what he said<sup>6</sup>.*

*F.E.: "I am involved in changing young people's lives as a divine mandate because I believe this is the only true of the role that I have to play in my community or whoever is near me in one way or another, according to Jesus Christ's preaching: you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."*

## Building strong families though couples' teaching programs

In respect to gender imbalance that was noticeable in Rwanda society, empowering women was made a priority in the sense of building balanced families as per biblical perspective husband and wife constitute one body. If so, it does not make sense to build capacity for one and leave the other. One of the elements that show that there is a sign of women empowerment is the fact that there are women who are pastors as it was claimed by church leader. There are examples of churches who are led by women and there is no difference of how their leading style compared to the ones led by men.

However, according to my personal observation, women pastors are leading under the name of their husbands. As part of ZTCC conviction picked from Biblical scriptures, husband is believed to be the head of the family. Thus, whatever role she would be playing in the church, she will still seeing herself submissive to her husband and serving under his nominal authority.

This goes in the same context as it was argued by Prelinger [15] that women have outnumbered men in the Christian churches, but authority and power have stayed in the hands of men throughout centuries. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the situation began to change on a larger scale. Women gradually got involved in the decision-making bodies of the churches and the number of female clergy increased. Likewise, the definitions of femininity and masculinity have little by little changed.

<sup>5</sup> WhatsApp call interview.

<sup>6</sup> Facebook call interview

In terms of contributing to building a harmonized society in a decentralized way to the grassroots, family has been given a great importance whereby ZTCC has been organizing open sessions and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) aiming to outline core issues that families are facing. For example, surveys have been conducted and findings were shared with the whole congregation of church members in couples' sessions, a men's committee member had claimed. Some of the issues that were tackled in these sessions and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were the causes of divorces, how to address home gender based violence and how to deal with it when it happens.

The first step to deal with GBV is to rely on spiritual leaders before it even goes reported to the police. This has raised many questions, but their explanation is that they should consider the church as a family whereby when a problem arises it should be treated by family members. Once it is not solved, then it can be reported to institutions with ability to deal with the issue (police).

According to McLeod [16] the century saw changes to the churches' understanding of marriage in at least three areas: the importance of human love, the positive value of sexual experience, and the place within marriage of children. In the new church view the gift of marriage brings husband and wife together in the delight and tenderness of sexual union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives.

The couples' committee member said that in those meetings that are normally announced at Authentic Radio (the radio owned by ZTCC) and happen on monthly basis, people from different churches in Kigali attend as they consider ZTCC as a leading New Pentecostal church that address issues that are not much talked about in other churches or considered as taboo in existing Christian perspective.

Out of what was said by the committee member, a man told me that:

*F.M.: "Since I attended couples' sessions in ZTCC that often happen once per month, I now fulfill very well my responsibilities in my family as a husband and father of my wife and my children respectively. There is no more trouble of misunderstanding in decision making in our home. I also have seen changes in how my wife behaves now. Any issue is discussed within the family."*

Time did not allow me to meet the wife so that I can collect information regarding how she perceived her husband after attending ZTCC couples' session as a way to counter-verify the expressed perception.

### **Businessmen and businesswomen teaching program**

As earlier said by church leaders, there are also evidences from church members that sessions that were organized in Africa Arise and Shine conferences since 2000 when it was established, has been a stimulating engine for some members to be confident and start their own initiatives (businesses) with some basic principles. Beyond what is taught in classical schools of business and management, speakers and motivators in the Africa Arise and Shine conference have been taking them to unseen world which they couldn't believe but emphasize on how things are possible no matter how challenging it would be when looking over the actual situation.

*J.B.K.: "A genocide survivor woman "T" deprived of everything including her hope of living. After being taught, she started her business, she overcame fear, now she has a business of halls and wedding stuffs for rent."*

Activating the confidence among church members so that they can be out of fear was the main theme of ZTCC teaching related to business and professionalism.

*Chr.: "I have started from nothing but I learned to be confident and sticking on whatever I am doing. My friends and relatives could also give me such encouragement, but what I have been learning from church business sessions was the divine interest beyond earning profit."*

*ZTCC leaders believe that due very complicated background full of hardship and struggle, you can start an initiative and be successful once you are still referring to the bad past experience. Unless with the Bible message, someone comes to know the truth and then will be set free (refer to what Jesus said: John 8:32).*

*M.U.: "I knew the principle to make business, but due to bad history of genocide, I couldn't feel free to start my former initiative. It is only after i have attended sessions of prayer and business teachings I was delivered and go back to my business of restaurant, which I now perform well and fearless"*

I had curiosity to know why ZTCC is putting much effort in putting effort is organizing sessions related to business. The only answer from leaders was that they want the Holy Spirit in a dignified, healthy and empowered body. Money is the engine on all these qualifiers. In addition, from my own observation, the other reason behind is have more people who have influence and who can also contribute to keep the church running without any money shortage.

### **Physical, psychosocial and spiritual support to vulnerable groups**

With the testimonies collected from ZTCC archives (Audio CD and DVD) and what beneficiaries has said, there are some specific events to support vulnerable groups such as widows and orphans, genocide survivors, refugees, etc. However, the support sometimes is not systematic in a way it can accompany them by building their capacity slowly by slowly to the point of reaching their social and economic empowerment.

Such kind of support is applicable in development process, but in the earlier stage of relief whereby people's conditions are in a situation of emergency. However, some of these groups that ZTCC has supported should not be assisted under relief program, rather a systematic way to build their capacity.

During my conversation with church leader (the overseer), he asserted that the reason why they opted to not establish a systematic way of having a vulnerable group within the church, it is because it would compromise what we teach them. It would have been created a feeling of identifying themselves as "vulnerable" while we teach them to overcome whatever hinders them and unleash their potentials. It is a game of mindset. Once you play it wrongly, the result will be negative regardless the amount of inputs you have put in place.

According to liberation Theology the primary issue for theology is not an abstract concept, even poverty, inequality, or injustice. It is rather poor people, and the question why they are poor, and what can be done about it [17]. The question here was to know if really there is something that has been done for these vulnerable people to come out of the bad situation. Though the church did not want to put them into groups due to the fear of making them more "vulnerable", which was

against the vision and teaching of the church, some support was given to the identified people in need.

A widow and genocide survivor, member of ZTCC for long time has confirmed the same perceptive.

*WP: "I have been supported by ZTCC in cash and in-kind things but the most important was the comforting messages and the confidence that was created in me to change my feeling of being vulnerable. I now can do anything that is my ability because I am confident as any other human being". She said.*

The church establishes platforms that will allow members to share their experiences with others whom they share the same background. Those who have success stories would help others to overcome barriers and strongholds that have been holding them back spiritually, socially and economically.

*Im: "We had in the past a group called Dorcas whereby widows and separated women have been sharing our experiences in the way to heal of wounds one to another."*

The deprivation and powerlessness of the poor wounds the whole community...These wounds will be healed only by greater solidarity with the poor and among the poor themselves" [15]. ZTCC leaders were expecting that the system whereby members feel belonging to a family (earlier mentioned) would lower the burden by creating a mixed family of those who are better-offs and those who are in need to be supported. However, the system seemed to be much a fiction than a reality. On one hand, it is not obvious that every church member has the same understanding of supporting each other. On the other hand, those who are in need would hardly integrate the artificially created families because they first hesitate the extent at which their needs would be acknowledged and satisfied [18].

*A.R: "As a head of a family in the big "family of Naphtal" I would say that the reason why family system is not fully functioning is because people prefer to really on church pastors rather than bringing their problems and issues in a heterogenic group." A head of church created family said.*

### **Raising children's program**

Normally, ZTCC has a permanent children's service on Sundays morning whereby they are taught about the Bible stories, values and good manners as a way to build their personality and character. Some parents take it as a time to keep their children busy so they do not disturb their parents when they are also at the same time in church service. There are also holiday camps that are normally organized by the church for 9-15 years children, which program is fundamentally building biblical principles and values, and hardworking in team spirit among young people.

In ZTCC's archive there are testimonies whereby parents declare to have seen the fruits of what their teenage sons and daughters have been learning in the church as a way not only to be hard working at school or at home, but also to prevent them against drug abuse and other malpractices.

The testimonies come back to what is written in the Bible, a verse ZTCC claims to be the foundation of all the efforts they put in improving Sundays' school for children. *"Proverbs 22:6 Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."* New International Version Bible.

Apart from teaching programs organized either in the normal church services or in specific sessions, conferences or trainings, I was introduced to ZTCC other interventions that might have impact in changing people's life. These are: Authentic Radio, Authentic Academy and Bethsaida Health Center.

Though they are managed separately, the three institutions are supported by ZTCC and function in respect with church values. Assessing each one of them would require a separate research. Therefore, in this research, I couldn't go deeply into how these interventions impact people's living conditions.

### **Pay tithes and giving offerings**

According to Davis, [19] Bible gives at least some reasons of why it is important to tithe and give offerings. One of the ways is in which Christians honor and glorify God is through faithful stewardship (Proverbs 4:9), the second is to express their love to Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:8,24), while the third is to receive the Blessings which God desires to give to His people (Mal 3:10). The fourth is to grow in faith (2 Corinthians 9:6) and finally to Support the ministries of the local church (Num 18:21-24).

The recommendation that Christians are given when they are tithing or giving offering is to give an acceptable stewardship generously with sacrifice out pocketed voluntarily, cheerfully and in a systematic manner. However, it all depends on how they judge the message and it has to do with different reasons of motivation.

As earlier said, ZTCC is almost fully financed by its members' contribution. Church leaders highlighted that they receive few donations from outside and it's not such a source they would rely on. During my course of analyzing data and information collected, three reasons or motives are behind members' belief to sustain their church. For some members interviewed, the tree reasons are all valid but at different level.

### **Paying tithes and giving offerings as a recognition of church's teaching programs**

There are members who feel that what ZTCC is providing as teaching programs trainings and specific sessions is more valuable. Thus, it is the reason why they also have in return to give offerings and pay tithes. In this case the church is considered as a training center where members are empowered with skills and knowledge in different fields that are needed for life improvement. Though the inputs/materials are given for free, members feel the responsibility of providing in turn financial means so that the church can keep around more knowledgeable speakers.

A ZTCC member claimed to be satisfied of the knowledge that she has received (appropriate teachings, high profile preachers and speakers, trainings, radio programs, etc.) and in turn, it makes her feel the responsibility to sustain church expenses. During a face-to-face interview, a businesswoman expressed the following:

*BE: "ZTCC is almost like my home. I consider that what I have got from its program can't be compared to what I give as tithe or offering. I wish I could have more money to offer. Apart from tithe and offerings, I passed around and if I found there is a shortage of toilet papers, I bring them in-kind from my shop."*

## **Pay tithes and paying offerings as a divine requirement from God**

From the history of the Bible, paying tithes was a requirement to Israelites known as people of God. Therefore, as Christians who believe in both old and New Testament of the Bible, there is a belief that giving offerings or paying tithes leads to blessings that God will give in turn.

*Im: "I pay tithe and give offerings as Biblical requirement. The only way that God recommended is to give before you expect to receive from Him. I also feel at home in ZTCC and it is our responsibility to contribute in covering its expenses."*

On this issue, a church leader has clarified this divine requirement of paying tithes and giving offerings. He said that there are church members who keep this practice in a mechanical way. They believe that by giving offerings automatically God will bless you with more money. But, as leaders, we take time to explain them that God will bless the work of your hands.

Through my personal conversation and observation, I found that there are church members who believe that regardless your work, God will bless you back if you offer or pay tithes. It is matter of teaching with the purpose of empowering them with the right knowledge and skills that will lead them to join national workforces.

## **The church is our institution/organization that we have to take care of**

There are those church members who consider the church as their organization that they have to take care of at any cost, especially those who are members for long period.

*M.U: ZTCC took me from hopeless life and now I have a restaurant in Kigali town. I know where I came from. This is why when I am paying tithes or giving offerings, I do it as if ZTCC is my home.*

Based on the collected evidences, churches are good channels by which development programs should consider while looking for development stakeholders. However, it all depends on the commitment of the leaders who have aspiration to bring their members from a level to an upper one by building them with the capacity needed to take care of their personal development first, to their communities and country.

## **Conclusion**

I would argue that ZTCC has positively contributed to the social and economic development of its members by providing different teaching programs in terms of principles that were beneficial in various categories of population. Through information collected in our study, it was shown that through biblical messages, ZTCC had built a foundation by which development process can be lay on within a community that was coming from a desperate situation to the level of embracing self-acceptance, and recognizing the essence communion with God as requirement to forgiveness and reconciliation within a community. The methodology of clustering teaching programs in respect of subgroups (youth and young professionals, businessmen, couples, widows, etc.) that attend church services has converted the abstract of biblical messages into applicable and achievable principles in day to day life with aim to improve their living conditions and be more proactive.

In fact, there are signs of evidences that show the contribution of ZTCC in life improvement of its members more building capacity at

individual level than at community level as a whole. Therefore, the built system of "family of 12" was designed with high expectations, but it has been revealed that all of them were met. Rethinking the system of "families" would probably make tangible contributions to members as community whereby those who are better-off would uplift lives of the most disadvantaged ones. Grouping them by location would possibly allow them to frequently meet and therefore build a strong relationship among them, which the church would also benefit from.

The fact that church leaders were committed to listen to despaired people has created an atmosphere of trust between ZTCC leaders and members. Elaborating a roadmap to identify how problems have been changing their facets was key to moving from step to step. Changing the topic of teachings allowed the church to avoid members being bored with only Biblical messages, rather applying them to their day to day life.

The trust and attachment to their church has made members to feel committed to sustain church's expenses by paying tithes and offerings. But also making the church a kind of training center where members and other people come to learn about skills and knowledge to deal with life issues and some of the solutions to apply increased the number of church members and make some of them loyal to the point they would consider the church as their own institution more than being plugged only to spirituality.

However, ZTCC contribution was facilitated by the political will of the leadership of the country in formulating and enforcing policies that allow a quick recovery of social and economic systems. More evidences are yet needed to prove the involvement of church members in their respective communities.

Development is a cross-cutting concept to engage in the process of societal transformation that deals with all spheres of life including religion. Furthermore, in this short research I would recommend researchers in the field of religion and development to go further in supporting these few evidences with other researches findings that would go deeply with a large scope in order to assess the role of New Pentecostal Churches in relation with development issues.

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