

## Prosperity Gospel Preaching and its Implications on National Developments

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### Abstract

*The paper examined prosperity gospel preaching or teaching and its implications on national developments. It discussed its historical origin and noted that it was birthed in USA and since the seventies now spreading in the Nigerian Pentecostal churches and society like wild fire. The information for the study was derived from primary and secondary sources. However, the paper showed that most scriptural references made in support of prosperity teachings are placed out of context, thus, giving a false impression and interpretation about what the Bible really teaches. The findings of the work indicated that, prosperity teachings in a way gives one a sense of hope, direction and reassurance that the life one lives can get better if one can only apply certain biblical principles correctly. Equally, it was observed that the prosperity preachers or teachers are quite correct in pointing believers to God and the wonderful promises made in his word in order to get their needs met. However, many of these preachers have turned the table of the gospel round for self or selfish advantages and thereby impoverishing their congregation the more rather than improving their lots. This in-turn has reduced the capacity of the people and thereby affected national developments in terms of socio- economic, psycho-spiritual and physical developments. The mind of many Nigerians has so much been corrupted to pursue wealth at the expense of the things of God which has eternal values. Hence, the work recommended that the focus of gospel preachers today should rather address soteriology of man. This is because most Christians today are not only a disappointment to the church but to the nation as a whole.*

**Keywords: Prosperity, National Development, Gospel, Preaching, Church.**

## Introduction

Christianity today in its growth is wearing many faces in its theology and praxis. This development is ushering in various positives and negatives results. While some Christian sects remain conservative and traditional in their praxis, some others are growing more contemporary in their approach using various modern ways of selling their messages. Among these contemporary ways is what is regarded as prosperity theology, prosperity gospel or teachings. David W. Jones claimed that over the years, the message being preached in some of the largest churches in the world has changed, a new gospel is being taught and has been ascribed many names, such as: “name it and claim it” gospel, the “blab it and grab it” gospel, the “health and wealth” gospel, the “prosperity gospel,” and “positive confession theology.”<sup>1</sup> According to him, no matter what name is used, the essence of this message is the same. Simply put, prosperity gospel teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy. This indeed is not wrong since God desires good life for his children. If so, should the prosperity preachers be condemned?

It is not a hidden fact that many of our contemporary churches and some of the conservatives orthodox are actively engaged in this message of prosperity gospel. In fact, a study conducted by a researcher in social science from the University of Nsukka, Nigeria shows that prosperity preaching is currently the major preoccupation of the Pentecostals, fast becoming one of the most significant expressions of Christianity and remarkably wielding a pervasive influence within the Nigerian religious space.<sup>2</sup> But then, the questions here are: first, are they not deviating from the main truths of the Gospel or doctrinal issues which have to do with salvation of soul? Second, in what ways have the prosperity teachings made Nigerians to develop their human potentials or the nation’s potentials meaningfully? At this critical point when Nigeria is in need of development of her human and physical resources in all forms, this discourse becomes germane as prosperity gospel is attracting more population away from productivity which could have enhanced the socio- economic developments of the nation. It is in view of this that this paper aimed at the assessment of the prosperity gospel and its implications on national development. This paper therefore, while particularly concerned with the effect of this theology on national development, shall cover the following: the meaning and origin of prosperity gospel, factors that encourage its propagation, the effects on national developments and what need to be done in addressing the issues.

### What is Prosperity Gospel?

According to the *Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English*, prosperity is the state of being “successful, and having good fortune.”<sup>3</sup> Prosperity theology teaches that God wants his people to be prosperous and healthy in life, with wealth being used as the measure for one’s level

<sup>1</sup> “The Bankruptcy of the prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics”, <https://bible.org/article/bankruptcy-prosperity-gospel-exercise-biblical-and-theological-ethics>, retrieved 25/10/2017.

<sup>2</sup> Rimamsikwe Kabila Kituase, ‘A Historical Study of Prosperity Gospel Preaching in Nigeria, 1970-2014.’ Being a Thesis presented to the Faculty of Social Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2015. p. x.

<sup>3</sup> Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition

of favor with God. Prosperity theology also referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of success, is a religious trend among some Christian sects, who hold that financial blessings and physical well-being are always the will of God for them, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth. J. K Ayantayo succinctly defined and describe prosperity gospel as a strong teaching that requires Christians to be prosperous while on earth. For him and within such premise, the emphasis is strongly placed on material acquisition, which could be manifested in possession of cars, houses, fat bank accounts, cash at hand, clothing, abundance, fortune and success in all endeavors, all of which make prosperity therefore a divine favor which Christians must seek and possibly pursue with vigor<sup>4</sup>.

Meanwhile, some proponents of the movement maintained that believers who had enough faith, kept a positive confession and gave a minimum of 10% of their income to their churches would walk in divine health and have divine wealth. They encourage their followers to pray, and even demand, of God “everything from modes of transportation (cars, vans, trucks, even two-seat planes), to homes, furniture, and large bank accounts.”<sup>5</sup> This, in other words, means that for the adherent of prosperity Gospel, it is a doctrine that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, hence he must be wealthy or prosperous, especially financially and to that end, to be poor is to be cursed or that the poor are poor because of lack of faith. Be that as it may, it is therefore expedient to take a cursory look at the origin of the prosperity theology.

### **A Brief Historical Fact about the Origin of Prosperity Gospel**

Historical records abound that prosperity Gospel, theology and preaching began in the United States of America (USA) featuring many significant personalities in the development and spread. Essek William Kenyon (1867-1948) was said to have played the formative role and put in place its cardinal principles when he began the teachings on positive confession, faith and healing. Some prominent faith teachers or pastors, who adopted his doctrine, popularized and commercialize it are Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, John Osteen, Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar and Robert Morriss, just to name a few. The individual who among them is more central to the theology is Kenneth Hagin, which is why he is termed the “father” of the movement.<sup>6</sup> Hagin’s Word-Faith theology had two principal components. The first was divine healing, while the second was the concept that God desired to materially bless believers. It is this second aspect of Word-Faith theology that eventually developed into the prosperity gospel.<sup>7</sup> McConnell informs that right from its source in the United States, prosperity gospel emphasizes “Three “Ps”: Power, Prestige and

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<sup>4</sup> J. K Ayantayo, “*Prosperity Gospel and Social Morality: A Critique in David Ogungbile and Akintunde Akinade (eds) Creativity and Change in Nigeria Christianity*, Lagos: Malthouse Press, Ltd, p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> P. Young, “An Evaluation of Prosperity Teaching in Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN), *Research Bulletin*, No. 43, March. 2005, pp 4- 15.

<sup>6</sup> Basilus M. Kasera, “The Biblical and Theological Examination of the Prosperity Theology and Its Impact among the Poor in Namibia”, a Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Master in Theology at the South African Theological Seminary, 2012, pp. 41-46.

<sup>7</sup> Basilus M. Kasera.

Prosperity”<sup>8</sup> However later, Kenneth Copeland, became the prosperity gospel specialist and propelled the theology to the forefront of Pentecostalism. In 1974 Copeland published *The Laws of Prosperity*, a book that has been reprinted many times since.<sup>9</sup>

In Nigeria, there are many prosperity preachers but the individual who first became most identified with this movement was a young firebrand preacher, Benson Idahosa, who would go on to become the father of the prosperity gospel in Africa. He earned his place in history, however, not just because he was the first African to articulate the message, but because of how he took this theology to the masses. Idahosa, against the trend in the society of his time, was preaching that Christians ought to have access to material wealth and live life to the full, insisting that he would no longer drive the two-door Volkswagen Beetle car that was in vogue and mostly used by the average wage earner but only ride four-door cars such as Mercedes Benz and Peugeot of the bourgeoisies. He also insisted that members of his church should not tithe nor give offerings with coins, but currency notes of high worth.<sup>10</sup> According to Ojo, Idahosa believed God created men and women for a better life than many are experiencing and He never intended that anyone should go through life imprisoned by their own superstitions but He opens the door of success to every believer who will dare to step out and go after the good life. No one in God’s family was ever destined to exist in sickness, fear, ignorance, poverty, loneliness or mediocrity. God’s abundant goodness will be enjoyed and utilized by those who discipline themselves, become decisive, bold, adventurous, believing, daring, risking and determined.<sup>11</sup> This is the main trust of Idahosa’s teaching. Today, thousands of pastors across sub-Saharan Africa proclaim the same message as Idahosa.

According to Adeleye, David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church (A.K.A Winnwers’ Chapel) consecrated as the Pentecostal Bishop of Northern Nigeria is the leading and most prominent figure of the prosperity theology today in Nigeria. Some believed it would be difficult, however, to find a prosperity preacher who has been a more prolific author than David Oyedepo who has published more than seventy books, mostly on the subjects of success and prosperity in African and contestably (perhaps) in the world.<sup>12</sup> There are other prominent preachers of like manner such as E.A Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God, W. F Kumuyi of Deeper Life Christian Bible Church, Ibiyeomie of Salvation Ministry, Ashimolowo of Kingsway International Christian Centre, London and Oyakhilome of Christ Embassy Church, just to mention a few. Among these and many other preachers of like manner, it is easy to see that their message and focus primarily is the same namely establishment and enjoyment of the kingdom

<sup>8</sup> D. R. McConnell, “A Different Gospel”, in *Historical and Biblical Analysis of the word of faith*.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, United Kingdom, Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1996, pp 4-6.

<sup>10</sup> M. A Ojo, “Consonance and Dissonance in the Doctrinal Emphasis of Prosperity Among Nigerian Pentecostals,” in *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies* 1(1), 2013, p.10

<sup>11</sup> M.A, Ojo.

<sup>12</sup> F. B Adeleye and B.A, The Preachers of a Different Gospel in Goka Muele Mpigi, “The Prosperity Theology impact in the contemporary Nigerian Church and Society,” *Sky Journal of Educational Research* Vol. 5( 5), October, 2017, pp. 034-043.

here on earth before that of heaven.<sup>13</sup> Having touched briefly on the history of this movement and mentioned the most prominent figures associated with it home and abroad, ancient and modern, it will be expedient to focus on the factors that make the propagation of prosperity theology or gospel to gain ground.

### **Factors that make the Propagation of Prosperity Gospel to Gain Ground**

There is no doubt that the prosperity theologians or preachers rely heavily on the interpretation of the Christian scripture. Verses of the bible both the Old and the New Testament are interpreted to suit the aim of achieving prosperity theology. As said earlier, the main tenet of prosperity theology is that God wants the believer to be materially wealthy and healthy. Hence, these theologians always search for those verses of the Bible that could be interpreted to suit this purpose. It does not matter whether that interpretation is actually the mind of the author or matches its contemporary interpretation following the authentic hermeneutic principles or not, as long as this interpretation suits the purpose of gaining the desired goal. The prosperity theologians' clever or smart understanding of the situation of the believers in their community or the society took advantage of it. Three major factors especially in Nigeria or Africa by extension are involved in this namely poverty, fear and ignorance.<sup>14</sup>

- Ignorance: Starting from the rear, ignorance is the main bane here as it subsumed the other two. When one is ignorant, it is very easy for the one who is informed to manipulate him. Many people are very ignorant of the knowledge of the scripture, even when they read it daily. The lack of critical and intellectual understanding of the scripture make many very vulnerable to deception, they get easily carried away or do not even questions whatever they are told in the name of God. This has made the assignment of prosperity theologians or preachers very easy.
- Poverty: Generally, in the Nigerian sphere, or Africa the poverty index of the overall population is not less than 90%. Many people are abjectly poor and in their desperation to get a better life, they would do anything demanded of them especially when such guide is coming from the church leadership. So, it is easy to manipulate this situation with the aid of the scripture. They are asked to sow seeds even with the little they have so that they can harvest plenty in return. Many scriptural verses are used to support this.<sup>15</sup>
- Fear: The fear factor is used on the rest 10% of the population. Fear of insecurity and the sought for protection of life and security of their accumulated wealth is the quest of the rich. It is then easy to manipulate this to cow the rich into submission. Seeking succor in the church they are ready to give any amount to secure it. So, they become easy prey to prosperity theologians or preachers.

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<sup>13</sup> F. B Adeleye.,

<sup>14</sup> GreyBeard: A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel-Religion, Naira Land Forum, retrieved March 29, 2012, Lausanne Theology Working Group

<sup>15</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Poverty," in *Dictionary of the Third World Theologies*, ed. Virginia Fabella, MM. et al. (New York: Orbis Books, 2000, 170-171.

On proper analysis, it is easy to see that Ignorance rides the two, both the rich and the poor. They both need something, but they both lack something which is more than what they think they lack: Knowledge. They are not familiar with the essence of the scriptures; neither do they understand meaning and message of the Gospel. It is easy therefore for the prosperity theologians or preachers to gain access into their ignorance and take advantage of it. Prosperity theologians have been able largely to use these loopholes to gain ground in their ministry of exploitation rather than propagation of the Gospel and soteriology proclamation.

### **An Examination of Some Manipulated and Coveted Scriptures**

There are many themes, pericopes, passages and verses of biblical scriptures that are used by the prosperity theologians and preachers to support their claims. David Jones and Russell Woodbridge did a thorough examination of this theological trend and pointed out some erroneous teachings and the misinterpretation, misrepresentation or may be manipulations of the scriptures in the doctrine of prosperity theologians and preachers. One of the basis of the prosperity gospel is the Abrahamic covenant as recorded in Genesis chapters 15, 17 and 22, which is meant to kick off God's economy of salvation after the Fall. This covenant is their own theological basis or scriptural authority or claim for prosperity or material longing.

These preachers have forgotten or are ignorant of the fact that the reason for the covenant is not because of Abraham as a person but for the sake of an intended nation or greater still the divine plan of salvation for which God wanted to use Abraham. The prosperity preachers view the inception of the covenant wrongly to mean personal prosperity but this is an erroneous interpretation of its application to the Christian life. For example, Kenneth Copeland wrote in his book *The Laws of Prosperity*, "Since God's covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now!"<sup>16</sup> In the same vein, Edward Pousson's application of the Abrahamic covenant goes thus: "Christians are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith. This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked primarily in terms of material entitlements." In other words, the prosperity gospel teaches that the primary purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham materially. Since believers are now Abraham's spiritual children, we have inherited these in financial blessings.<sup>17</sup> This is self-contradictory. Some of these theologians cannot even differentiate between spiritual and material or even economic blessings. To worsen this anomaly, these preachers and theologians find false solace in the letter of Paul to the Galatians (3:14) which refers to the blessings of Abraham that would come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus. Is it not funny that these theologians ignore the second half of the verse that refers to the promise of the Spirit to be received? It is very clear that St Paul is clearly reminding the Galatians of the spiritual blessing of salvation and definitely not the material blessing of wealth.

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<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Pousson, *Spreading the Flame* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.158.

While it is good and even praiseworthy that these prosperity theologians or preachers recognize much of Scripture is the record of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant and are so much ready to lay claim to those promises and their fulfillment, it must also be stated that is equally bad that the orthodox interpretation of these scripture is not maintained but distorted to fit personal fulfillments.<sup>18</sup>

Another mistake these theologians or preachers make is the misunderstanding of the essence of the theology of atonement. They claimed that both physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the atonement. Copeland is actually of the opinion that the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, *and 'poverty'* on Jesus at Calvary. Like many in his category, who had a wrong notion of the life of Jesus, John Avanzini said, Jesus had "a nice house," "a big house," "Jesus was handling big money," and he even "wore designer clothes." With this kind of the misunderstanding of the life of Jesus, one should not be surprised to see a misconception of essence of his death and how that kind of theology could mislead the believer. The scripture used on this claim is 2 Corinthians 8:9, which reads, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich." While it is easy for an amateur in the knowledge of the scripture or a fraudster to believe or think Paul was teaching about an increase in material wealth, a contextual reading reveals he was actually teaching the exact opposite principle. He was teaching the Corinthians that since Christ accomplished so much for them through the atonement, they should empty themselves of their riches in service of the Savior. They seem not to see that few verses away from the above verse, where the same great Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to give their wealth away to their needy brothers saying, "that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack" (2 Cor. 8:14).<sup>19</sup>

Another interesting characteristic of the prosperity theologians is their seeming obsession with the act of giving. Falling back on the verses like, "Give, and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will they give into your bosom. For with the same measure you measure it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38) These preachers will urge the believers to give generously to the church (hardly to the needy on the street or sick in their homes and hospitals or prisoners in the cells) and bamboos them with pious statements like, "True prosperity is the ability to use God's power to meet the needs of mankind in any realm of life" or "We have been called to finance the gospel to the ends of the world." While such statements may appear creditable, laudable or even admirable, the motive behind them is built on anything but philanthropic or evangelization. Robert Tilton drew from

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<sup>18</sup> This important covenant is mentioned numerous times in the writings of the prosperity teachers, i.e., Gloria Copeland, *God's Will is Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1973), 4-6; Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974), 51; idem, *Our Covenant with God* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1987), 10; Edward Pousson, *Spreading the Flame* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 158; and Kenneth Copeland, *The Troublemaker* (Fort Worth, TX: Kenneth Copeland Publications, n.d.), 6.

<sup>19</sup> John Avanzini, "Believer's Voice of Victory," program on TBN, 20 January 1991. Quoted in Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 381.

Mark 10:30 what he called “Law of Compensation.” According to this law, Christians should give generously to the church because when they do, God gives back more in return. This, in turn, leads to a cycle of ever-increasing prosperity. This is the driving force behind this teaching. Little wonder, Jones cynically remarked “In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.” It’s evident, then, that the prosperity gospel’s doctrine of giving is built on faulty motives. When Jesus taught his disciples about giving, he did not teach them to give in the hope of returns or compensations; he taught them to give, hoping for nothing in return (Luke 10:35). Meanwhile, prosperity theologians teach their disciples to give because they will get a great return<sup>20</sup>.

James 4:2, “we have not because we ask not,” is another of the many misconstrued, misinterpreted or manipulated parts of the scripture. True to the scripture and in fairness to prosperity gospel preachers, this verse encourages the believers to pray for personal success in all areas of life. Nothing indeed is wrong with a believer asking for personal blessing, but when as Creflo Dollar writes, “When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass. . . . It is a key to getting results as a Christian;” then something is at stake. This kind of understanding of the message of Christ has much to desire.<sup>21</sup> It is not in the spirit of the Gospel. The implication of this truncated theological mentality is that prayer in the hands of the prosperity gospel’s adherent, whether the preacher or the believing audience, has become a tool believers can use to oblige or compel God to grant their desires. With this kind of mentality in prosperity theology, man, not God has become the focal point of prayer. One would need to ask the prosperity preachers who use James 4:2 whatever happens to the very next verse, that is, the second half of James’s teaching on prayer: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James. 4:3). Surer than their belief or thought is the fact that God does not answer such venal or self-seeking requests that do not glorify, honor or reverence his holy name. The Scripture does, of course, encourage believers to make their petitions known to God as stated in Phil 4:6, but prosperity gospel trend focuses too much on man’s material desires such that it encourages selfish, shallow, superficial prayers that do not bring God glory. Prosperity doctrine of faith, leads to a futile task of people attempting to manipulate God to get what they want. A Christian should genuinely consider the manner of Christ which says “not as I will Lord, but Your will be done,” (Matt 26:39) who also teaches his disciples the same in the ‘Lord’s Prayer.’<sup>22</sup>

The prosperity gospel maintains the redemption in Christ Jesus is also redemption from financial poverty. This is backed up by 2 Corinthians 8:9, where Paul says: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich.” What an appealing statement to both the poor and the rich as it seems to mean the poor will become rich and rich become richer. After all, Jesus also says those who leave their house or land or brothers or sisters or father or mother for the sake of the gospel

<sup>20</sup>Robert Tilton, *God’s Word about Prosperity* (Dallas, TX: Word of Faith Publications, 1983), 6.

<sup>21</sup>Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 22.

<sup>22</sup>David Jones.



will receive a hundredfold return. (Matthew 10:29-30). Many preachers have taken advantage of this to lard money out of Christians by making them believe if they give to their churches, God would give them a hundredfold return. But they forget Jesus is talking of the spiritual returns that would come to them and that is for the sake of the gospel. Becoming rich at the expense of their congregation through the art and act of fleecing the flock by the prosperity preachers is now justified by these texts. Marcus Bishop says unapologetically: "Financial prosperity is just as much a part of the Gospel as anything else... I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm not ashamed of prosperity. I'm not ashamed that Jesus bought and paid for me to be wealthy. Let me just tell you from the heart of God, preachers are supposed to be rich."\* Kenneth Copeland echoes him as he also maintains: "You can draw on heaven like a magnet. We don't have to wait until we get to heaven to get God's blessings. Now's when we need them."<sup>23</sup>

Preaching to a large congregation of Christians at the dawn of the propagation of prosperity Gospel or theology in the early twentieth century, Charles Spurgeon expressed his opinion thus:

I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth. You will say, 'Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?' You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God. But what I said was that to live *with the object* of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian."<sup>24</sup>

Any true Christian with the understanding of message of the Good News proclaimed by Christ would stand by the opinion of Spurgeon. He was very fair to anyone who through a genuine understanding, legitimate interpretation and the sincere followership of the scripture becomes wealthy. He however did not spare those who got theirs otherwise. Indeed, nothing would be so anti Gospel and anti-Christian than deceiving the people of God through the manipulation of the His message to amass wealth and then go on to stamp it with the cloak of legitimacy in the word of God. God abhor such as it is seen in the story of religious immorality of Amaziah who was not sent but claimed to be sent or in the story of Gehazi who collected the wealth otherwise rejected by his master.

For the sake of clarity, it should be summarily reiterated again that two things are indeed wrong with the prosperity theology as seen in the recent trend. One, it takes advantage of the condition of the poor and the fear of insecurity of the rich to extort from them and legitimizing it in the name of the Gospel. This is very wrong. Any genuine preacher of the Gospel should preach, teach and help the people of God whether poor or rich, whether ignorant or informed to understand the place of the word of God and God himself in their situation rather than use them to seek his own advantage or material advancement. Two, these preachers have made the material blessing an end itself such that it is now what should be sought after. This invariably

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<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Copeland.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Carted, ed., *2,200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles H. Spurgeon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 216.

means that the fact of salvation of the soul is no longer the ideal and the goal of the Gospel that Jesus brought and preached rather it is the here and now material wealth and health of the believer. This is not the message that Christ of the Christians preached, lived and died for. Now all is deceit in high places and giving false hope to the people and their lives, in the majority, have no transformation either physical or spiritual because they live on false hope. Prophet Jeremiah expressed the mind of God clearly on this kind of faith, "They give useless medicine for my people's grievous wounds, for they assure them all is well when that isn't so at all!" (8:10-11). This is exactly what these preachers are doing; deception, cheating, robbing and extortion of the poor helpless but unsuspecting congregation who see these preachers as mouthpiece of God.

### **The Effects of Prosperity Gospel Preaching on National Developments**

If effect is viewed in terms of its meanings as result, outcome, end-product or consequence; it then indicates that it is in two forms of either positive or negative or the two together. As such one expects to see the good and the ugly sides of the effects of prosperity theology on national development. In fact, Kituase from the result of his research found that prosperity theology and its tool, that is, prosperity preaching has challenged endemic poverty through its emphasis on spiritual and economic empowerment programmes of the prosperity purveyors which is engendering remarkable social, economic and spiritual transformation in the Nigerian society.<sup>25</sup> Looking around the country today, one would see a number of universities that have sprung up under the proprietorship of these prosperity preachers. This can be considered under national development since as many Nigerian who can afford their cost go for them. On the spiritual level also, it is very glaring that majority of their adherents have learnt to trust and look up to God for their needs. This is a great achievement in the confirmation and fulfillment of Karl Marx's axiom that religion is an opium. There are other handful pieces of engagements such as providing employments members in church activities. These have helped to cater for the welfare of these members who otherwise would have resulted to begging or violence on the streets and thereby solving, at least, some economic and psychological problems.

There are however two ways to the negative aspect of this prosperity theology and preaching. One is the theology of giving and the other is the theology of expectation of be false hope. On the former, the prosperity preachers' undue or over emphasis on giving (now popularly called sowing of seed) as an investment for future prosperity backed up wrongly with misinterpretation or manipulation of the Scriptures by the same "holy men of God" is resulting to misinformation and misapprehension of people about prosperity and this has had and continues to have negative influence on a wide scale of the Nigerian Christians families and churches financially, socially and spiritually to the sole advantage of the preachers. On the later, recent trend of things in Nigeria show that there seems to be a gradual pattern swing or paradigm shift in the orientation and inclination of people from hard labor to idleness and from holiness to worldliness just because people are now being taught to expect much fruit from little labour or no labour at all in the name of miracle. There is no longer emphasis on hard work to profit and gains or reward.

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<sup>25</sup> Kituase, p. 3

This is happening to verse majority of the Nigerian population, especially the many jobless graduates and other able-bodied youths who should otherwise be self-employed or gainfully employed in industries or production sector of the economy but lurking around churches looking for or expecting miracles. It is disheartening to know that it is now on the pulpit that such negative, deceitful and fruitless encouragement are being proclaimed and propagated. One would expect otherwise.

If there is any fitting place and occasion where truths of life and nature is to be proclaimed one would look straight to the pulpit. This theological trend has not in any way encouraged national development. About these massive young able-bodied but jobless people filled with false hope, what can one say, Nigeria, 'behold your glory being slain upon the mountains. If one should cast a glance at the special programs and outreaches organized by these prosperity churches, one will discover the emphasis is not on righteousness or the kingdom of God. Instead, banners, posters, handbills and radio jingles proclaim "Unceasing Showers of Blessing," "Twenty-Four Hour Miracles;" or "Stupendous Breakthroughs." None of them would ever say, Take Your Cross and Follow Me. They are all full of promises they cannot deliver. Jesus does not promise us a rose garden in this life. Instead he tells his disciples: "In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." (John 16:33). One should ask whatever happens to such maxims as "no pain no gain" or "no cross no crown." This generation of young (even elderly) Nigerians created by prosperity launchers does not believe in suffering or struggle before victory.

It is very disheartening that these prosperity preachers, especially here in Nigeria, would not allude to models and likes of Anthony Elumelu, Dangote, Alakija who are successful tycoon, or Usain Bolt, Serena Williams, Tiger Wood of the world of sport. They won't talk about Steve Jobs, Bill Gates or the young people in Silicon Valley reshaping our world ever new inventions and innovations. They won't talk about young American scientists spending endless hours in search of a cure to diseases killing in the Tropical African region; or talk about Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or Ben Okri of the literature world or academic world; or the many young men and women who have defiled all odds and became successful through hard work, creativity and dedication... and neither would they ask members to emulate the spirit of these individuals. They would rather talk about one Sister Faith who got a job she was not the most qualified because she prayed and fasted; or Brother Prosper who became an instant millionaire because he sowed seed with his salary; or Mr. Miracle who after anointing two of his children got admission into the university or Mama Esther whose business boomed everywhere after paying her tithe even without a business plan. To these prosperity preachers, the only way to prosper is by paying tithe and sowing seeds. So, they will never talk about those who have through hardworking and dedication placed themselves in the world map or Guinness Book of Records. It is as if Nigeria has a different God, one who only blesses the first thirty people that rushed to the altar to drop N1bn as seed. It is like the God of Nigeria abhors creative thinking, hardworking and dedication but remunerates only those who sow seeds and make offerings as well as those who blab the loudest "I am a billionaire" or "I claim it" on Sundays in the Church and do nothing but rest for the rest of the week. It is only in Nigeria one expects God

to come down and help his creature to do what they can do or what use the talent He already gave them and still Him to bless them because they go to the church to shout "Daddy, I receive it." This kind of mentality has led to a new breed of mentally lazy and derailed young people who mistake God as a rewarder of mediocrity. This is the greatest disservice to national development.

The average believers of the prosperity theology and preachers have reduced themselves into jokers or laughing stock and mudding the name of the Christian religion simply because they have refused to see they are indolent, reluctant or sluggish enough or not even ready at all to use their commonsense, brains, hands and other faculties accordingly. Consequently, majority continue to experience no transformation in their lives but remain in their abject poverty while the preachers smile to the bank every Monday morning or receive alert on their bank accounts. Rather than people working and developing the economic and social structure of the nation, they are waiting for miracles. Hence, the pace of development in the country is slow. Minds and abilities are not developed. May be, it will take an angel to come from heaven to tell them that irrespective of one's creed, faith or religion, blessings and favours follow the one who uses his or her talents and become useful to him/herself and to the society. The effect of this on the nation is the negative, many of the nation's human resources and potential are wasting away. It will not be wrong, in view of this, to conclude that despite the recognition of some positive progress experienced in the prosperity gospel trend the impacts on the other hand are more damaging than beneficial in Nigeria as many more people are embracing this mediocrity mentality and becoming less productive.

In a fractured Nigeria, where ethnic group is pitted against ethnic group, race against race, corruption abounds almost everywhere, people against government against private enterprise, women against men, the church is looked up to in re-orientating minds positively in collaboration with the government for a revamp and not to take undue advantage of the situation. No other ministry of the church is greater than this. But the reverse is the case as prosperity teachers are taking advantage of the situation to amass wealth. They are preying on the gullibility of the ignorant congregation to skin and scrape them to the bone. They milked their poor (as well as the rich) congregation to the point of nakedness only to enrich themselves and earn fame as the richest preacher. On record, it is common to see the names of our prolific preachers competing for who is the richest and not who is the holiest or who has impacted most on the nation. Yet, majority of the members of the church whom they collect tithes and donations from find it difficult to feed well or pay school fees of their children. Meanwhile, the children of the preachers even think it is an insult to study in Nigerian schools. They are too much for that. One will wonder what the message they preach about humility and contentment and prudence is . How can a nation grow under such a legacy?

There is no doubt that the values of Christianity in Nigeria in the last four decades have experienced serious damage because of the different gospel preached by these prosperity preachers. This, by extension, has negatively imparted on the moral value of people and when the moral level of a society become decadent, it will, by extension, affects other forms of

development. No doubt, this is playing out in Nigeria today as one can see not only in the spiritual, but also, most affectedly the socio-political and economic sphere. Spiritually, the content of prosperity gospel as proclaimed has played down the importance of holy living in the life of believers. Material satisfaction rather has replaced heavenly values and love of neighbor. Self-love or selfish love has replaced the spirit of communal living or engagement where one lives for the other or for his/her country.

It is however unfortunate that the Nigerian Christianity today is blemished by superfluous theologies and ideologies and most Christians are living below the biblical standard while the faith is now made to be superficial and wobbling because it is based on prosperity alone. Evangelical Christianity, according to Tozer, is now tragically below the New Testament Standard. Worldliness, as he said, is now an acceptable way of live and it is rated high above the Gospel values. Our religious mood is social instead of spiritual. We have lost the art of worship.... carrying out religious activities after the model of the modern advertiser. Our literatures are shallow and scarcely anyone appears to care. Many have been perverted by the new doctrines of this faith movement. Christian successes are now being measured by the types of car one has and rides, the type of house one dwells and clothing put on. Being poor is now seen as an effect of sin and lack of faith, (a kind of recession into the Old Testament mentality that Jesus condemned in the New). One can agree no less with the warning of Tozer that the sooner we redeem or have a better kind of Christianity within another half century, we may have no true Christianity at all.<sup>26</sup>

Most Christians in Nigeria today are lacking spiritually, having wrong concept of God and that of themselves; yet multiplying the number of half-Christians is not enough and proliferating demi-god preachers and religious leaders would only continue to swell the evil. Just as many of our political leaders are guilty of voracious want of money, many of our religious leaders and especially the prosperity preachers are equally guilty of unappeasable want of money in the name of propagating the gospel or in the name of God. The spiritual leaders, who are supposed to support the efforts of political leaders to lead the country to greatness and where possible show the way, are themselves guilty of the same sin. The truth is, genuine Christianity builds the nation because it encourages hard work, dedication, creativity and productivity not mediocrity or patchiness.

Socially, mention has been made of certain positive contributions of these faith movements to national development. But as good as these social contributions may be, it would not yield the desired fruit if it had no spiritual values to the people and the nation. It remains at the level of "Social gospel."<sup>27</sup> Even if it is presumably agreed that the aim of the prosperity gospel preachers is to improve the society, but it cannot be achieved when the Christian values of dignity of labour, good conduct and relationship with others are not encouraged. This perhaps may account

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<sup>26</sup>A.W. Tozer, "The First Obligation of the Church," Herald of His Coming January 2002, 4.

<sup>27</sup>Melvin L. Defleur, *Sociology: Human Society* (Dallas: Foreman and Company, 1976), 489

for the crimes and other social problems we have in Nigeria today.<sup>28</sup> The Nigerian situation is that, the rich are becoming richer, while the poor are growing poorer by the day. The complete and genuine gospel teaches help for the poor. For Jesus, genuine concern for the poor and the needy of the world is real Christianity. Regrettably, the fact remains that the concern for the poor, a major biblical theme, has not received adequate attention by the churches.<sup>29</sup> This theology encourages prosperity but there is little or no emphasis on helping the poor, perhaps because they are seen as sinners.

Psychologically, the prosperity gospel trend has affected the way people think. Most Nigerians now, especially young people believe they have to be rich by all means. According to Folarin, the very problem of the message as advocated by David Oyedepo and others is that “it is the gospel that defines poverty as sin.”<sup>30</sup> According to him, two points sum up this definition: It is exclusively financial, and it neglects the spiritual well-being of the people.<sup>31</sup> This conception has greatly affected the church on the sort of Christians she now produces. A good sign that shows that the Christian psyche of many Nigerians is getting more and more derailed is the way and the rate members run from one denomination of faith to the other seeking prosperity or freedom from sickness, demon oppression, and poverty. Although, some of the times, these preachers have recorded some breakthrough, however, it should be frankly said here that solutions to these problems lie more outside the church. Where then is the solution? What is to be done?

### **What is To Be Done?**

It is high time Nigerians began to look for solution to their problems at the right place at the right time. Trooping to the church at every slight is discomfort as if preachers and religious leaders are medical doctors, technology experts, political actors or economy gurus. While one may not dispute that in any of these a religious leader could be gifted and assist but his calling is predominantly to show the way in celestial matters while terrestrial matters are secondary. The way out should be seen in other nations put the right peg in the right hole. Advance civilization would rather seek solution in researches in medicine, advancing technology, boosting agriculture, profitable and veritable educational system, industrial revolution which invariably create more jobs and engage the youth, create enabling atmosphere for innovation, creativity and critically and positively engaging the psyche of the youth. Rather than seeking solution to the Nigerian problems in the church alone, government should engage creation of feasible economic policies and programmes and monitoring such to a good end or the goal intended. There should be less talk and more actions. The church should stop or should be stopped from the act and art of deceiving and extorting innocent people in the name of God.

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<sup>28</sup> “Sociology,” in World Book Encyclopedia (Chicago: World Book-Child Craft International Inc., Volume 8, 1981), 458.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine U. Nebechukwu, “Solidarity with the Poor: Christian Response to Poverty” (African Theological Journal Vol. 19, No. 2, 1990), 98.

<sup>30</sup> G.O. Folarin, “The Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria: A Re-Examination of the Concept, Its Impacts and Evaluation” [www://http://www.cybesource.org](http://www.cybesource.org), 1

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,

Proper social and religious regulation should be enacted to guide the activity of churches especially those who take from the sweat of the helpless people and give nothing back to the society but only to service their own selfish ego. Stop preaching fears and stop focusing on what the devil or witches did, does or would do. Instead they should preach positive news and focus on the community such as hard work, dedication, creativity, commitment, perseverance and responsibility. The church and its message should not just focus on tithing and sowing of seeds breakthrough, miracles and wonders. Religious leaders can encourage and promote good communities' initiative such as cooperative societies, creativity and innovations instead of waiting for government to what they can do for themselves. The church and her preachers should be preaching the gospel of hard work, encourage production of goods and services, stimulate in their members critical thinking analysis, strategy, visibility plans, system building, market and customer analysis and the process involve in production of goods and services. When the church encourages this, it helps in creating noble wealth.

It is high time the Nigerian society through a conscious and concerted effort began to re-orientate the derailed and misguided psyche of the precious youth by the manipulative prosperity preachers and dubious political elites. Not to tackle this is to ask for more chaos and less national development. Churches should stop glorifying riches which is required through miraculous sources. Christianity has played a big role to the fall of Africa today but that is not what it is intended. Spreading messages of instant success have met with generation of people who are just in for instant result, immediate relief and effortless profit.

Take for example, during the outbreak of Ebola disease in Nigeria, imaging if all Nigerian could do was going to church pray, then expect miracles, what would have happened? Prayer without work is useless. Prayers alone do not heal diseases and one should know that you do not need the pastor's blessing to create wealth in life. Wealth and developed cities don't come by miracle or magic in life. Religious superstition such as the shout of I received it, and loudest shout of Amen are not enough to neither put food on the table nor fulfill one's wishes.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria does not need an angel to remind her that prayer without work is emptiness. This is a Christian axiom of which truism is proven. True Christianity must and can only produce productive youths. For Nigeria to be globally competitive, education alone is not enough, as one can see in teeming thousands of jobless graduates. The nation needs to nurture creativity, innovations and good governance. True Christianity must produce productive youths. Any country that builds more churches than industries, school, hospital, research institutes is bound to fail. Any nation that invests more on churches than it invests on her youth is bound to experience mediocrity and endure restiveness from which even the church cannot rescue her. Nigeria should invest more of her resources on human, capital and practical projects which will save her future. Spending billions to build religious edifices (like in the recent case of Akwa Ibom state building an international worshipping centre worth of N24bn) when thousands of the indigenes are without jobs and outstanding workers' salaries have not been paid for months is nothing but an

aberration. God does not need such a project when his children: lacking families, the widows, orphans and the lakes are going hungry. Building morality and inculcating the sense of value into the mindset of Nigerians should be restored. A nation that is beset by moral decadence and bedeviled by loss of values cannot stand the test of viability and development. The brothers who became a millionaire by simply sowing a seed does not help build a better community and the message of such success should not be spread and showcased. Instead, the applause should go to someone who has succeeded by hard work and perseverance. It is time to stop glorifying corrupt church leaders (or politicians) who fat feeds on the sweat of the poor or gains of corruption. It should be frankly stated that Nigeria is not setting her priorities rightly. Too many evils are being perpetrated and condoned in the name of God or propagating the Gospel. If this present trend by the prosperity theologians and preachers should continue into the next three decades without a check or without being curtailed or contained, Nigeria stands two risks: one, what is indeed called Christianity will be no more and two, national development as far as Nigeria is concerned would only be read on the pages of history books.



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