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Individualism and Empowerment in Pentecostal Sermons:
New Evidence from Nairobi, Kenya[*]

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Abstract: Pentecostal and Charismatic churches We find that Pentecostal churches in Nairobi are remarkably consistent in the messages they disseminate, despite great variation in church and membership characteristics across congregations. We argue that the dominant theme in the sermons is a focus on cultivating believers' sense of their own potential and autonomy as individuals. This theme dominates other topics commonly associated with Pentecostal churches, such as getting rich and social conservatism. The individualist theme is also accompanied by a relative lack of social service provision, reflecting an approach to wellbeing that focuses on mental transformation rather than material handouts. We discuss implications for understanding the popularity and politics of these churches.

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A new brand of church has cropped up and spread throughout many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. Referred to as Neo-Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Renewalist,[1] these churches have experienced explosive growth in recent decades, in places that were already highly religious. At least 11% of the continent's total population now belongs to a Pentecostal church (Miller 2013), and in many countries with large numbers of Christians, members of Pentecostal churches comprise over 20%, and sometimes over 50%, of the population.[2] Indications of their rising role in public life also abound: prominent politicians have become ``born-again'' and publicly promote their membership in these churches;[3] Pentecostal pastors have decided to run for office, using their religious following as a political base;[4] some of these churches have allowed political rallies to take place on their premises.[5]

Many people associate these churches with prosperity gospel theology—the idea that wealth is a sign of God's blessing and that God rewards individual faith and positive thinking with material riches in the here and now (Kay 2011). Some scholars and journalists have therefore expressed concern that these new Pentecostal churches are distracting citizens in Sub-Saharan Africa from demanding collective political action around important economic issues— particularly issues of poverty and inequality (e.g. Gifford 2004; Deacon and Lynch 2013; Smilde 1998; Miller and Yamamori 2007, 125). There is a fear that these churches are using their resources to enrich pastors rather than to provide material services to the needy (McCauley 2013; Lado 2009). Yet other scholars have argued that the theologies and activities of Pentecostal churches are less about getting rich *per se* and more about 'psychological liberation' (Martin 2002), about giving adherents the mental tools to engage in 'spiritual warfare' for their own

individual wellbeing (Marshall 2009) and to develop 'a more autonomous, rationalized

personhood' (Swidler 2013) in an uncertain and corrupt political world.

Not only is there some debate about the typical theological focus of Pentecostal churches,

there are also reasons to expect that the formal messages of these churches might *vary*

substantially across congregations. Pentecostal churches do not belong to one overarching

institutional structure, and they serve congregations of widely varying socio-economic

demographics: the rich and the poor; the educated and the uneducated; members of many

different ethnic groups. Even highly centralized religious denominations are often not uniform in

their doctrine and activities (Djupe and Calfano 2013, 24), so do Pentecostal churches then tailor

their theological messages to the specific congregations they serve? Do Pentecostal mega-

churches ministering to political and economic elites have distinctively different content than

smaller, slum-based churches? Or, do Pentecostal churches propagate a consistent set of

positions that perhaps reflect the national context and human condition more broadly, regardless

of differences in membership?

This paper approaches these questions by collecting new text and interview data on the

messages and services Pentecostal churches are delivering to congregants in an important urban

center: Nairobi, Kenya. We present the results both of an open-ended survey of a random sample

of Pentecostal pastors and of close readings of sermons collected from those pastors' churches.

Our data gathering efforts allow us to describe the most common topics being delivered in

contemporary Pentecostal sermons in Nairobi. Our data also allow us to evaluate whether there

are clear commonalities or obvious differences in theological foci across different types of

congregations. Nairobi is a city that is fairly representative of the growth trends in

Pentecostalism in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, and it is also a city of significant

demographic diversity and economic inequality – thus providing an important site in which to test whether there is significant variation in theological messages *across* congregations.

We find that the messages of these churches are remarkably consistent, despite institutional decentralization, and that the main commonality, in fact, is an individualist theme: a focus on encouraging individual autonomy, empowerment and self-affirmation, a breaking with or overcoming of traditional collective ties. Eighty-two percent of the sermons in our sample contained explicitly individualist messages, encouraging followers to believe in their own self worth and autonomy, proclaiming the transformative capacity of individual faith, urging members to feel their achievement potential and to be self-confident whatever the social pressures from family, friends and enemies. As one of our pastor-respondents put it, the goal of religious leaders in these churches is to transform listeners from 'victims into victors.' This individualist theme is evident whether the congregation is reportedly poor or middle to upper class, younger or older, and whether the church is a purely domestic one or has international ties.

Contrary to some conventional wisdom, the most blatantly financial forms of the prosperity gospel were relatively uncommon, even though we designed our data collection strategy to oversample these types of sermons. Only 17% of the sermons in our sample explicitly *celebrated* wealth accumulation.[6] Meanwhile, 33% explicitly expressed *caution* about a singular monetary focus, warning against placing getting rich ahead of more spiritual goals. Overall, the sermons focused on self-confidence and individual achievement, but not on monetary accumulation *per se*.[7]

Indeed, the churches in our sample approached poverty alleviation largely through a focus on individual psychological transformation. Through the survey, we find that the churches are not overwhelmingly involved in poverty alleviation activities through social service

provision. While just under half of the churches in our sample engage in some sort of material handouts, these efforts are largely limited to occasional medical camps and food-drives and are not the large-scale efforts to provide health care and education in which many mainline churches have historically engaged. An additional 12 churches report providing only financial consulting rather than material handouts, and the remainder provide no regular social services at all. This limited attention to services was consistent across the surveyed churches and yet is in dramatic contrast to mainline churches, which provide over 50% of public services in health and education across Sub-Saharan Africa (Obadare 2007).

And, even though Nairobi is a highly politicized environment, preachers infrequently raised explicitly political topics in the sermons in our sample. Only a fifth of the sermons offered any explicit political commentary, and most of these were brief, consisting mostly of prayers for non-violence during elections and good leadership. Only two of these sermons offered prayers for particular leaders or an endorsement of policy positions. Only two explicitly voiced opposition to homosexuality, and they did so only briefly. Our data collection happened during a non-election period, so, at least during these times, the individualist message is much more common in formal sermons than explicitly political messages.

Our findings have important implications. While we often think of religion as an enterprise centered around building community, these theological messages are, remarkably, largely about the individual—about transforming the individual's self-concept and about redefining (and sometimes eliminating) her obligations towards others (Swidler 2013). The individualist theme in the sermons also suggests some reasons for which the draw of Pentecostalism has been so strong across different demographics: among urban youth, political elites, migrating rural villagers, and slum-dwellers alike. The individualist theme is likely to

4

attract people who are looking to redefine their communal obligations, who are looking for guidance in finding a path toward personal achievement, and who are seeking spiritual protection in an uncertain social, economic and political world. Each of these demographic categories potentially fits that bill. Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising that these churches have become extremely popular in many countries with growing yet uncertain political economies – where there is economic opportunity but also high levels of poverty and unemployment.

Finally, exposure to these messages may have important implications for political behavior. Messages emphasizing self-worth and individual efficacy have been shown in other research to help people gain the courage to participate in politics (Brady *et al*. 1995). At the same time, messages of the churches in our sample may ultimately have the effect of letting the state off the hook. Even if they do not explicitly glorify wealth, the messages leave questions about structural constraints and policy problems largely untouched. The focus is instead on individual solutions to poverty and inequality. With a focus on individualism rather than on broader social reforms, the messages may remove responsibility for these problems from the state and from other organizations that have the capacity to address them. The effect of theological individualism might be to enable participation—but a kind of participation that is likely to be uncritical and individually-, rather than collectively-, focused.

In the rest of the paper, we first discuss some of the extant literature on clergy-congregant communication, as well as some existing studies on Pentecostal theology in the global south. We then introduce the specific context in which we collected our data and our data gathering strategies. We present the results of our survey and of our textual analysis. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings.

PENTECOSTAL MESSAGING: VARIATION OR CONSISTENCY IN THEMES?

While there is broad recognition of the global popularity and growth in Pentecostal churches (Freeman 2013; Miller 2013), studies have come to different conclusions as to which theological themes are core to contemporary Pentecostal preaching in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some have suggested that the common theologies of Pentecostal churches revolve around the prosperity gospel: the idea that conspicuous consumption is a sign of God's favor. These studies have expressed concern that the rise of Pentecostal churches may result in a shift away from concerns for equality and social justice because the prosperity gospel serves to justify the status quo:

By advocating the gospel of prosperity, [Pentecostal Christianity] dissuades adherents from evaluating the present economic order, merely persuading them to try to be amongst those who benefit from it … it diverts attention from the social ills that are crying out for remedy… it all but eliminates any interest in systemic or institutionalized injustice (Gifford 1991: 65-66).

Observing one Pentecostal church in Kenya, Gregory Deacon and Gabrielle Lynch (2013) similarly caution that its core focus on the prosperity gospel 'tends to detract from…opposition to…inequality, corruption, and oppression.' Freeman (2012) writes that, through the prosperity gospel, Pentecostal messaging provides a moral legitimacy for distributional choices that might otherwise clash with traditional prohibitions against inequality. However, little research has systematically examined *how* central the prosperity gospel is to Pentecostal clergy communication.

By contrast, another theological theme highlighted in some extant studies of Pentecostal churches is individual empowerment and the development of an autonomous self-concept.

6

Martin (2002), for instance, argues that Pentecostal churches place a consistent emphasis on 'psychic liberation' and on ways to give individuals greater capacity to control their fate. Meyer (1998) describes how Pentecostal worship helps adherents ritualize and internalize a 'break with the past' and offers them ways to resist familial and traditional obligations in order to focus on their own individual successes (also Manglos 2010; Swidler 2013). Studying the Pentecostal community in Nigeria, Marshall (2009) argues that through total openness to the power of the Holy Spirit, each individual adherent gains autonomy and power over the material conditions of her own life. It is through spiritual actions – not through traditional rules and social obligations – that adherents succeed in the world.

A final theme that some studies suggest may be core to Pentecostal theology is social conservatism. According to this view, Pentecostal churches share a common insistence on conservative rules for sexual behavior and gender roles. For instance, Pentecostal believers in the U.S. are generally highly intolerant of homosexuality (Wilcox and Jelen 1990). In Sub-Saharan Africa, Grossman (2014) documents a strong association between growth in Pentecostal membership and anti-LGBT rhetoric in politically competitive countries. Others argue that, since Pentecostal churches generally reject any differentiation between private and public spheres (Regnerus and Smith 1998), they are especially likely to carry their socially conservative theology into the public sphere. And because many Pentecostal churches throughout the world have ties and even sponsorship from U.S.-based churches, some scholars have also argued that these ties ensure a common focus on using theology to justify social conservatism (Kaoma 2012). But it is not entirely clear from these studies whether social conservatism is central to formal clergy-congregation communication or plays second fiddle to other theological themes. In

this paper, we bring new, original data to bear on the question of *which* theological themes are most common in contemporary Pentecostal preaching in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Another important question is whether the content of clergy-congregation communication varies substantially *across* congregations—that is, whether formal communication is tailored to particular parish demographics and contexts or whether it is consistent regardless of characteristics of the congregation. Are theological messages reflective of the diversity of Pentecostal congregations, or are they consistent and perhaps reflective of shared doctrines and macro social conditions?

There are *ex ante* rationales for expecting *either* consistency *or* variation within Pentecostalism. For instance, a rich political economic literature on religion suggests that the formal communication of theological ideas should vary with context and with the characteristics of potential converts. Thus, it should vary within denominations as well as across them. Religious associations are, after all, also organizations seeking to grow their membership (Djupe and Calfano 2013). A central goal is to convert or to maintain followers, especially since clergy rely at least in part on financial contributions from their congregations, which requires both numerous and committed members. In order to attract new members, to keep them and to inspire commitment, clergy may tailor their messages to the preferences, life experiences and views of the people in the area of their specific churches (Woolfalk 2013; Olson 2000; Wald *et al.* 1990). In order to attract new converts, clergy may also respond to needs other churches in an area are leaving unaddressed.[8] Particularly because Pentecostal churches are not bound by strict, centralized rules to expound a particular doctrine, clergy might be expected to vary their formal communication depending on the context in which their church operates.

Yet there are also reasons to expect consistency across Pentecostal churches. If there is a general unmet need that cuts across social strata and affects people from all walks of life, we might expect clergy to converge on themes addressing those needs, independent of the specific demographics of the areas in which the church is operating. In contexts of high political and economic uncertainty, for example, individuals might be seeking messages of individual possibility and personal control, no matter whether they are rich or poor, old or young. Additionally, religious associations may be decentralized institutionally but nevertheless share a robust set of common literature and teachings. The clergy may be reading the same books, watching the same talks and thereby interpreting scriptures in very similar ways. Indeed, some studies have argued that, despite following no central authority or participating in a standard formal training, Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors rely on the same treatises and videos, often produced by American or Nigerian sources (Attanasi and Yong 2012; Marshall 2009, 4). For this reason or to address widely shared needs, the formal clergy-congregation communication of Pentecostal churches might be quite similar, rather than tailored to particular congregations and micro contexts.

One might also have different expectations about the role Pentecostal churches are playing in the religious marketplace for service provision and poverty alleviation. The missionary and colonial history of Sub-Saharan Africa has meant that Catholic, Mainline Protestant and Muslim provision of social services, particularly in the areas of education and health care, has been a key way in which these religious associations have grown and maintained their membership numbers (Kagawa, Anglemyer, and Montagu 2012; Nunn 2010; Horton 1971; Seay 2013). Since independence, states in Sub-Saharan Africa have often not been able to take over fully the provision of these social services, and so religious organizations' role in meeting

the primary needs of the population continues to be crucial.[9] Furthermore, international faith-based organizational support has been critical in providing resources and shaping domestic social policy (Robinson and White 1997).[10] One might expect, given the significant demand for such services and the international ties of many Pentecostal churches, that they would follow suit in providing extensive and regular social services – if only to compete with mainline churches and mosques for adherents.

On the other hand, some studies have suggested that Pentecostal churches pursue a consistent approach of eschewing material service provision. The core idea of achieving wellbeing and healing through faith may reduce the need for building schools and clinics (Dilger 2007). Faith and psychological transformation offer an alternative approach to poverty alleviation. Rather than providing handouts, churches provide guidance on how to change mindsets. This development model of mental transformation, rather than material service provision, might be the Pentecostal competitive advantage (Meyer 1998).

As with formal theology, however, we might also expect *variation* in the amount and type of social services Pentecostal churches provide. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church and many mainline Protestant churches, Pentecostal churches do not fall under one overarching structure. There is not one system of educating and training clergy, and Pentecostal churches cater to congregations with different levels of need for material social services. We might therefore expect service provision efforts to vary by church, just as we might expect religious communications to vary according to membership and local conditions. Pastors have the freedom to speak to the specific life experiences and needs of their parishioners, and so they might also tailor their social services to the specific demographics they face. At least in poorer areas, we might expect material service provision from these churches. In more middle class and affluent

areas, by contrast, we might expect material service provision from these churches to be reduced or absent.

SERMON AND SERVICES DATA COLLECTION

We center our study in Nairobi, an important political and economic center with both sprawling slums and a large middle-class. This demographic variation provides an appropriate setting in which to test whether Pentecostal churches are tailoring their messages and social services to congregation attributes or are instead maintaining a consistent approach. Given that these churches are not part of a centralized structure, one might expect a significant amount of variation in Pentecostal messaging across congregations in Nairobi if there is such variation anywhere.

In other ways, Nairobi is an important place in which to understand the activities and ideas of this rapidly growing faith. Levels of religiosity in Kenya are high and typical of the continent as a whole.[11] Kenya is among the 14 countries in the world with the highest absolute numbers of Pentecostals, according to the World Christian Database, and those numbers tend to be concentrated in urban areas.[12] Percentage-wise, the prevalence of Pentecostals in Kenya is representative of Christian countries in Sub-Saharan Africa more generally. Pentecostals currently make up over 20% of the population in Kenya, and, as elsewhere on the continent, the percentage continues to rise.[13] A 2006 Pew survey of Pentecostal churches reports that the number of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi has more than doubled since the 1970's. Nairobi is thus the kind of place in which the effects of Pentecostalism are likely to be socially and politically consequential.

Unlike in the U.S.,[14] there is no existing repository of sermons in Kenya, and there is very limited data available on sermon content across Sub-Saharan Africa in general (c.f. Trinitapoli

11

and Weinreb 2012). We therefore sought to collect data on Pentecostal churches and sermons on our own, striving for as close to a random sample of those churches in the city as possible. Because Pentecostal churches are decentralized and some may not be officially registered, we sought a method that would allow us to capture information not just on high profile, internationally-connected, churches but also on smaller and more informal churches.

In order to approximate a random sample of such churches, we first generated a comprehensive list of possibly Pentecostal, Charismatic or Renewalist churches in Nairobi, using Google Maps and Google Earth.[15] Our searches generated a list of 416 distinct churches within the city. A second list of 339 churches was then created by excluding any from the first list whose names clearly linked them to mainline Protestantism or Catholicism. 100 churches were then randomly selected from this second list. Figure 1 depicts these 100 churches in their geographic locations within Nairobi.

[Figure 1 about here.]

We attempted to contact each of the 100 churches (whether information was available online or not)[16] in order to conduct a survey with the pastor about what, if any, social services the church provides and about the make-up of the church congregation, as well as to inquire as to whether the church keeps records of its sermons. We conducted this survey and sermon text collection between August 2013 and June 2014.[17] Some churches publish sermon recordings, texts and videos online. Others maintain recordings or notes offline, of which we requested copies in the interview. In either case, research assistants transcribed any videos or audio recordings we were able to collect, and, if not in English, translated them. Many churches maintain no records of their sermons. In these cases, a local research assistant or we endeavored to attend a Sunday service and took copious notes on the sermon.

Altogether, we have been able to conduct an interview and/or collect a sermon text from 90 of the 100 selected churches. Specifically, we have completed interviews with 75 pastors and been able to collect notes and transcripts of sermons from 60 churches. In Figure 1, the red squares represent churches from which we have both interview information and a sermon text. The orange circles represent churches from which we have interview information but no sermon text. The green circles represent churches from which we have a sermon text, but no interview. The blue circles represent the 10 churches on which we have no information at this point. For the 15 churches where we have a sermon text but no interview, only one church outright refused to grant an interview. The others were unable to schedule the interview at the time when we visited the church and the sermon was available online. For each church that was identified as non-existent (following extensive searching and consultation in the neighborhood identified by the GPS coordinates for that church), we replaced it with the next randomly selected church. We followed the same replacement procedure for churches visited that then identified themselves as not Pentecostal, Charismatic or Renewalist. We had a total of 26 churches that were dropped and replaced either because they were non-existent or because they were not Pentecostal, Renewalist or Charismatic.

The churches that have been interviewed and visited exhibit a range of institutional and congregational characteristics. Table 1 summarizes the basic, non-textual information we have on each of the churches. Twenty-three (31%) of the pastors interviewed reported that their churches have official international linkages to other institutions in the United States, Europe and other parts of Africa. The rest (69%), however, reported no such international linkages. Twenty-nine (39%) of the interviewed pastors reported that their congregations consist mostly of the poor and unemployed, and 17 (23%) reported that their churches cater predominantly to the middle-

upper class and well educated. The rest reported mixed-class congregations. In 24 cases, we were able both to interview the pastors and to observe the congregation during a service. In 18 instances, the description given by the pastor matched exactly our impressions of the congregation's demographics. The appendix lists the questions asked in each interview.

On observable characteristics, the churches we interviewed are not different from churches we were not been able to interview, for example on the average distance from the center of Nairobi and the number of churches with an online presence.[18] There is also no statistically distinguishable difference between the percentage of churches we were able to interview that are located in slums and the percentage of the churches we were unable to interview located in slums. Although we were initially worried about overlooking churches serving poorer congregants in more informal structures, our data collection strategy did not run into this problem. Using our sampling strategy, we were able to collect information on a wide range of churches: from mega-churches in the Nairobi suburbs and 'in town' to corrugated tin churches in slums, from internationally-connected churches with their own YouTube channels to domestic churches with no recording equipment. We believe this is the most comprehensive dataset to date on the variety of Pentecostal churches in a major African city.

SERVICE PROVISION AND CHURCH CHARACTERISTICS

Among churches interviewed, thirty-nine (52%) report providing some kind of material social services for the poor, but the reported social services were not large-scale or regular. They typically consisted of occasional clothing drives, the provision of school fees for select students, small-scale feeding programs, and occasional medical camps. Rarely did pastors of these churches report daily institutional social service provision such as the running of schools, soup

kitchens or health clinics. Among the churches reporting no social services, 12 reported offering financial guidance and training in entrepreneurship and 'empowerment,' but without any kind of material handouts. Thirteen churches reported helping a few parishioners in absolutely dire straights on a case-by-case basis but providing nothing more regular. Eleven churches reported providing no financial help at all (either as regular or case-by-case handouts or in financial training). This empirical evidence suggests that Pentecostal churches are not rivaling established mainline churches in terms of material social service provision. The main focus reported in our survey was not the provision of tangible goods, but rather transforming mental states. We return to this point in the next section.

[Table 1 about here.]

As can be seen in Table 1, the demographics of the congregations are quite diverse. Thirty-nine percent of pastors reported catering primarily to the poor; twenty-three percent reported catering to the rich and upwardly mobile; the rest reported mixed income congregations. Strikingly, very few congregations use 'tribal' languages in their main worship services. An overwhelming majority use English or Swahili, or a combination of the two. Many pastors reported to us that this choice is meant to appeal across ethnic groups, as well as to the upwardly striving. Churches reporting that they have mainly middle to upper-class congregations were much more likely to report that they use primarily English in their services, rather than a combination of English and Swahili, primarily Swahili or some other language. Churches with predominantly poor congregations were also the most likely not to offer any social services or training or case-by-case handouts at all. Presumably this is because they have fewer financial resources in their coffers from tithing or donations to do so, although, again, regular social service provision was rare across the board.

Overall, based on pastor reports and observations at the churches, we observed significant variation in the churches' memberships in terms of language-use, socio-economic class and location within the city. We also found significant variation in the type and degree of social service provision, ranging from none at all to case-by-case assistance to more significant material service provision such as clothing drives and feeding programs. This variation in service provision correlates somewhat with variation in congregation class, with poorer congregations most likely to provide no material handouts at all. We next analyze the content of formal clergy-congregation communication and investigate whether there is consistency or variation corresponding to congregation demographics.

SERMON CONTENT

We present results of content analysis conducted over 60 sermons—one for each church for which we have at least one text. As discussed above, some churches regularly record their sermons and thus offer many texts for analysis; others do not record their sermons at all and we instead have only one visit, and thus only one sermon, to represent them. For the few churches with multiple sermons, our research assistants explicitly chose a sermon that, based on the title, was about money or finances. If no such sermon appeared available, the research assistant randomly selected one from all available for that church. This selection strategy means that, if anything, we stacked the deck in favor of finding an overabundance of explicitly financial, prosperity gospel discussions.

Although the Pentecostal churches selected in Nairobi were randomly sampled, the *services* we visited were not strictly randomly selected, though neither our research assistants nor we knew sermon topics in advance of in-person visits. Since these church services are open to

the public, we avoided announcing our visits in advance of the service and asked for an interview with the pastor afterwards so as to reduce the possibility that our presence might change the sermon content substantially in visited churches.[19] Only eight out of the sixty sermons were captured by an American researcher through attendance at a service; twenty-four were captured by a Kenyan researcher through attendance at a service; the rest were transcribed from recordings available online or from sermon notes available from the pastors. We find remarkable consistency across sermons, regardless of who observed the sermons, and regardless of whether we gathered sermon content in person or by transcribing online recordings.

We do not have a measure of consistency *within* any given church, because in many cases we have been able to gather information only on one sermon for each church. We thus concentrate on describing consistency *across* churches. We also capture only the theological topics communicated formally to congregants. We do not analyze the expressive style of the preacher nor any informal clergy communication with congregants that may be delivered outside of worship services (Smith 2005).

Figure 2 shows a word cloud representing the sermon texts from the 60 churches. The size of the word represents its frequency across and within all texts—the larger, the more frequent. Words in colors other than black are distinct; they appear frequently, but only in one or two sermons, not across many sermons. Words like 'financial' and 'rich' are present, but less frequent, even though we designed our collection procedure to target explicitly financial topics. The common words that stand out instead are words related to faith, blood, love, fighting, curses, victimhood, the devil, fear, mental focus, asking, giving, believing, the mind and spirit, learning, discipline, and references to David and Goliath. This picture provides a visual suggestion that, among these sermons, the focus is less on financial accumulation *per se*, and rather on themes

like fighting the devil, having faith, engaging in mental focus and overcoming victimhood. The references to David and Goliath are used to encourage adherents to believe in themselves as underdogs: to pursue personal achievement even when others doubt their abilities ('Why should you give up quickly?...This is a form of psychological warfare. David run toward Goliath! For you to get more than enough there are some Goliaths that you are going to have to face down.')

[Figure 2 about here.]

As one can see in Figure 2, the word 'blood' is particularly frequent and central to the sermons. In examining examples of its use, we found that references to blood are often to the blood of Jesus as *protection* against social pressures and evil spirits. For instance:

The blood of Jesus is your personal insurance. The devil looks at people and once he sees that they are covered with the blood of Jesus he leaves them alone.

The references often appear in the context of discussing individual striving for personal achievement and enrichment ('Believe in Him to give you success. Expect that He will cause you to succeed'). The sermons provide reassurance that such striving is spiritually protected, even if other people are jealous or make demands on the upwardly mobile ('As God's messenger standing on the blood of Jesus, I say your curses [from others] are no more…Go and succeed, build, live well, get a job in the name of Jesus. Why should you suffer for the mistakes of others, I want to tell you today that your life has opened up'). The theological references to blood in these sermons are used to bolster and protect the autonomous individual who is striving for success.

Yet word clouds do not necessarily convey the whole story: for instance, this word cloud does not tell us how words co-occur; the placement of the words is random. It thus tells us little about theological *topics*. With this limitation in mind, we also analyzed the texts via both computer-assisted text analysis and hand coding.

For the computer-assisted text analysis, we used a software program called the Structural Topic Model (STM), to identify topics and approaches to topics within the sermon texts (Stewart et al. 2014; Roberts et al. 2014; Lucas et al. 2014). Advantages of using a computer-assisted method include that the findings can easily be replicated and verified, and that researchers can move beyond their pre-existing expectations about topical themes and 'uncover' new patterns through unstructured analysis.[20]

Figure 3 shows the five most frequent topics in the sermons identified by the computer program. We have supplied our own titles for each topic, for ease of interpretation. The computer program generates both the most likely words to be associated with each topic and the words that are both frequent and also exclusive to that topic (``FREX,'' i.e. frequency-exclusivity). While these topics are distinct from one another to a certain degree, they clearly share underlying themes. Topic 2 is the most explicitly financial, but the texts discussing the other four topics also touch on the subject of prosperity in more broadly defined ways. They promise individual blessings with faith and perseverance; they promise personal 'fruitfulness' and abundance; they urge listeners to believe in their own potential and abilities to achieve. For instance:

Start looking at yourself as successful. If you see yourself playing a subordinate role then you'll be the same for as long as you live.

None falls far astray from the general promises of health, wealth and wellbeing. The minor differences are more in the specific *route* to personal wellbeing than whether wellbeing itself is the principal goal. Topic 1 focuses on convincing listeners to stop 'whining,' to break from a 'victim mentality' reinforced by their friends and kin. Topic 2 focuses on principles of investment – on spiritual protection for seeking personal enrichment. Topic 3 focuses on spiritual purity, autonomy and a break from impure pasts and social ties (Meyer 1998), while Topic 4 focuses on finding the strength to fight, to do battle, as an individual. Topic 5 highlights the need to understand Jesus' suffering as a promise of blessings to those individuals who prepare for them. All focus on the individual. More detailed excerpts are included in the appendix.

The topics identified by the computer program do not vary much at all by church characteristics, even though the churches we examine are diverse. Figure 4 shows estimates of whether each of the topics is more likely to be discussed in churches that have poorer or richer congregations, those that hold services in English or those using Swahili, those that provide social services or those that do not, those that cater to the young or those that cater to a mixed age group, those that have international ties or those with only domestic ties, and those located in slum areas of Nairobi or those not located in slums. Where the bars do *not* cross the dashed vertical line at all, we have picked up a statistically significant difference in topic prevalence across church type. Yet very few lines do not cross that dashed vertical line. The one exception is that the topic of ``Suffering and Perseverance'' appears more frequently in young congregations than in those of mixed ages, but this one statistically significant result could have occurred by chance. Figure 4 thus suggests a remarkable degree of consistency across churches.

We sought to verify and nuance these computer results by hand coding the sermons. We investigated whether hand coding could pick up more subtle differences in topics across sermons

and whether hand coding would detect differences in *positions* on similar topics. For instance, among the few sermons discussing money and investment, do some sermons express *caution* about material accumulation while other sermons glorify it? Although most sermons tend to focus on the topic of individual potential, do some advocate self-confidence and achievement while others encourage humility?

Two people (one of the authors who had not conducted the computer-assisted analysis and one research assistant) independently conducted a close reading of each text, proceeding in alphabetical order by church name. The author-reader determined whether she could code each sermon according to the five topics generated by the computer-assisted coding exercise. A given sermon was allowed to address multiple topics. The coder then separately recorded whether *other* topics were core to the discussion in each sermon. Finally, the research assistant-reader coded each sermon according to whether it addressed the issue of individual empowerment, material accumulation or politics and, if it did, coded its *position* on that issue (advocating empowerment versus humility, advocating material accumulation versus cautioning against it, advocating political engagement versus cautioning against it).

Table 3 summarizes the results of the hand coding. Overall, 92% of the sermons were coded as covering at least one of the same topics uncovered by the computer program. Five sermons were interpreted by the readers as addressing topics *not* uncovered by the computer: These included themes such as 'Be God's student'; 'in God, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to his grace'; 'true faith is manifest through action'; 'Christians are brought together by the blood of Christ, seek unity through the church'; and 'healing through ministry'. These five messages generally advocated purely faith and belief in God, but did not correspond with promises of an abundant future or mention victimization,

21

suffering, underdogs or investment in the future. Nevertheless, such topics were clearly in the minority.

Indeed, the hand coders found that many sermons (34 out of 60) discussed more than one of the topics uncovered by the computer program. Although the five topics occupied distinct places within any given sermon, they were related enough to the underlying themes of individual potential, autonomy, perseverance and empowerment that they often co-occurred within the same sermon. The average number of the five topics discussed in each sermon was 1.7. Every possible combination of the topics was identified in at least one, suggesting that all 5 were distinct yet complementary.

[Table 3 about here.]

The general position that individuals have great power and potential ('Empowerment') is highly prevalent. Eighty-two percent of the sermons were classified by the readers as discussing individual empowerment and autonomy. This theme took many diverse forms but generally suggested believers were individually capable, that God wanted them to have a bright future and overcome challenges, that they needed to have a victorious (not a victim-) mindset, and that the faithful should break with traditional bonds as necessary to receive their blessings. Even topics that could have diverged from individualism did not. For example, the discussions of suffering did not include reminders to be humble or to conform to the expectations of others; instead, they were calls for individual perseverance in faith, reminders of the pitfalls of discouragement and giving up, and an invitation to wage a individual spiritual battle with evil spirits and with other human beings.

Meanwhile, explicit glorifications of getting rich were uncommon. Even though many sermons discuss money and financial abundance explicitly, a good third of them expressed some

reservations about money as a primary goal or caution against the problems that wealth accumulation can bring. Politics was also an infrequent topic. It was explicitly discussed in 20% of the sermons, but far less often than the topics of mental transformation and individual capabilities, and even less often than explicitly financial topics.

The topics uncovered by hand coding do not differ across the types of churches. Three tables in the paper's appendix summarize the null findings from the hand coding of topics across church types. The lack of variation here confirms the results from the computer-assisted analysis.

The positions of the churches on these topics (summarized in the bottom half of the tables in the appendix) also do not vary by type of church. Individual empowerment was a highly prevalent message in churches of all types. The one exception to the overall conclusion that sermon content does not differ by church and congregation characteristics is that primarily poor congregations were more likely to have sermons with explicit political statements, especially statements *dissuading* political engagement. For these churches, the message to congregants is often that while they cannot do much about politics in a collective fashion, they do have God-given potential to succeed in their personal lives.

DISCUSSION

The face of religious organization in Sub-Saharan Africa is changing rapidly through rising rates of conversion to Pentecostalism. Perceptions of the relationship among the individual, the community, the state and the divine are thus potentially being transformed. This paper contributes to understanding this phenomenon by collecting new data across a wide range

of Pentecostal churches in Nairobi, a politically and economically important and diverse African city.

Through a survey of 100 randomly sampled Pentecostal churches in the city and through content analysis of sermons available from those churches, we found remarkable consistency in messaging, despite demographic variation and institutional decentralization. Specifically, we found a strong and consistent emphasis on individual empowerment, striving and autonomy. Our survey confirmed that the churches' congregations are economically and socially diverse, are both domestic and international, and present throughout the city. Yet, whether addressed to middle class or poor congregations, young or mixed in age, domestic or internationally-tied, the sermons consistently centered around transforming 'the imaged-self of members' (Frahm-Arp 2010). They stressed that each individual believe in her own worth, in her autonomous potential for success. They offered spiritual protection for achievement and enrichment, advocating a 'victorious' mindset.

Through our interviews and the content analysis, it became clear that pastors of these churches view giving advice about worldly success as a necessary part of their role. They described it as a 'holistic' approach. While some pastors commented that, years ago, their churches might have regarded such topics as outside of their purview, these days they view their congregants' worldly, as well as their spiritual, wellbeing as central. Yet, we found through our survey that these churches' approach to combating poverty and promoting wellbeing is largely *not* through the provision of social services. While we did find that some churches report providing material handouts, either regularly or on a case-by-case basis, this kind of outreach was rarely of the regular, institutionalized kind historically associated with mainline churches in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Instead, the key to development and personal wellbeing advocated by these churches is in one's mental state: it must be a state of faith, self-confidence and individual autonomy. Such a message is usually not explicitly political. Yet it touches on the political by attempting to cultivate an empowered, victorious, individually focused citizen. It has potential implications for the political by setting structural and policy questions about poverty alleviation aside and instead taking an individual, psychological approach to the challenges of economic development and distribution.

Our findings thus raise some questions about these churches' political and social roles that might be investigated in future research. First, do these churches' efforts to foster individual empowerment, perseverance and self-confidence reveal that other social and political institutions—schools, universities, workplaces, state agencies—are leaving certain needs unmet? A good portion of these Pentecostal churches' members, whether rich or poor, are the urban young. Many of them have been dislocated from their families and communities (McCauley 2013; Frahm-Arp 2010) either because they migrated to the city from rural areas or because their generation is newly upwardly mobile and ambitious. They may be looking for cultural capital and guidance for achieving success; indeed, sometimes it is their very success, education and upward mobility that have created rifts with their families and childhood communities. These churches seem to be providing guidance and support for navigating new social and occupational waters. Do the churches' efforts then reveal that other institutions are leaving these individuals out to sea, as it were?

Second, do these messages of individual empowerment effectively leave the state off the hook? By focusing on individualism, the messages leave questions about structural constraints and policy problems largely untouched. They seem intended to uplift, but they thereby also place

25

the burden of action and improvement on individuals, rather than on organizations or on the

state. It is possible, then, that these church messages are actually undermining political

accountability. This possibility deserves further investigation.

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Figure 1: Map of Surveyed Churches

**Figure 2: Word Cloud of Sermon Texts**

Figure 3: Five Most Common Topics

Topic 1: "Faith, Overcoming Victim Mentality"

Highest Probability Words: faith, church, preach, mental, christian, spirit, victim

FREX: victim, mental, preacher, faith, gospel, cost, preach

Example quote: "Some people have victim mentality because of the groups they associate with. Some people have even got tribal victim mentality where they think in a particular way and can't think out of that box because they have a victim mentality…But God is up to something more than what you thought he's up to…If God says let the weak be strong don't say they won't be able. Just say they will be strong."

Topic 2: "Money Through Giving, Praise, Investment"

Highest Probability Words: prais, given, rich, now, talent, money, valu

FREX: talent, prais, rich, valu, five, hour, remain

Example quote: "What kind of year is this? It is a year of increase, Amen! … He who had received five talents came and brought five other talents saying to the Lord you delivered to me. Five talents, look I have gained five more talents besides then. Tell anybody that is increase."

Topic 3: "Abundant Future Through Purity"

Highest Probability Words: name, day, fruit, better, today, hallelujah, shall

FREX: hallelujah, fruit, clean, better, amen, anoint, day

Example quote: "By this word that I speak to you. No devil can come and claim something in your life… I could have had failures last week, but this week now I am clean… As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except ye abide in Me."

Topic 4: "Fighting, The Underdog"

Highest Probability Words: blood, love, must, friend, money, plan, fight

FREX: blood, fight, david, curs, cross, leadership, vision

Example quote: "We get discouraged when we get mocked, insulted, jeered, laughed at…When we don't see or understand God and ask where is God. We feel the opposition is too great…Yet, the strength of those who wait with hope in the Lord will be renewed. They will soar on wings like eagles."

Topic 5: "Suffering and Perseverance"

Highest Probability Words: year, job, vers, said, shall, chapter, suffer

FREX: job, thou, condit, suffer, year, prepar, vers

Example quote: "They will ridicule you. They will make fun of you. They will jest about you. They will try to play some caricature about you... mind that; that's part, a part of what they have by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. You'll suffer persecution… Greater blessings are on the way…But they'll come, they'll be yours when you get yourself prepared."

Figure 4: Topics Across Church Types

Difference in Prevalence by Congregation Class Makeup

Victim Mentality
Money/Praise
Abundance/Purity
Fighting/Underdog
Suffering/Perseverance

-2   -1   0   1   2

Mixed /Middle Class...Poor
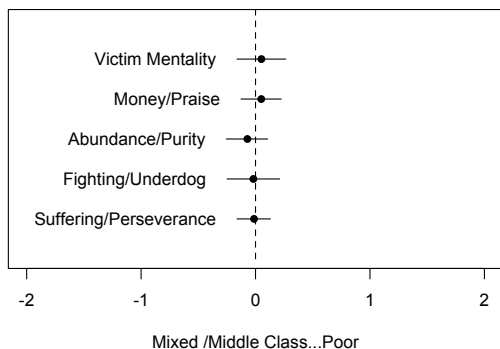
Difference in Prevalence by Church's Primary Language

Victim Mentality
Money/Praise
Abundance/Purity
Fighting/Underdog
Suffering/Perseverance

-2   -1   0   1   2

Mixed/Swahili...English
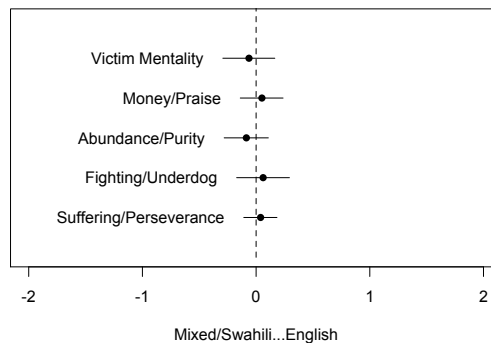
Difference in Prevalence by Social Service Provision
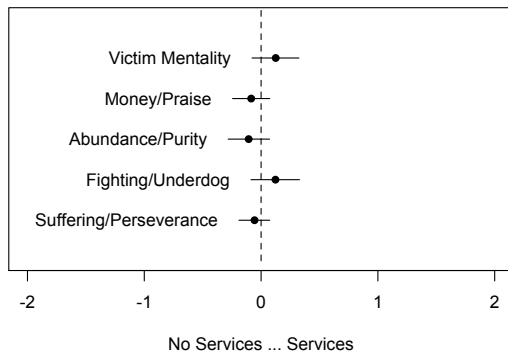
Difference in Prevalence by Congregation Age Makeup

Victim Mentality
Money/Praise
Abundance/Purity
Fighting/Underdog
Suffering/Perseverance

No Services ... Services

Mixed Age ... Young
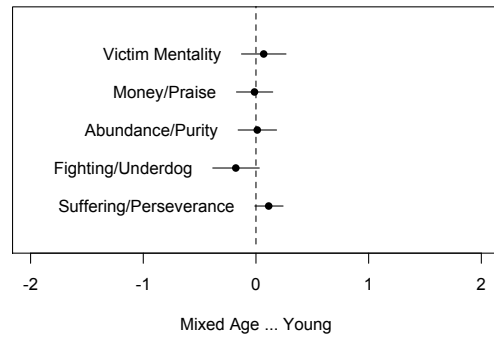
Difference in Prevalence by International Ties
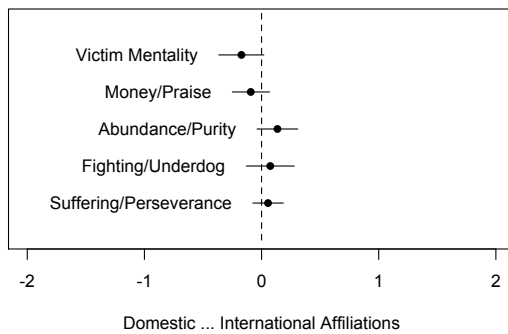
Difference in Prevalence by Location Type

Victim Mentality
Money/Praise
Abundance/Purity
Fighting/Underdog
Suffering/Perseverance

Domestic ... International Affiliations

Not in Slum...In Slum
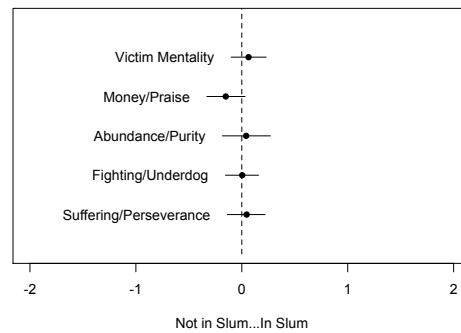
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	No. Obs.
Churches Not Interviewed					
Distance from Nairobi Center (km)	10.18	5.57	1	21.7	25
Online Presence	0.44	0.51	0	1	25
Located in a Slum	0.36	0.51	0	1	25
Sermon Available	0.64	0.49	0	1	25
Churches Interviewed					
Distance from Nairobi Center (km)	8.24	5.58	0	31.8	75
Online Presence	0.56	0.50	0	1	75
Located in a Slum	0.44	0.50	0	1	75
Sermon Available	0.59	0.50	0	1	75

International Affiliations	0.31	0.46	0	1	75
Congregation Primarily Middle Class +	0.23	0.42	0	1	75
Congregation Primarily Poor	0.39	0.49	0	1	75
Congregation Primarily Young People	0.43	0.50	0	1	75
Reports Providing Material Social Services	0.52	0.50	0	1	75
Reports Providing Financial Training Only	0.16	0.37	0	1	75
Reports Providing Case-by-Case Material Aid	0.17	0.38	0	1	75
Reports Providing No Material Aid or Training	0.15	0.36	0	1	75
Worship Conducted Primarily in English	0.35	0.48	0	1	73
Worship Conducted in Swahili and English	0.46	0.50	0	1	73
Worship Conducted Primarily in Swahili	0.15	0.36	0	1	73
Worship Conducted in Swahili and Another Non-English Language	0.04	0.20	0	1	73

Table 2: Summary Results of Hand Coding

	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max	No. Obs.
Topic Analysis					
Contains at least one of computer-identified topics	0.92	0.28	0	1	60
Victim Mentality Topic	0.40	0.49	0	1	60
Money/Investment Topic	0.33	0.48	0	1	60
Abundance/Purity Topic	0.50	0.50	0	1	60
Fighting/Underdog Topic	0.13	0.34	0	1	60
Suffering/Perseverance	0.32	0.47	0	1	60
Position Analysis					
Individualism: Empowerment	0.82	0.39	0	1	60
Individualism: Humility, Limitations	0.00	0.00	0	1	60

Money: Glorification	0.17	0.38	0	1	60
Money: Caution	0.33	0.48	0	1	60
Politics: Pro-Engagement	0.15	0.36	0	1	60
Politics: Anti-Engagement	0.05	0.22	0	1	60
Any Explicit Politics	0.20	0.40	0	1	60

Notes:

[1] Following the Pew 2006 survey, we use the term Pentecostal in the rest of the paper to refer broadly to churches that are Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Renewalist. Because the churches are not under one over-arching authority, there is some debate about their grouping (Freston 2001; Grossman 2014; Ranger 2008). In our sample, there was also no sermon content differentiation along these nominal categories.

[2] Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ghana, DRC, Nigeria, Kenya, Angola, Zambia and Uganda (World Christian Database).

[3] Examples include the former President of Benin, the first lady of Uganda, the president of Burundi, the president of South Africa, several presidents of Zambia.

[4] Examples include Member of Parliament Bishop Margaret Wnjiru and Pastor Pius Muiru in Kenya, as well as MP and former Vice President Nevers Mumba in Zambia.

[5] Examples include the 2010 'No' rallies on the Constitution in Kenya (Nziwili 2010), and African National Congress activities before the 2014 South African elections (Ndlangisa 2014).

[6] These churches go as far as to argue explicitly that 'poverty comes from the Devil' or that congregants will get fancy cars or big houses through giving to the church and through faith, but these sermons turn out to be in the minority in our sample.

[7] Our survey bolsters the observations of Martin (2002) and Gifford (2009) that the remarkable and more core feature of Pentecostal churches may be less their fundamentalism or their position on material enrichment than it is their emphasis on 'empowerment through spiritual gifts offered to all'(Martin 2002, 2).

[8] Trejo (2009), for instance, finds that Protestant churches in Latin America began explicitly addressing the issues of poverty and inequality where the Catholic church was not meeting the needs of poorer citizens, thereby winning a large number of new converts and forcing the Catholic church to respond to this competition.

[9] For example, in the 1940s, 97% of the student population in Ghana and Nigeria were from missionary schools (Berman 1974).

[10] For instance, religious organizations supply 68% of all hospital beds in rural Zimbabwe (Green and Matthias 1995:314) and 40% of all rural health services in Zambia (Mogedal et al. 1995: 359).

[11] In the 2010-2012 round of the Afrobarometer, 84% of respondents said that religion is 'very important' in their lives. In Kenya, the percentage was 88%.

[12] In order starting with the highest number of Pentecostals in the country are: Brazil, Nigeria, United States, Indonesia, Ghana, Kenya, South Korea, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Angola, India, Tanzania, Mozambique and Burkina Faso.

[13] The numbers presented here exclude members of mainline (Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Baptist) churches that incorporate charismatic features into their services (on this point, see Dowd 2011).

[14] See, e.g., http://www.sermoncentral.com; Woolfalk (2013).

[15] We used the following search terms, choosing them so as to increase the likelihood of discovering churches that could possibly be Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Renewalist: 'church loc: nairobi, kenya,' 'pentecostal loc: nairobi, kenya,' 'charismatic loc: nairobi, kenya,' 'evangelical loc: nairobi, kenya,' 'revivalist loc: nairobi, kenya,' 'protestant loc: nairobi, kenya,' 'renewal loc: nairobi, kenya,' and 'bible loc: nairobi, kenya.'

[16] Only 53 of the 100 churches had an online presence (website or social media page).
[17] General elections were held in March 2013.

[18] By online presence, we mean that the church has its own website or social media page. We do not count a church as having an online presence if an international affiliate has a webpage but there is no page devoted specifically to the Nairobi church. We cannot reject the null hypothesis that the average distance from the center of Nairobi between churches interviewed and those not interviewed is the same (p=0.14), nor the null that the percentage of churches interviewed with an online presence is equal to the percentage of churches not interviewed with an online presence (p=0.31).

[19] No pastor (not even the one who declined to be interviewed) objected to our analyzing the church's sermons.

[20] We asked the STM program to search for different numbers of topics across the 60 sermons. The most distinct and coherent topics were uncovered when the program was asked to search for five topics. More details on the method can be found in this paper's appendix.

Individualism and Empowerment in Pentecostal Sermons
Appendix

Appendix

Notes on Computer-Assisted Text Analysis

For some of the analysis in the paper, we used an unsupervised computer-assisted program in R, the Structural Topic Model (STM), to identify topics and approaches to topics within the sermon texts (Stewart et al. 2014; Roberts et al. 2014; Lucas et al. 2014). We used an unsupervised approach since we were interested in "uncovering" common subjects of communication from clergy to congregation. An unsupervised approach "infers" rather than "assumes" the content of texts (Roberts et al. 2014; Grimmer and Stewart 2013).

These programs are often used with a large number of texts when all documents cannot feasibly be coded by hand, but even with the smaller number of documents (60) we have, computer-assisted topic modeling programs provide certain advantages. Advantages include that the rules by which certain topic words were excluded and "discovered" are transparent. Researcher interpretation is required, but it is often easier to "uncover" surprising patterns than when researchers are coding texts by hand. We therefore used the STM program to take a first cut at the textual data.

In Tables A-1 to A-3 we also report results from subsequent hand-coding efforts.

The advantage of the STM program, in particular, is that it allows us to incorporate metadata on the sermon texts into our analysis, which allows us to assess the question of content consistency across different types of churches. The metadata come from our interviews with and observations of the churches from which we collected the sermon texts. We specifically make use of information on the class and age compositions of church congregations, as well as of information on whether the church is internationally-affiliated, located in a slum, provides regular material services, and conducts its services primarily in English.

We prepared the text corpus by removing numbers and punctuation, converting all text to lower case, removing standard English "stop words" and stemming words. We also removed any words that did not appear in at least two sermon texts (infrequent words) as well as any words that appeared in more than half of the sermon texts (frequent words). Our results are robust to other approaches to excluding words: including excluding only words that appear in more than three-quarters of the texts rather than one half. A list of words that were often excluded because they appeared in less than very few texts or appeared in many is shown

below. None of these words appeared particularly meaningful to us. They are words that were either highly specific to an anecdote told in a particular sermon (e.g. a story about a young boy and a duck) or were included frequently in most sermons (e.g. Lord, bless, Christ) unrelated to the particular theological themes of that day.

Figure A-1: Excluded Words

bless christ come duck god good grandma jesus johnni let lord may one pastor peopl preach said say see shall student tell thing word year

Processign left us with about 1211 words across the 60 texts (give or take depending on which frequencies of words were excluded). Making use of the STM's unique features, we then used the metadata to examine relationships between church attributes and topic prevalence (i.e. the frequency with which particular topic is discussed).

We allowed topic prevalence to vary by whether the congregation is primarily poor (rather than mixed income or middle to upper class), primarily young (rather than mixed age or old), hears services in English (rather than in a mix of English and Swahili or primarily Swahili), located in a slum (versus in a formal residential area, town or suburb), whether the church reported providing material social services, and whether the church has international ties. We ran a selection modeling STM, with 50 runs, and then selected the model producing topics that scored highest on both semantic coherence and exclusivity. (By exclusivity, we mean that words strongly associated with a given topic are weakly associated with others.) Some sample R code is provided below.

Figure A-2: Sample R code

```
library(stm)
processed < - textProcessor(dataset$Sermon, metadata=dataset, lowercase=TRUE, removestopwords=TRUE, removenumbers=TRUE, removepunctuation=TRUE, stem=TRUE, sparselevel=.99, language="en", verbose=TRUE)
out < - prepDocuments(processed$documents, processed$vocab, processed$meta, lower.thresh=2, upper.thresh=30)
meta< -out$meta
vocab< -out$vocab
docs< -out$documents
out < - prepDocuments(docs, vocab, meta)
docs< -out$documents
vocab< -out$vocab
meta< -out$meta
length(docs)
length(vocab)
length(meta)
sermonSelect < -selectModel(docs,vocab,K=5,prevalence= Poor + Young+ English + SocialServices+International+Slum, runs=50, data=meta) plotModels(sermonSelect)
topics< -sermonSelect$runout[[8]]
labelTopics(topics, c(1, 2,3,4,5))
plot.STM(topics,"labels")
```

The STM program does not allow missing data, and there were 17 churches with some missing demographic or attribute data out of the 60. Where data were missing, our default entries on the characteristics were: domestic, mixed income, mixed age, no social services and both English and Swahili. To verify that our findings below are not an artifact of how we replaced missing data, however, we separately ran the same analysis on the sample of 43

churches with no missing data, and the findings on topic prevalence and topic approach were practically identical.

We ran the code asking for different numbers of topics to be identified, ranging from 3 topics to 100 topics. We found that the most coherent and distinct topics were generated when we specified 5 topics. Those are the topics presented in the body of the main paper, with example quotes. In Figure A-3 we give some additional excerpts from sermons covering each of those topics.

Figure A-3: Example Sermon Texts

Topic 1 (Overcoming Victim Mentality): I want to speak for a few minutes on the subject of no more a victim . . . People have got this victim mentality because maybe of the continent they belong to; people have got the victim mentality maybe because of the families they came from; people have got the victim mentality because of the school they went to; some people have victim mentality because of the groups they associate with. . . . Some of you presume you know what God is up to yet you have no clue what God is up to, for God is up to something more than what you thought he's up to. . . . Doubt would have said no I don't think so. Doubt would have said, God you can't do this. Doubt would have said God this is not possible. . . . But faith said only you lord only you know. Faith placed the situation in the hands of God.

Topic 2 (Money Through Giving, Praise, Investment): This is your year come on say with me. What kind of year is this? It is a year of increase, Amen! . . . For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country and called his own servants and delivered his goods to them and to one he gave five talents, to another two and to another one, each according to their ability and immediately went to a journey and he who had received five talents, went and traded with them and made another five talents, likewise he who had received two talents gave two more also but he who had received one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his lord's money . After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents saying to lord you delivered to me five talents, look I have gained five more talents besides then. Tell anybody that is increase. . . . That's my prayer that at the end of this year you shall be talking about double what you had at the beginning of the year.

Topic 3 (Abundant Future Through Purity): You are clean. Amen! By this word that I speak to you. No devil can come and claim something in your life . . . Your business is clean; your calling is clean; your marriage is clean. Everything called by our names, it has been cleansed. It is made holy, it is sanctified. . . . Your bank accounts, they are clean. Don't tell me that they bewitched you, the devil does not have any power. . . . My body is clean! My mind is clean! My spirit is clean; my heart is clean. my hands are clean; my children are clean; my marriage is clean; my business is clean; my calling is clean. . . . i could have had failures last week, but this week now I am clean. . . . Yes, verse 4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you, except ye abide in me. Everybody say Lord Jesus, wheresoever in my life I have not been abiding in you, I repent this morning. . . . He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit.

Topic 4 (Fighting, The Underdog): Overcoming Discouragement. If I was (sic) the devil and I only had one bullet to shoot I would choose discouragement. . . . Let me illustrate the power of courage: Better an army of 100 sheep led by a lion than an army of 100 lions led by a sheep. . . . We get discouraged when we get mocked, insulted, jeered, laughed at. . . . When we don't see or understand God and ask where is God. We feel the opposition is too great. We have been working on it and it feels like [there is] not enough time, strength to finish. . . . Yet, the strength of those who wait with hope in the Lord will be renewed. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and won't become weary. They will walk and won't grow tired. Like David and Solomon.

Topic 5 (Suffering and Perseverance): It is Jesus who sanctifies, Jesus also saves, but that he might sanctify the people, with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him outside the camp . . . Let us fall , therefore, into him. . . . You'll suffer persecution. Don't let that silence you. It says let us go therefore outside the camp unto him without the camp bearing his reproach. . . . We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. . . . . So that is what the Lord is telling us, the beginning of this year is telling us, the supernatural is on the way. Greater blessings on the way. And all the blessings you have been dreaming about, and thinking about, and praying about and fasting about, they're on the way this year, in Jesus name! But they'll come, they'll come they'll be yours when you get yourself prepared.

In the following tables, we provide results from simple difference in mean tests on the hand coded categories across church types. As discussed in the main paper, we find very few detectable differences in topic frequency or in positions on the main topics across church types.

Table A-1: Results of Hand Coding Sermons, By Congregation Class Makeup: Difference in Means

	Primarily Poor	Middle Class +	Diff	Swahili, Mixed, Other	Primarily English	Diff
Victim Mentality	0.25	0.47	**0.22**	0.39	0.50	0.11
	(N=20)	(N=34)	**p=0.10**	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.47
Money/Investment	0.35	0.29	-0.06	0.25	0.40	0.15
	(N=20)	(N=34)	p=0.68	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.29
Abundance/Purity	0.65	0.41	**-0.24**	0.57	0.35	-0.22
	(N=20)	(N=34)	**p=0.09**	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.13
Fighting/Underdog	0.15	0.15	0.00	0.18	0.10	-0.08
	(N=20)	(N=34)	p=0.95	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.44
Suffering/Perseverance	0.45	0.26	-0.18	0.39	0.20	-0.19
	(N=20)	(N=34)	p=0.18	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.15
Empowerment	0.85	0.79	-0.06	0.86	0.75	-0.11
	(N=20)	(N=34)	p=0.61	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.38
Disempowerment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(N=20)	(N=34)	–	(N=28)	(N=20)	–
Glorify Accumulation	0.15	0.12	-0.03	0.07	0.20	0.13
	(N=20)	(N=34)	p=0.75	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.23
Cautious about Money	0.35	0.38	0.08	0.35	0.36	0.01
	(N=20)	(N=34)	p=0.81	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.96
Pro Political Engagement	0.25	0.12	-0.23	0.21	0.00	**-0.21**
	(N=20)	(N=34)	p=0.25	(N=28)	(N=20)	**p=0.01**
Anti Political Engagement	0.15	0.00	**-0.11**	0.07	0.00	-0.07
	(N=20)	(N=34)	**p=0.08**	(N=28)	(N=20)	p=0.16
Any Explicit Politics	0.40	0.12	**-0.28**	0.29	0.00	**-0.29**
	(N=20)	(N=34)	**p=0.03**	(N=28)	(N=20)	**p=0.002**

4

Table A-2: Results of Hand Coding Sermons, By Service Provision and Intl Ties: Difference in Means

	Provides No Handouts	Provides Handouts	Diff	Domestic Only	International Ties	Diff
Victim Mentality	0.33	0.52	0.18	0.39	0.50	0.11
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.20	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.44
Money/Investment	0.19	0.34	0.15	0.23	0.40	0.17
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.23	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.21
Abundance/Purity	0.62	0.41	-0.21	0.52	0.45	-0.07
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.16	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.65
Fighting/Underdog	0.19	0.10	-0.09	0.23	0.00	**-0.23**
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.41	(N=31)	(N=20)	**p=0.01**
Suffering/Perseverance	0.43	0.28	-0.15	0.35	0.25	-0.10
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.28	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.43
Empowerment	0.81	0.86	0.05	0.81	0.80	-0.01
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.63	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.95
Disempowerment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(N=21)	(N=29)	–	(N=31)	(N=20)	–
Glorify Accumulation	0.00	0.24	**0.24**	0.16	0.10	-0.06
	(N=21)	(N=29)	**p=0.01**	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.53
Cautious about Money	0.38	0.34	-0.04	0.35	0.35	0.00
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.80	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.97
Pro Political Engagement	0.14	0.17	0.03	0.13	0.15	0.02
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.78	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.84
Anti Political Engagement	0.09	0.03	-0.06	0.10	0.00	**-0.10**
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.42	(N=31)	(N=20)	**p=0.08**
Any Explicit Politics	0.24	0.21	-0.03	0.23	0.15	0.08
	(N=21)	(N=29)	p=0.80	(N=31)	(N=20)	p=0.50

Table A-3: Results of Hand Coding Sermons, By Location Type: Difference in Means

	Not In a Slum	In a Slum	Diff
Victim Mentality	0.40	0.40	0.00
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=1.00
Money/Investment	0.31	0.36	0.05
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.72
Abundance/Purity	0.40	0.57	0.17
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.20
Fighting/Underdog	0.17	0.08	-0.09
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.29
Suffering/Perseverance	0.29	0.36	0.07
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.55
Empowerment	0.80	0.84	0.04
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.70
Disempowerment	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(N=35)	(N=25)	–
Glorify Accumulation	0.17	0.16	0.01
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.91
Cautious about Money	0.31	0.36	0.05
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.72
Pro Political Engagement	0.17	0.12	-0.15
	(N=35)	(N=25)	p=0.58
Anti Political Engagement	0.00	0.12	**0.12**
	(N=35)	(N=25)	**p=0.08**

Figure A-4: Interview Questions

Could you please verify that the name of this church is [ ] ? Are there other names the church is known by? (If by phone or email, verify address/ location.)

What is the denomination of this church?

Are you linked with any other affiliated churches, either in Kenya or internationally? Which ones?

If you had to briefly summarize the social mission of your church, what would it be? How is this church different from other churches? How do you view your role in society?

Do you provide help or services to people in economic need?

Do you provide these services only to members of the congregation or also to those outside of the church?

How would you describe your congregation? What types of people are members of your church? We do not want to know about specific people, just about the general characteristics of your congregation. List as many characteristics as you can. [If necessary, probe for economic/class characteristics, age characteristics in particular.]

Do you conduct your services primarily in English, Swahili or in another language? (If the latter: which language?)

Do you keep written records or audio or video records of sermons from your services? Are those publicly available? (If not: would you be willing to share them with us for the purposes of our study?)

[The following questions were asked as follow-ups in later interviews, with only 38 of the 100 churches]:

In your church, do you advocate that members of your congregation engage with the state and the political and social system in order to help themselves in life, or do you instead focus on finding alternatives to the existing systems, such as individual blessings and personal transformation?

Churches seem to have different stances as to whether and how it is appropriate to talk to congregants about money and financial issues in their services and sermons. What is the role of this church in addressing issues of money and wealth?

Given that life can present challenging circumstances for every person at different times, how does this church help its congregation to cope with difficulties they may be facing?

Does this church tell congregants that miracles can bring prosperity?