

Theo-Sophy of Prosperity Preaching: Towards Its Logic, Contents, and Appealing Factors.

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Abstract

The prosperity gospel, teaching, or theology holds that health and wealth are compulsory benefits of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, most adherents of this teaching have accepted it dogmatically, leaving them open to exploitation and deception. Previous studies on prosperity gospel have looked at it from a hermeneutic and theological standpoint, with little or no consideration of the philosophical viewpoint necessary for a balanced understanding of the gospel. This study focuses on prosperity gospel in its contents and principles, logic and inconsistency with the Biblical teachings and effects on its adherents. The study is anchored on Kant's theory of morality 'the categorical imperative.' Through the lenses of philosophy, the paper reveals the illogicality and inconsistency of prosperity teaching: "wealth as gain of salvation" fails to explain why Christians like Apostle Peter and John were poor (Acts :6); "sowing and reaping" contradict Jesus command to Christians to give without expecting anything in return, but to store treasures in heaven (Matthew. 6:9); "covenant of divine unfailing health" contradict scientific and Biblical evidence (1 Timothy. 5:20) of human vulnerability to sickness; Power of positive verbal confession" is hinged on faulty premise of an anthropocentric view that humans are in God's class, making prayerful request unnecessary. The study argues that prosperity preachers who manipulate people to create wealth for themselves simply see their vulnerable victims as means to achieving their selfish end of wealth accumulation. The paper advocates for a balanced theology that encourage rational faith for more effective Christian impacts.

Key Words: Pentecostalism, prosperity, preaching, morality, and theology.

Introduction

Religion, in ways both obvious and subtle, is reshaping the world's social and political landscape. Despite predictions of religion's demise, since the late 1970s we have been witnessing the growing power of religion in shaping people's identity (Luis, 2007). Talk of "Secularization" and of a "Post - religious" society has given way to a renewed recognition of religion's influence in people's social and political lives. This re-emergence of "public religion" is happening throughout the world and across religious traditions – from Islam and Hinduism to Buddhism and Judaism. Christianity, the world largest religion, is no exception.

Within Christianity, Pentecostalism and related renewalist or spirit - filled movement has greatly transformed the face of world Christianity and Africa remains one of the movement major heartlands. Thus making some scholars to assert that African Christianity is the representative of 21st century, as they drew their imagery from the African world-view (Walls 1995, Jenkins, 2018). Pentecostalism seems to defy any scholarly and academic classification. While some scholars attested a taxonomy of such churches into three major classifications namely; the holiness movements, the prosperity organization and the deliverance ministries (Ayegboyin & Ukah, 2002). Ojo (2010) gave six classification of Pentecostal churches especially in Nigeria as the faith speakers, the faith builders, the faith transformers, the reformists. In the same vein, Obineche (2004) presented their development as five waves of Pentecostalism: Pentecostal movement, Charismatic, Prosperity movement and the social gospel movement. However, while Obineche Ayegboyin & Ukah classified them according to functions, Ojo classified them according to their dispositions towards the faith; convictions or beliefs, it is further observed that all these versions lay claim to the utilization of the power of the Holy Spirit of God to "turn things around" for better for an individual Christian, spiritually and materially and some claiming a moderate or radical departure from the emphasis of what is often called the historic or tradition of the Christian church (Wotogbe-Weneka, 2019)

Amidst the global spread of Pentecostalism, prosperity gospel also became one of the most significant expressions of Christianity on the African continent. In other worlds, this movement which emerged at the beginning of the Twentieth century in Africa (Achunike, 2009; Anderson 2004; Hollenwegor, 1997) is associated with the Christian practice of life modelling in the context and lived experience of the Holy Spirit outpouring in Acts of the Apostles, biblical account. This message was preached by foreigners, but predominantly, it was a message proclaimed by Africans who saw in the newly translated vernacular bibles a message that had been hidden from them by the extant missionary forms of Christianity. Thus, provided for the Africans the cultural lens to read the bible, through

which they discovered that much of what the white missionaries had condemned like, spirit possession, faith healing, dreams, vision, witchcraft and spiritualized. The reality of the spiritual universe, therefore, became the precursors of African Independent churches and strands of Pentecostalism (Anderson, 1999; Ogbu-Kalu, 2008; Gbule, 2018). That is to say, it was on message that resonated with the African enchanted worldview, with which the people were so familiar with. It was a message that caught fire in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Prosperity gospel therefore centres on a complex liaison of speech acts victory, combined with ritual practices. With their evangelical cousins by strongly affirming that such practices as speaking in tongues, prophesying, divine healing and other miraculous signs of the spirit are as valid today as they were in the early church. Hence, the belief that God's blessing in wealth and health among others are their divine birth right. Prosperity preaching, theology or teaching is therefore justified by those who argue that Jesus came to liberate the "poor" from the bondage of poverty and brought healing to all areas of a believer's life. Healing, it is believed, was linked to the work of Christ on the cross and demonstrated his victory over all forms of affliction. In this vein, salvation is holistic and encompasses all of life's problems making the presence of 'signs and wonders' the realization of the presence of the kingdom of God (Anderson, 2002). Thus, signs and wonders should complement the proclamation of the word. This became an indispensable part of Pentecostal evangelistic methodology (Saayman, 1993); and the push for prosperity has attended many Pentecostal evangelistic proclamations as well as influenced the faith of many of its followers.

In spite of the large and growing influence of prosperity preaching, there is relatively little research available that gauges the logic, contents and influence of prosperity teaching on public and private morality. To help gain a better understanding of the nature and dynamics of these renewal movement, this paper took a critical view of the contents of prosperity preaching as well as the remarkable growth of Pentecostalism, whether there is something in Pentecostal preaching from which all Christians can learn in the on-going task of proclaiming the gospel? Conversely, is there something other churches have failed to do or did wrongly which resulted in such a huge response? Why are those movements appealing to people regardless of their many disagreeable practices? Data for this study were gathered through observations, oral interviews and library sources.

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Immanuel Kant's theory of Morality-The Categorical Imperative. Kant's philosophy has some bases of moral actions with which he outlined as categorical imperatives. This philosophical base advocates for moral duties for duty's sake and not for interior motives. In his *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), Kant held that "the rational being, is by its

nature an end and thus as an end in itself, must serve in every maxim as the arbitration restricting all merely relative and arbitrary end". He added that, "so act as to treat humanity, whether in your personal or in that of any other, in every case as an end and never as merely a means" (Kant, 1952). Within the context of this study, Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative was used to explore how prosperity preachers use their fellow humans as a means to an end. For instance, if a pastor hypnotises their members into believing that anyone who does not pay tithes or sow seed in his church would never enter heaven, or be rich, or remain perpetually sick, such pastor is said to have treated the members as means to their selfish end.

This study, therefore, serves as an antidote to utilitarianism, prohibiting all kinds of manipulation and exploitation of individuals for selfish or even altruistic ends. It is a general reminder that "people count" and that one's interest should not be disregarded. It is a principle of respect for persons.

Defining Prosperity Preaching

Prosperity preaching is an ideological movement also known as the "faith gospel" or "healing and wealth gospel," and its message focuses on God's will for believers to be rich, healthy, and successful. In other words, it is associated with Pentecostalism, evangelism and charismatic Christianity that emphasises on the believer's abilities to transcend poverty and/or through devotion and positive confession (Coleman, 2000). It refers to teachings about prosperity and the need for Christians to be prosperous while on earth. Within such promise, the emphasis is strongly placed on material possession or acquisition, which could be manifested in possession of cars, houses, fat bank account; cash in hand, clothing, abundance, fortune, and success in all endeavour. Prosperity is therefore portrayed as divine favour, which Christian must seek and possibly pursue with vigour (Ayantayo, 2010).

Typically, proponent of prosperity preaching teaches that human salvation is not only deliverance from sin but deliverance from every distortion related to sin including mental freedom. Oyedepo (1992) affirmed that "we are called into a life of abundance and glory not degradation and shame". They ask believers to contribute money or goods to the church. The gifts, usually referred to as "seed" are understood to carry the promise of a divinely increased harvest (Boeck, 2004). Through such offerings, believers work to integrate themselves into a heavenly economy of super abundance (Hasu, 2006; Wiegele, 2005).

The Emergence of Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

Prosperity preaching, teachings or theology is a twentieth century Pentecostal ideological movement, which could be traced to Essek William Kenyon though; some scholars often credited this ideology to Kenneth Hagin. Sir Kenyon began this ideological movement in

1900 as a result of his experience from the Christian service, metaphysics, heresy and the Pentecostal movement (Wolemonwu, 2018; Obineche & Eluke, 2016). In fact, many of the phrases popularised by present day prosperity preachers such as *what I confess, I possess* were coined by Kenyon himself (Mpigi, 2017), through his radio program in 1931 which was entitled *Kenyon's Church on Air*. His legacies through his Bethel Bible Institute, and ministerial helped to build and shape the Pentecostal orientation of Hagin and other progenies.

Tracing the history of prosperity preaching pastors, Gaiya (2002) noted that Archbishop Benson Idahosa, founder of Church of God Mission International whose headquarters is in Benin City, Nigeria, was "a crusader and founder of prosperity gospel (preaching) in Nigeria. He was ordained into the ministry in 1971 and consecrated Archbishop in 1985. He had a memorable experience on May 18, 1973 when the Lord declared to him; "The world and its people are complaining daily of poverty and want. I have given you the mouth of miracles and blessings to my people. I have asked the cashiers of heaven to be on duty as long as you have a need for my honour and glory..." (Adelegan, 2012, p.501) As a flamboyant preacher he once boasted that "faith had brought him so many clothes he did not know he had; a car even Nigeria's President Babangida could not match". He started the first television evangelism in Nigeria in 1975.

Interestingly, it is asserted that Africa's five richest pastors in contemporary times are Nigerians. Bishop David Oyedepo, founder of Living Faith World Outreach Ministry (a.k.a. Winners Chapel), is regarded as the wealthiest preacher, and his estimated net worth is put at \$150 million. He became born-again February 19, 1969, had an 18-honour divine encounter May 1, 1981 and ordained by Enoch Adeboye September 17, 1983. He owns four private jets and homes in London and the United States. Oyedepo has a private university (Covenant University), a high school, and a publishing outfit-Dominion Publishing House. Chris Oyakhilome received Christ at age 9 and became a Pentecostal theologian in Africa and founder of Believers' Love world Ministries (a.k.a. Christ Embassy). His estimated net worth is \$51 million. His businesses include newspapers, magazines, and a local television station. David Ibiyeomi is the Overseer of Salvation Ministries (Home of Success) and is broadly known as the Apostle of Prosperity and Great Well-being whose estimated net worth is \$41 million. Temitope Joshua, founder of Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN); his estimated net worth is between \$10-15 million. He has a Christian television network named Emmanuel TV. Matthew Ashimolowo is the founder of Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) in London with the largest single Christian congregation in Western Europe. His estimated net worth is put at \$6-10 million. He has a media company known as Matthew Ashimolowo Media

and his business ventures include documentaries and Christian literature. Chris Okotie is the founder of Household of God Church International, and his net worth is between \$3-10 million. His church's 5,000 plus members are composed of Nollywood actors, musicians, celebrities, and society people. It is important to point out that each of these prosperity gospel pastors has magnificent mega churches. There are other notable preachers of prosperity message in Nigeria such as Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo and Ayodele Joseph Oritsejafor, a former member of Idahosa's Church of God Mission International and immediate past President of Christian Association of Nigeria. Others include Jacob Ayantayo; Rev. George Adegboye, founder of Rhema Chapel; Bishop Wale Oke, founder of Christ Life Church; Pastor Alex Adegboye, founder of Stone Church; and Rev. Tunde Joda, founder of Christ Chapel International Churches among others. These leaders engage in private empire building for themselves by accumulating assets that boost their personality and justify their prosperity preaching message and mentality. They are proprietors of businesses including publishing houses, financial investment companies, and academic institutions.

The Logic and Contents of Prosperity Preaching

Prosperity preaching is the doctrine that God wants people to be prosperous, especially financially. Adherents to the prosperity preaching believe that wealth is a sign of God's blessing and is compensation for prayer and for giving beyond the minimum tithe to one's church, televangelists, or other religious causes. The logical extension of the prosperity preaching-sometimes explicit, sometimes not, depending on the preacher-is that the poor are poor because of a lack of faith, that is, that poverty is the fault of the poor themselves (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996; Fee 1985; Gifford 1990; McConnell 1988). Adherents also tend to interpret the New Testament as portraying Jesus as a relatively rich figure who used his wealth to feed the masses on several occasions and to finance what they argue to have been a costly itinerate ministry. As such, prosperity adherents argue that they should model their lives after Jesus' by living lavishly, in stark contrast to orthodox interpretations of the Gospel. In this sense, adherents believe God to be very interested in their financial status. Poverty, far from being a blessing, is a sign of God's disfavour; thus, Christians have a duty to deal only with the apparent lack of faith among the poor and not their poverty itself.

They also emphasises on the material prosperity of a new man (Orji, 2019). By its ideology, the new man cannot be poor because he serves the God who said; *the silver is mine and the gold is mine* (Haggai, 2:8-9). The silver and gold here refer to riches. In fact poverty is a curse. The ideology is usually fanciful, captivating and motivating. It, no doubt, assists the suffering man in living with his problem, because it offers explanation to existential

problems. Their philosophy tends to agree with the view of Clifford Hertz as cited in Wotogbe-Weneka (2012) that "when suffering has meaning, it becomes sufferable."

The Principle of Wealth as a gain of Salvation

The idea of total man's atonement according to the prosperity teachers is that salvation through Christ's death on the cross did not only affect the spiritual aspect of man but also his physical aspect. The prosperity teachers say that Christ died essentially so that all of us, being originally condemned sinners, might, by believing in him, be reconciled to the Father and be saved from the penalty of sin. An automatic bonus that comes with this 'holistic' salvation is overcoming poverty and dwelling in abundant wealth. Benson Idahosa, the first proponent of the prosperity teaching in Nigeria has drawn his own list of bonuses that come along with the holistic salvation thus:

You are made for life and not for death, You are made for health and not for disease, You are made for success and not for failure, You are made for faith and not for confusion, You are made for love and not for fear
(Idahosa, 1992:50)

It is the view of Idahosa that having material wealth is a sign of God's blessings; that poverty is a sign of God's displeasure and that God is a God of riches, who right from creation, desired that man should prosper. The general idea of prosperity teachers is that if we are not rich, it must be because we are not right with God. Keeping the law of the kingdom faithfully ensures health, riches and honours. Pastor Femi Emmanuel (2003) says that for the Christian, success is his birth right. You are created with the power of success. This is the essence of your being created in the image and likeness of God. He says God gave man the power both to make and to enjoy wealth, citing Deuteronomy 8:18; "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (NKJV). Some Pentecostal gossellers argue also that salvation comes with material blessing, citing (Isa 1:19) that "If you are willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land". They opines that the Lord has promised to give Christians their heart desires if they delight themselves in Him, but should "seek first the kingdom of God and all its righteousness and all other things shall be added to you (Mt. 6:33).

The Principle Sowing and Reaping in Multiples

The thinking here is that if you are not giving much back to God, material blessings may not manifest in your life. The principle here is "of giving and receiving". The "seed faith" giving or miracle faith is the idea that God is "obligated" to repay a multiplied

version of whatever seed of faith-in cash or kind-that the believer “saved” into the ministry or God’s work.

Pastor David Ibiyeomi calls it the law of kingdom investment, and that divine Investment brings divine dividends. There are divine opportunities in which someone must invest in order to be connected to divine wealth. There is a wealth we acquire through the instrumentality of the power of God, and which we dispose of for the expansion of the kingdom of God. These divine opportunities constitute what Emmanuel calls Kingdom Investment; that is, doing business with God (Ibiyeomie, 2019). Kingdom Investment gives someone the power to get wealth. It is the investment one make into the kingdom of God that opens the door of abundance. Giving and gaining go hand in hand. Whatever someone give to God is not lost, rather it is an investment that will come back to the person bigger, larger and better than what was given. He quotes from Luke 6:38, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over, shall men give unto your bosom”.

Quality sowing will always bring quality harvest. The secret of living in plenty and prosperity is to give to God’s work cheerfully. For those unwilling to give, devourers will always get into their inheritance and they become poor if they do not give cheerfully to God’s work. “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you” (Deut 28:47-48).

The Principle of Covenant of Divine Unfailing Health

This teaching is tantamount to saying that a true child of God cannot be sick. Kenneth Hagin said that the sin of Adam and Eve led to spiritual death for man. But with the coming of Jesus Christ, we have passed from death unto life. If someone have been born again, then the person have been made a new creature in Christ. The bible says you have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). For “you have been redeemed from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13). The curse of the law, which is the penalty of breaking God’s law, includes spiritual death, sickness, disease and poverty. However, humans are redeemed from sickness and disease when they become Christians, sickness can only come to those who break God’s law.

Whenever Christians keep to the laws of God, they are bound to enjoy good health and escape from those curses stated above (Kenneth, 2005). For when you are walking in the word of God, you will prosper and be in good health. It is God’s will for us to be made

whole-spirit, soul and body- and to remain that way until the return of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess. 5:23). It is only when humans remain in sin and refuse to be regenerated that they experience pain and sicknesses. Kenneth Hagin (2005) added; "I do not deny the existence of disease. What I deny is the right of that disease to exist in a Christian's body, because a Christian's body is the temple of Christ". All prosperity teachers usually refer to 3 John 1:2; "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers". This is a cardinal verse in prosperity teaching hence it is often referred to as the gospel of health and wealth.

The Principle of Positive Verbal Confession

This has also been widely referred to as the principle of "name it, claim it". The prosperity teachers say that words have power. But power in this sense, is no reference to literary force, or to the ability of the words to either build up or destroy its hearer depending on the chain of thought or feeling it rouses in the person. This power is far from natural. The confessed word "means a lot in the spiritual realm", it has the power to "make your life-style successful and it has the same power to bring you down, (Okwori, 1995). By confession through action, we determine the outcome of our faith by our actions. "Positive" actions bring "positive" results and so forth. Positive confession teaches people that their words are determinative. We should learn to put our faith in our word or according to Hagin "put our faith in our faith thus; "Did you ever stop to think about having faith in your own faith? Evidently, God had faith in His faith, because He spoke the words of faith and they came to pass. Evidently, Jesus had faith in His faith, because He spoke to the fig tree and what He said came to pass" (Hagin, 2005).

Faith in God and His word that is acted upon will bring results every time. "whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says" (Mark 11:23). The principle is that if you talk about your trials, you talk about your difficulties, you talk about your lack of faith, you talk about your lack of money, and your faith will just absolutely shrivel. But if you'll talk about your wonderful Heavenly father, if you talk about the word of God, then your faith will grow in leaps and bounds. If you talk about sickness, it will develop sickness in your system; if you talk about your lack of finances, it will stop the money from coming in. In claiming what we desire from God, we should get the word in our heart. Get the revelation of it in your spirit, be convinced in your own heart; then say it, and it will work! Believers are enjoined to meditate on the word until it becomes a reality in ones' heart. You can say with your mouth what you believe in your heart, and results will be forthcoming automatically.

The Principle of Wealth Transfer

This is the principle that all the wealth in the world will be transferred to the Christians before Christ returns. The general verse quoted here is Prov. 13:22; "A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous". This principle teaches that anyone who gives heartily to God's work is righteous and will ultimately inherit the wealth of the unbelievers who are not giving to God's work. It maintains that God can make you wealthy by transferring the wealth of the heathens to you according to Isaiah 45:3. Well informed Christians will enjoy the luxury of the nation's wealth which for long has been beyond their reach. The good men and the just are the children of God whom God has decided to make wealthy through wealth transfer from sinners. "For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Eccl 2:26). Again, "Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; He may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver" (Job 27:16-17).

Prosperity Preaching and Its Appealing Factors

Despite the continuous criticism, prosperity preaching has remained appealing to its members.

Economically, it promises safety for all who would practice its principles. The fact that poor Christians are told that they can become candidates for economic emancipation can be nothing else but attractive. The message of prosperity strikes at one of the most sought after human needs in the Namibian society-economic or financial freedom. With an unemployment rate standing at 51% (CIA Facebook 2010), this theology attracts such need driven people. As a way of escape from such a situation Oyedepo (2007) taught that keeping to the covenant of God (referring to giving) "entitles you [the Christian] to economic empowerment." He went on to write that sacrificial giving is the only way to obtain "enduring wealth, as every other means of acquiring riches is time-tagged."

People are promised staggering returns if they practice these laws of giving. Moreover, it is claimed that giving is a guaranteed method of being freed from lack and "no matter how hard you pray for a harvest, you would not have any until you start sowing" (Goroh, 2009). This agricultural metaphor is used to convince readers of a "spiritual principle" that if exercised will bring lasting deliverance from poverty, lack and financial struggles. At first glance, this principle would appear to be quite divorced from reality, so how does one go about creating the needed responses? Through the sharing of one's personal experiences.

That is, the truth of this “spiritual principle” is not argued from the Bible, but rather from personal experience.

Emotionally, there is dominant anti-intellectualism found amongst many Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal adherents; rather than appealing to reason, they appeal to the emotions of followers. Oyedepo (2009) wrote; “God’s Word is not scientific, neither is it logical; God’s Word is divine.” But does divinity rule out the use of logic from its equation? This concept is a contradiction to the Christian faith and Oyedepo contradicted himself as he had earlier written that the Christian has surpassing intelligence. You cannot be intelligent without being logical, for one presupposes the presence of the other. That is, intelligence presupposes the presence of logic (or the other way around). While Scripture is not a scientific book, it is contradiction to say that it is not logical, and then call on people to obey it. If it were not logical we would not be able to understand it and claiming to do what the Bible says with no logic built into it would be “blind faith.” The bottom line of Oyedepo’s view is that we are to approach Scripture without our thinking capabilities. With reason ruled out of the equation when we approach Scripture, the adherer actually opens a gate for unquestioning trust of virtually everything said by the preacher.

Gifford (1987) wrote of Reinhard Bonnke advocating these same attitudes of anti-intellectualism and experientialism. First, critical thinking is removed from the scene “The Bible puts me through! I’m getting through to the throne of God! Alleluia!” Secondly, experience is made the ultimate judge of spiritual truth by sentiments such as “Don’t listen to your head, listen to your heart” and “the gospel happens now! ... The gospel *happens now!*” Implying that the gospel is not to be studied intellectually (Gifford 1987:82) or “The Gospel is not a theological doctrine” (Bonnke, 1999:241). The evaluation of Gifford concerning Bonnke’s evangelistic ministry could be said to be true for many prosperity preaching proponents especially those along Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal lines. He claimed that evaluating them along exclusively or even predominantly theological lines would be wrong-headed, for a key factor in Pentecostalism generally is its opposition to academic theology. In fact, this whole stream of Christianity tends to reject modern theologising as a perversion. According to Pentecostals, the mainstream churches with their lifeless preaching, their intellectual tortuosities and compromises with modernity, meet no needs of real people. This stream of Christianity cares little for theology and puts almost exclusive stress on experience (Gifford, 1987).

Surely, the Christian faith should not be denied its emotional side; however, emotions should never be manipulated nor be considered as arbitrary tests of truth. A theology that

is opposed to thinking leads to the creation of a people who judge with their feelings rather than with their minds. Emotionalism is very appealing as it touches at the very heart of the traditional religious roots of the African and the dominant spirit of Western postmodernism. Thus, because people are made to feel good, they deduce that what they are busy with is true, for if it were wrong they would not have felt good in the first place. With this emotionalism at the centre of things, the Bible is easily set aside or de-emphasised. However, this opening up to good feelings paves the way for deception to creep in subtly.

Spiritually, it is directly linked to neo-Pentecostal spirituality, which gives a sense of superiority because of its transcendental emphasis. They teach the poor that if they attain a certain level of spirituality they can live above any natural circumstance and rise above social and economic confinements. This access to a life of limitless victory begins with being born again as this is the “divine insurance for abundance [and] material security” (Oyedepo 2009). Thus, becoming a Christian guarantees a life of total victory over every known circumstance of life and a life of wealth.

The aspects of wealth, ceaseless victory and good living are emphasised in this spirituality not necessarily as things with which God will bless us, but as things for which we are entirely responsible to ensure that they happen. Prosperity preaching adherents are told that they become divine when they are born again based on Psalm 82:6 “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.” This interpretation has given rise to a new sort of spirituality in prosperity gospel in which people think and believe that they are mini gods or demigods here on earth and as gods, they are entitled to all the good things this world has to offer especially wealth, health and success. Oyedepo (2009) claims that Psalm 82:6 “is the basis for the supernatural: you are no longer human, but superhuman. You are a son of God, so you are a god”. He then continues to guarantee, “[I]f you grasp this truth, every devil will see you and clear off the way! This is the fundamental secret of all my victories in life” (Oyedepo 2009). He added that;

God wishes above all things my prosperity. All my needs are met according to God’s riches in glory by Christ Jesus. The riches of sinners are laid up for me. I serve a very rich God. I am a child of a generous God. I am a lender and not a borrower. I am the head and not the tail. I will spend all the days of my life in joy, peace and prosperity. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. Abundance is mine. I am a giver and not a beggar. I am a blessing to people; I am not a liability. I make God’s Kingdom my priority in my life. My mind is open to ideas that will

generate wealth from now on, In Jesus' name. Amen (2009:108-109).

This prayer indicates the spiritual aspect that makes prosperity preaching attractive to its adherents because people feel that they are in control of the circumstances of their lives. No longer do they have to wait upon God but they can demand of God what they desire and they can call upon any circumstance to change in their favour. Thus, our human words mixed with God's Word can result in powerful things (Osteen, 2004:127).

Socially, it was Mary de Haas who said about neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movements that they offer a home to people who have become painfully aware that their very future is at stake. "By a process of elective affinity' in the Weberian sense, widely different groups of people have found solace, in different ways, in the face of a situation which is perceived as threatening. There is still hope of redemption from a future, which appears, bleak and fraught with uncertainty" (1982:41). Those who adhere to prosperity preaching are people who feel their need to succeed in life, given that natural circumstances have excluded them from the bar of success. Prosperity preaching churches become their platforms for motivation to pursue success, especially wealth. Many, especially the poor, feel that they belong to a "family" that thinks highly of them or that values them. This social affirmation that anyone can attain success in this life regardless of their circumstances draws crowds of people—specially from the formerly economically disadvantaged (Akoko, 2007).

Adherents of prosperity preaching develops a sense of being winners. That is, they feel that they are winners because of the kind of churches they attend. Perhaps a cultic aspect in the movement is that people feel or believe that they have attained some special revelation which those in mainstream churches have not attained. Moreover, there remains a general belief that one can attain prosperity because you have a certain "man of God" whom you admire or honour. The honouring of the man of God is based on II Chron. 20:20 "Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed." Dollar (1999:117) wrote, "Your prosperity will be based in part on whether you believe and trust your man of God." This view has created great fear. People cannot leave prosperity preaching churches or comment on the theology of their leaders for fear that doing so, will cause them to lose their prosperity, or that things will not work out for them somewhere else.

Giving of Hope

There may be much to disagree with prosperity g preaching churches, however, it is encouraging to know that people's hopes are somehow raised. Prosperity preaching

has helped many people realise that life can actually be better and that they do not have to remain in the poverty that has been caused by various social structures. Although the theology is missing, it is admirable that people's hope in the midst of misery is restored. Not all prosperity preachers necessarily just focus on themselves. There are also many good projects they have taken on, to help their societies. For example, Goroh runs a feeding programme for destitute children, providing them with two meals a day. Wahl Abrahams runs a primary school which help children to be educated on Christian principles since the state has removed Bible study in public schools. Oyedepo has built a big university in Nigeria and runs several humanitarian programmes that help with human development. TB Joshua often gives away millions of naira to the poor and destitute. His ministry has adopted some poor families and helps with the education of their children and has provided housing to homeless people.

Moreover, prosperity preaching has given a chance to men and women, who under normal circumstances would never have found a profession, by granting them opportunities to be church leaders and even pastors. In mainline churches, the requirement that is clergy obtains a certain level of theological training before they can be ordained or granted opportunity to minister or lead the church. It is also worth noting that prosperity preaching churches have helped in changing attitudes towards giving and their members are often motivated to give to for the work of God, in contrast to mainline churches. These things give a certain vibrancy to people who are in search of answers to their problems and practically the prosperity preaching churches appear to be really practical in addressing people's needs.

Some Philosophical Appraisal of Prosperity Preaching

It has been contended that the teaching that wealth is an essential gain of salvation is not only materialistic but it is also superstitious. Superstitions are irrational beliefs that future events are influenced by specific behaviour without having facts. It is a belief or practice that is not based on facts or events that can be proven. It is an irrational belief in an object, action or circumstance that is not logically related.

The Bible, especially N T contains many warnings about the danger of riches. Even though the prosperity teachers mention people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Solomon as a proof that God truly wants his children to be rich, they did not take cognizance of Elijah and Elisha, who apparently had meagre income and associated with the poor and widow. We also learn about Peter and John Acts 3:6 as people who were not rich; Then Peter said, silver or gold I have none, but such as I have give I thee. In the OT, the Lord made provision for the poor, and this could not have been a sign of displeasure from him

Leviticus 12:8; “And if thee be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring tow turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean”.

Jesus himself said “for ye have the poor with you always” (Mark. 14:7). Philosophical theologians like St. Augustine have argued that all grades of human beings are in the universe and the creator of them all is the good God. This conception, according to his principle of plenitude, leads to the theory of a hierarchy of higher and lower forms of existence, (Augustine, 1953). These ideas also flow in the aesthetic theme where he tries to explain the world’s graded diversity. He says evils, like poverty, are in totality and from the standpoint of the creator, necessary to make the universe wholly good; for even the evil (poverty in this sense) within it is made to contribute to the complex perfection of the world. (Augustine, 1953). To him the combination of rich and poor people will make up an ideal society. He said they make the world beautiful like the bright and dull colours make a perfect picture. Lutheran theology also shares a similar view. This is further demonstrated by great thinkers like Martin Luther who once said;

Riches are the pettiest and the least worthy gift God can give man. What are they to God’s word, to bodily gifts such as beauty and health or to gifts of the mind such as understanding, and wisdom. Yet men toil for them day and night and take up no rest. Therefore God commonly gives riches to foolish people to whom he gives nothing else.

It has been argued that prosperity teaching so exalt success as to pour scorn on the poor as stubborn infidels who have evidently refused to seek God’s aid by not giving to His work. In this version of the gospel, faith leads to tithing, and tithing ignites prosperity. A gratified Almighty will respond by opening the windows of heaven, pouring out blessings so rich that believers will not have room to store them all. You have to pay to play—and to win; and if the church pastor follows a dazzlingly sumprosperity gospeluous lifestyle, that is just his way of exhibiting God’s munificence to the world. It seems as though most leaders who teach that God wants Christians to be rich, live lavish lifestyles and there is need to figure out if there is any correlation. What is certain is that Jesus and the Apostles did not set the example of extravagant lives.

Sowing and reaping, it has been argued, has an animistic connotation. It’s quite obvious that the animists man’s giving is not altruistic, not a result of generosity. Animist giving is rather a subtle way of inducing his world, whether it be human or supernatural, to reciprocate by blessing him with the fulfilment of his desires (Okwori, 1995). This also

aligns with the purpose of giving in prosperity teaching where the teachers emphasis on "Seed faith offerings". Oyedepo (1986) for instance, emphasized tithing, kingdom promotion offering and giving. Whatever you let go for the kingdom's sake, Jesus said it is an investment; it will surely come back to you in multiplied forms. By this, Oyedepo is actually preaching "give to get".

Pastor Femi Emmanuel called it "kingdom investment" where the divine investment brings divine dividends. He said that the secret of living in plenty and prosperity is to give to God's work cheerfully, which he called "doing business with God" (Femi, 2003). We must observe that the motivation for giving is not so much to bless that ministry, but to get something back from God. The motivation is so twisted. Do they really expect God to "bless" something so wrong-hearted? Much of the reasoning behind this "seed faith" teaching is a distortion of "Sowing and reaping", which is a biblical concept, but when it is distorted and sold as a means of „giving to get“, then it is well beyond the scriptures. The purity of simply "giving from the heart" is lost and replaced with selfish motives. People give because the preacher "guarantees" they will get a "big return" on their investment. The motivation is so wrong that it is no wonder that this doctrine has produced disastrous fruits in the Church. Many people have stolen in their places of work to get money to sow as "seed of faith". The preachers of prosperity pretend to lead their listeners to an altruistic life through financial sacrifices. But such altruistic intention is completely neutralised by constant promises of material prosperity from those very same preachers. As a result of such an egocentric motivation, believers end up paying generous tithes and offerings, believing that the more they give, the greater the multiplied financial return they will receive.

In addition to such an egocentric motivation, it is worthy to highlight that the ego of the givers end up being exalted even more through public testimonies about the donations and the resulting prosperity experienced (We cannot forget that many of the testimonies broadcasted by the media are about financial prosperity!). Such practices might be backed up by good intentions, but they are in direct opposition to Christ's example and teachings! In His remarks about the poor widow's offering (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4) and in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14), Christ reprovved forcefully this kind of show-off "testimonies." Jesus emphasised the principle of giving in humility thus:

Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your

right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly (Matthew 6:2–4).

Concluding Remarks

This study has carefully identified the basic principles of prosperity teaching as well as its inherent logical weaknesses. It has revealed the inconsistencies of prosperity teaching with the Bible. It has shown that prosperity teaching thrives in an atmosphere of mindless surrender to religious claims without applying reasoning or objective inquiry. This work also revealed that the concern that inspired the birth and development of prosperity teaching in Nigeria is genuine-to solve the economic problems in Nigeria and enhance the socio-economic emancipation of the people.

However, the premises of the arguments and the methods employed by prosperity preaching exponents in implementing the ideas are faulty, which makes it a poor panacea for the crises that have engulfed Nigeria's socio-economic and political scenes. It has also shown that there are ethical problems associated with prosperity teaching and has proffered suggestions that could lead to a re-orientation of prosperity teaching to accommodate the use of reasoning and change the message from being just theoretical, to making it a practical solution to people's socio-economic and ethical problems.

The study highlighted the need for the church to endeavour to teach a balanced theology for ideal Christian living. The logical issues raised made the study worth undertaking. It has also added to existing literature on the concept of prosperity teaching, affording the teachers and followers of prosperity teaching the opportunity to apply rational faith in their belief system, which ensures a better comprehension of shared religious beliefs.

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