

PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

BY

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Augustine Igbo Omavuebe', is written over a horizontal line.

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It is good to give thanks to the Lord, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness every night, On an instrument of ten strings, On the lute, And on the harp, With harmonious sound. For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands (Psalm 92:1-4).

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ABSTRACT

The concept of prosperity gospel is the theology of all-inclusive success. It is anchored in God's full earthly blessings. It is understood as the Christian teaching that emphasises all-round physical well-being, such as good health, financial success, prestige, personal empowerment, long life, peace, and happiness. It is the gospel that showcases itself as an all-conquering arsenal against material crises, such as unemployment, poverty, failure, diseases, barrenness, and insecurity. Often, it is sought after by people who are seeking explanation to their meaning in life amidst their social economic challenges (Phillips, 2013, Ehioghae, & Olanrewaju, 2015 & Pickering, 2013).

A link between religion and development has long been established as shown in Weber's Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. Accordingly, religious institutions are part of the central elements of a good number of civil societies. In Africa, religious activity is one of the most associative instruments for social development. In recent times, there has been the emergence of a massive wave of the prosperity gospel ideology that is sweeping across the continent. This ideology views religion and material development as intertwined. It brings with it a new mechanism for achieving material success, by radically laying claims to divine intervention with great energy and passion. The prosperity gospel views material prosperity as the birth right of every born-again Christian, and poverty as something that should be cast out.

Prosperity gospel has brought its influence to bear on Nigerian Christianity since it emerged in 19th century. It has been able to penetrate the religious space with much audacity. However, in recent years, with the advent of prosperity gospel and its compelling force amidst the increase in social-economic challenges in Africa, scholars have started to investigate the claims of the prosperity gospel

phenomenon. Despite the audacious and appealing claims or teachings of prosperity gospel, the contradiction is that social-economic challenges such as poverty, sickness, unemployment, and security, which prosperity gospel seeks to address, remain a grave concern in Nigeria. Unemployment is at an alarming rate of 18.7%, poverty rate is at 42.4%, life expectancy is 53/6 years (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The pressing social and public question is: Why are the fortunes of people not changing despite the proliferation of prosperity gospel in Nigerian Churches? This has generated a lot of public reactions from social media, academics, and the Christian community.

Therefore, this thesis has two focal points. First, the investigation of the responses of prosperity gospel to social-economic problems in Nigeria. This will involve responding to questions like, what are the tools deployed by practitioners of prosperity gospel in fighting bad conditions? Or simply put, how does prosperity gospel seek to address social-economic crises? Second, the thesis explores the impacts of the responses of prosperity gospel to material crises. This entails assessing the phenomenon of prosperity gospel to establish whether it has been able to achieve its aims of fighting human challenges, or whether it is just a utopian package that gives false hope to adherents amidst the prevailing social-economic upheavals.

The findings of this thesis reveal that while prosperity gospel progenitors believe that prosperity gospel propels the drive for material prosperity, the responses of prosperity gospel place more stress on divine intervention, miracles, spiritual agencies, demons, wizards, and witchcrafts. Prosperity gospel spirituality nurture a religious attention that ignore functional elements that underscore social-economic advancement. The findings suggest that prosperity gospel progenitors, appropriate religious instruments, such rhematisation, pneumatic

regeneration, soteriology, prophetism, provocative giving, die by fire, prayer water, oil, and handkerchief to solve contextual battles of life. They claim that these are divine armaments capable of solving every mitigating condition of humanity. Meanwhile, the findings further reveal that while these claims are alluring, they do not practically solve bad conditions of adherents. The finding demonstrates that the content of the prosperity preaching lacks basic reality that may trigger material development. The prosperity teaching is centred on divine entities rather than the structure and system that create human suffering. Therefore, instead of motivating people to face reality, it motivates adherents to be docile as they expect a conquering entity that will miraculously stop all human woes.

The findings suggest that the response of prosperity gospel to contextual challenges in Nigeria is delusional in that it lays undue emphasis on a 'quick fix' rather than on substantive cause and effects. The lack of an empirical approach, where delayed gratification is instead the watch word in solving social-economic challenges, poses a grave danger to any growing society. The contents of the prosperity preaching do not highlight the need to plant, water, prune and wait for harvest. It presents life as a bed of roses where one just need to claim and grab whatever he wants. It presents a theology that relies solely on divine alteration of nature for one's benefits. To this end, the study opines that prosperity gospel claims are only a pacifying instrument that throws the adherent into a euphoria of false hope, whilst bad conditions persist. Prosperity gospel is a summon of the adherent to a panoply of momentary relief, which fades away when faced with reality of life.

PART I: PRELIMINARIES

This is an introductory segment. It introduces the preliminaries of the thesis. It contains two chapters – which are chapters one and two. Chapter one introduces the reader to the background of the research, the overview, and the definitions of key terms used in the thesis. Chapter two covers the methodology employed in achieving the aims and objectives of the research. This segment starts with chapter one and ends with chapter two.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

From 1967 to 1970, Nigeria was engulfed with a brutal civil war which resulted in the loss of many lives and properties. Political stability, socio-economic development, and infrastructural facilities were radically damaged (Nafziger, 1972, Ojo, & Fagbohun, 2014 & Isaac, 2013). The emerging social-economic challenges from the civil war were further complicated by the impacts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the 1980s. Since 1980s, the IMF and the World Bank have required developing nations to create conditions that were beneficial to Western corporations and governments. These conditions were known as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). SAP's requirement was for government to cut public spending - these include subsidy for medical care, food, and education. African governments responded by defunding government policies and programmes that were aimed at reducing poverty during the well-known and widespread Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Githua, 2011). Thus, in this thesis, it is proposed that the impacts of the Nigerian civil war, the International Monetary Fund and the Structural Adjustment Programme created social-economic challenges, which were the precursors to the advent of a new form of spirituality known as prosperity gospel.

Prosperity gospel is the theology that lays claim to an all-embracing success. It is the gospel that sells itself as a solution to all human woes. Therefore, as social-economic challenges such as poverty, sickness and poor health facilities, insecurity, unemployment, high mortality rate, and infrastructural decay persisted, prosperity gospel found a breeding ground. Within this social-economic context, prosperity gospel appeared, claiming to possess the solutions

to the emerging harsh conditions. Prosperity gospel was marked as an all-crushing weapon against poverty. Because there was every tendency for people to embrace the gospel of hope amid an overwhelming difficulty, prosperity gospel spread across Nigeria and subsequently popularised within the African continent in the 1970s (Illogu, 1985 & Maxwell (1998). Prosperity message penetrated and saturated the African religious spirituality (Magbadelo, 2004 & Folarin, 2006). The Pew Research Centre (2010) posits that more than half of Christian believers in sub-Saharan Africa are subscribers to prosperity gospel ideology. The notion of prosperity gospel has spread from Pentecostal milieus to the general body of African Christianity. Prosperity is now advocated in many Christians pulpits across Nigeria.

The emphasis on all-round financial success, peace, poverty alleviation, self-empowerment, longevity, divine security, and divine healing helped the rapid spread of the prosperity gospel. As social-economic challenges such as unemployment, sickness, high mortality rate and lack of basic amenities remained, and as there were quick fix promises, as well as a persistent perception that God could solve one's human challenges and protect the devotee from evil machinations, prosperity gospel flourished because it provided a spirituality that was presumed to have immediate solution to prevailing social-economic challenges (Kalu, 2000, Oyakhilome, 2019 & Omavuebe, 2021). To this end, it appealed not just to victims of social-economic difficulties, but to those who were motivated by the quest for divine protection, healing, and divine provision, or were motivated by the drive for upward economic mobility (Omavuebe, 2021). Where harsh reality persists, there is the susceptibility of people quickly adopting a contextual spirituality that addresses their condition. For this reason, Africans, especially Nigerians who wanted to conquer or escape harsh conditions embraced the prosperity gospel expression

in the 1970s (Kalu, 2000, Magbadelo, 2005, Falorin, 2006 & Kitause & Achunike, 2015).

Despite the popularity of prosperity gospel and its appealing claims to fight hardship, the contradiction is that social-economic challenges such as poverty, sickness, unemployment, and security – which prosperity gospel seeks to address – remain a sincere concern in Nigeria. In 2020, unemployment is at a frightening rate of 18.7 percent – approximately sixteen million (Trading economics, 2020). Official statistics suggests that the rate of poverty in Nigeria, between 1980 and 2010, increased by 62.76% if measured by \$1.25 USD/person/day 2005 PPP line benchmark. The corresponding number of those living in poverty increased from 39.2 million to 112.47 million. The overall poverty statistic covering the period between 2009 and 2010 (calculated using a per capita approach) was put at 62.6% (Dapel, 2018). Life expectancy is 54.07 years (Osibogun, 2004 & Nigeria Health Watch, 2020). The estimated maternal mortality ratio in Nigeria as of 2015 is about eight hundred and fourteen per one hundred thousand live births (Sageer et al., 2019). The more pressing questions are: Why are the fortunes of people not changing despite the proliferation of prosperity gospel in Nigerian Churches? This has brought about a chain of reactions and counter-reactions from academics, stakeholders, and social and mainstream media. For instance, holiness advocates argue that prosperity should be about the viability of the human soul and should be focused on attaining paradise instead of gathering material possession (Ojo, 1988 & Kumuyi, 2011). Other critics believe that prosperity gospel swindles unsuspecting worshippers of their hard-earned money and leaves them more impoverished (Kitause, 2017). Other commentators also argue that the doctrine of property gospel places more emphasis on divine intervention, miracles, spiritual forces, demons, and witchcrafts that foster a religious imagination that

disregards a functional reality underpinning social-economic development. They maintain that too much emphasis on divine intervention, monetary donations, and lack of contextual interpretation of scriptures have negative implications for large spectrum of Nigerian Christians spiritually and economically (Gifford, 2016).

Exponents of property gospel on the other hand, contend that the prosperity teaching is a replica of the protestant ethics popularised by Max Weber in his essay, "The protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism" (Weber,1905). Subscribers to such persuasion postulate that prosperity gospel is a catalyst to social-economic empowerment. Prosperity preachers predict that the liberating power of salvation is not something for the past, but for the here and now and should take place in any human condition that is characterised by social-economic challenges (Gutierrez, 1974). In this light, prosperity gossellers contend that the church has centred its message on the human soul for too long. They believe that the traditional message of the church – which is focused on the salvation of the human soul – has failed to address the social-economic plight of humanity. What is clear from prosperity gospel advocacy is that salvation is not entirely about deliverance from the Adamic sin, or atonement for the inability of the believer to meet the standard of God, as advocated by the church, but it is more about the everyday realities of life (Gutierrez, 1974 & Omavuebe, 2021). It is more about how the believer can progress in business; how to be healed of any ailment; how to bear children; how to live a long life; how to have enough money to solve basic issues of life and how to be happy in life (Gutierrez, 1974, & Amechi, 2014). It is in their opinion that prosperity gospel provokes the drive for social-economic endowment and happy life (Maxwell 1998). It is based on the raging debates among the community of scholars, politicians, policy makers, Christians, and religious leaders that this thesis

ensures the phenomenon of prosperity gospel is examined. Thus, the thesis examines the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel on social-economic challenges in Nigeria.

1.2. Overview

This thesis is segmentalized into five parts, with twenty chapters:

Part I contains chapters one and two, which detail the preliminaries.

Chapter One: This chapter introduces the reader to the background of the research, the overview and the definitions of key terms used in the thesis.

Chapter Two: This chapter covers the methodology employed in achieving the aims and objectives of the research. Literature review is used to generate secondary data, while interview, observation, and site visits are used to generate primary data.

Part II contains chapters three to eight: These six chapters lay the conceptual, contextual, and historical framework for the thesis and serves as springboard to field trip, where the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel are investigated. They focus on literature analysis, and they attempt to address the following research questions:

1. What are social-economic challenges in Nigeria? This entails exploring the contextual challenges the prosperity gospel claims to address.
2. What is prosperity gospel concept? This involves exploring the meaning of prosperity gospel, its biblical foundation, and its general features.
3. How did prosperity gospel develop in Nigeria? This is an evaluation of the historical development of prosperity gospel in Nigeria.

4. What were the factors responsible for the rapid growth of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria? This is a critical analysis of the varied factors that promoted the spread of prosperity gospel ideology.

5. What were the responses of 'mission churches' and 'Pentecostal puritan group' to the growth of prosperity gospel? The assignment here is to analyse how these faith groups viewed the phenomenon of prosperity gospel and how they reacted to it at the beginning of its spread.

In chapters three to eight, themes such as the contextualising of the Nigerian social-economic challenges; the conceptualisation of prosperity gospel; the historical development of prosperity gospel in Nigeria; precursors to the advancement of prosperity gospel in Nigeria; prosperity gospel and Pentecostal purity movement; and prosperity gospel and mission churches are examined. The research recognised a link between the impacts of the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), and subsequent political unrest and government failure with the emergence of harsh social-economic realities. These harsh social-economic conditions and failure of political leaders to address them became catalysts for the beginning of a distinct spirituality that promoted itself as a solution to all human suffering. Prosperity gospel believes that suffering is not the will of God for humanity and must be rejected. Prosperity theology advocates all-inclusive material success for every believer. Thus, prosperity is said to be a sign of a healthy relationship with God. Findings in this thesis show that proponents of prosperity gospel support their claims with the concepts of blessing in the Old Testament and salvation in the New Testament. Promoters of prosperity gospel presume that God is a liberator who liberates adherents from social-economic challenges.

As the prosperity gospel appeared on the Nigerian soil in the 1970s, factors like the International Monetary Fund, Structural Adjustment Programme, and political unrest of the 1980s, modernity, African cosmology, and indigenous Pentecostal gospel music, aided its rapid spread. Findings in this thesis suggest that this rapid spread was not without some form of reactions from the Pentecostal holiness movement and the mission churches. The theological reaction of the Pentecostal holiness spirituality was in the form of an emphasis on doctrines such as new birth, justification, sanctification, and restitution. Pentecostal purity faith groups such as the Deeper Life Bible Church, were unable to identify with the theology of prosperity. The materialistic drive of prosperity gospel was perceived as a dissuader of spiritual benefits. Rather than material prosperity, the rapture of the saints, echoed in the minds of the puritans. This eschatological motivation concerned with the last things and end time envisages a time when both the living and the dead in Christ will ascend into heaven to be with Jesus during the parousia (Jesus' second coming). To this end, Pentecostal puritans preached that material possession must be traded away in order to enter one's heavenly home. (Matthew 24:29-31 & 1Thessalonians 4:15–17).

Also, research findings in this thesis reveal that the reactions of the mission churches to the phenomenal spread of prosperity teaching in Nigeria was more of stiff opposition. As the hurricane of the prosperity ideology hit harder, the mission churches attempted to mount a defence mechanism by reinforcing their liturgical rigidity. This closed-door approach bowed to the overbearing invasion of the prosperity spirituality. Thus, the advancement of the prosperity gospel resulted in the emergence of two opposing perceptions about material spirituality. As the anti-prosperity campaigners took a radical approach in their criticism the pro-prosperity advocates took a soft posture in their advocacy.

Part III contains chapters nine to sixteen. These chapters attempt to answer the research question: “What are the responses of prosperity gospel to social-economic challenges?” The instruments for data collection are field trip, interviews, and observation. In these chapters, the thesis investigates how prosperity gospel reacts to bad conditions. Simply put, it examines the mechanisms prosperity gospel uses to conquer material crisis. The research findings in this thesis show that prosperity gospel deploys strategies like rhematisation, pneumatic regeneration, redemptive soteriology, exorcism, provocative giving, prophetism, and spiritualised items, in combating social-economic difficulties.

Part IV contains chapters seventeen to nineteen. These chapters examine the impacts of prosperity gospel on social-economic challenges. In these chapters, three theories are used to analyse data. Firstly, the Weberian hypothesis proposes that religious ideologies have correlation with social-economic prosperity of a nation. It assumes that the capitalist spirit in Europe was propelled by certain religious ethics propagated by the protestants. Such ethics included hard work, responsibility, innovation, honesty, and entrepreneurial skills. On the other hand, the research findings in this thesis reveal that the prosperity doctrine does not imbibe these work ethics, and therefore, lacks the capacity to propel industrial revolution that can bring about material prosperity. Secondly, the Marshmallow theory details the impacts of delayed gratification on personal achievement in life. The research findings in this thesis suggest that the prosperity gospel encourages a quick fix mentality instead of a delayed gratification. Therefore, the thesis proposes that a shortcut theology though can provide an immediate gratification but cannot propel a lasting material prosperity. Thirdly, the Marxist hypothesis explains a capitalist society in terms of a struggle between two classes – between the ‘bourgeoisie’ (the capitalist, or

those who hold the means of production), and the ‘proletariat’ (wageworkers, or those who sell their power of labour to survive). The class war is rooted in a situation where the bourgeoisie such as the business, factory and industry owners, exercise enormous power over the proletariat such as peasant labourers, and the bourgeoisie uses such control to exploit the proletariat by paying them low wages to maximise gains. It presupposes that this exploitative tendency creates an economic structure, where inequality is entrenched. The research findings demonstrates that the prosperity gospel does not practically solve material crisis, rather it only supplies an emotional spirituality, which helps adherent to cope, while the harsh realities persist.

Part V contains chapter twenty: This chapter summarises and concludes the arguments put forward in the thesis.

1.3. Brief clarification of key terminologies

Prosperity gospel: The concept of prosperity gospel is the theology of all-inclusive success. It is fixed on God’s full material success. It is understood as that Christian teaching that emphasises all-round physical well-being such as good health, financial success, prestige, personal empowerment, long life, peace, and happiness. It propagates all-inclusive prosperity without recourse to suffering. It is the gospel that claims to possess the solution to all human difficulties such as unemployment, poverty, failure, diseases, barrenness, and insecurity. It is appropriated as panacea to all social-economic woes by people who are seeking explanation to bad conditions in life. A detailed explanation of the concept of prosperity gospel is given in chapter four.

Social-economic challenges: These are bad conditions that can be associated with any society that can have negative impacts on everyday lives. They are

contextual woes that thwart people's quest for a successful social-economic life in a society. Poverty, unemployment, insecurity, sickness and disease, and high mortality rate are some of the social-economic challenges identified in this thesis. The Nigerian social-economic challenges prosperity gospel claims to address are extensively examined in chapter three.

African cosmology: African cosmology is how African people contemplate, perceive, conceive, and articulate the world around them. It is the cultural and sometimes the metaphysical lens through which Africans view human reality and experiences that affect their attitudinal orientation and value system.

Pentecostal purity (holiness) movement: The dividing line within Pentecostal churches is between the purity and prosperity gospel movements. While prosperity theology emphasises influence, prestige, and materialism, holiness theology focuses on asceticism. Thus, the Pentecostal holiness movement is that part of Pentecostalism that celebrates holiness and ascetism as the centrality of its theological formulary. Extensive discussion on this is detailed in chapter seven.

Mission churches: Mission churches are those churches planted in Nigeria by Europeans and American missionaries in the nineteenth century. They were the first churches that emerged in Nigeria. They are distinct from African indigenous churches. Mission churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, and the Presbyterian Church, assert their divine positioning by claiming Christological authentication and apostolic succession as other expressions, such as the prosperity theology claim the pneumatic dunamis and the workings of the Holy Spirit. The response of mission churches to the popularity of prosperity theology is discussed in chapter eight.

Rhematisation: This an act of scriptural quotation or positive declaration. It is employed to influence the material outcome of events. A detailed explanation can be found in chapter nine.

Pneumatological regeneration: Pneumatic regeneration is the extravagant claim to a divine union with God through the instrumentality of new birth, orchestrated by the pneuma – πνεῦμα, spiritus. Detailed explanation is found in chapter ten.

Redemptive setoriology: Redemptive soteriology is the systematic evaluation of the Christological import of redemption and salvation on the Christian voyage. It connotes a belief or a doctrine regarding redemption and salvation. Detailed expatiation regarding redemptive setoriology and how it is appropriated in combating social-economic upheavals are found in chapter eleven.

Exorcism: Exorcism is the casting out of demons from their host. The assumption that demons are real, and that they can possess, molest, harass, smite, and cause mysterious occurrences to their victims is the foundation for exorcism. Chapter twelve of the thesis captures the full explanation of what exorcism is.

Die by fire: This is charismatic prayer devised by adherents of prosperity gospel in combating perceived enemies. Chapter thirteen is dedicated to this spirituality.

Charismatic prophetism: In this thesis, the concept of charismatic prophetism will mean the prophetic and charismatic activities carried out by purveyors of prosperity gospel to investigate the past in order to foretell the future. How charismatic prophetism is utilised by promoters of prosperity gospel is detailed in chapter fourteen.

Spiritualised items: These are ordinary items such as oil, water, handkerchiefs, wristbands, and stickers that are blessed and imbued with spiritual powers by a religious minister for the dislodging of demonic onslaughts. Chapter fifteen examines these details.

Provocative giving: This is a type of giving that is believed can invoke God's material blessings. This doctrine espoused by adherents of prosperity gospel, and it is disguised in different forms such as the principles of sowing and reaping, seed time and harvest time, giving and receiving, and a hundredfold harvest.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

This methodology chapter details the aim, objectives, research questions, and methodology of the research work.

2.2. Aim

The aim of the research stresses the envisaged goal within the scope of the thesis. Thus, accomplishing the aim of the research work supplies answers to the research questions. The thesis has a central aim:

To explore the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel on social-economic challenges in Nigeria.

2.3. Objectives

The objectives of the research work split the research aim into various fractions and addresses them separately. The research objectives detail several steps that are taken to address the research aim. These steps are:

1. To explore the Nigerian social-economic challenges.
2. To investigate the concept of prosperity gospel, its biblical foundation, and its features.
3. To evaluate the historical development of prosperity gospel in Nigeria.
4. To examine why prosperity gospel has found so much followership in Nigeria.
5. To explore the perceptions that 'mission churches' and 'Pentecostal puritan groups' have about prosperity gospel.

6. To investigate the responses of prosperity gospel to social-economic challenges
7. To assess the impacts of the responses of prosperity gospel on social-economic prosperity.

2.4. Research questions

The research questions are stipulated investigations into the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel in Nigeria. The research questions exist within the centre of a systematic inquiry and help in clarifying and defining a route for the research procedure. The research questions are:

1. What are social-economic challenges in Nigeria? This entails exploring the contextual challenges prosperity gospel seek to address.
2. What is the prosperity gospel concept? This involves exploring the meaning of prosperity gospel, its biblical foundation, and its general features.
3. How did prosperity gospel develop in Nigeria? This is an evaluation of the historical development of the concept of prosperity gospel in Nigeria.
4. What were the factors that were responsible for the rapid growth of prosperity gospel in Nigeria? This is a critical analysis of the varied factors that promoted the spread of prosperity gospel ideology.
5. What were the responses of 'mission churches' and 'Pentecostal puritan churches' to the growth of prosperity gospel? The assignment here is to analyse how these faith groups considered the phenomenon of prosperity gospel and how they reacted to it during its rapid spread.

6. How does prosperity gospel address social economic challenges? This is to investigate how prosperity gospel responds to social-economic challenges in Nigeria.

7. What are the impacts of the responses of prosperity gospel on contextual challenges in Nigeria?

2.5. Methodologies and theoretical framework.

The methodologies of the thesis detailed the techniques the researcher adopted in identifying, selecting, processing, and analysing data about the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel in Nigeria. In other words, the methodologies of the research work helped the researcher to evaluate the validity and reliability of the research work. It directed the researcher to choose the right instruments that yielded valid and dependable outcome that achieved the research aims and objectives.

The research work adopted three primary methodologies: Literature review, qualitative interviews, and observations/site visits. I discussed these methodologies now in turn.

2.5.1. Literature review: The literature review is the exploration of secondary data collected from learned journals, textbooks, magazines, and newspapers that are relevant to area of research or theory. By extension, literature review gives description, summary, and objective analysis of secondary data in relation to the research aim of the study. Writing literature review gives an overview of sources the researcher has explored, demonstrates the researcher's familiarity with the body of knowledge and adds to the credibility of the work. It summarises prior research work and establishes how the current research work

is linked to it. It shows that the researcher has learned from other scholars in the field and the research is a starting point for innovative ideas (Fink, 2014).

A literature review might involve only a summary of key sources. However, in the social sciences, a literature review commonly has a highly organised pattern and combines summary and synthesis, frequently within specified conceptual categories or frameworks. A summary involves a recap of the important data, but a synthesis is a rearranging or re-organization of that information in a way that informs and aligns with how the researcher is planning to answer a research question or investigate a research problem. The analytical characteristics of a literature review provides new interpretation of old data or link the old with new interpretations, trace the intellectual debates and progression in the field, identify gap in literatures, and locate the current research work within the context of existing literatures (Jesson, 2011 & Hart, 1998).

In postgraduate research work, the review of related literature can become a project. This is where the researcher's talent of understanding, interpretations, analysis, synthesis, clarity of thoughts and development of arguments are demonstrated. Conducting and reporting literature review can provide clarification to the researcher's thoughts about the study. It can as well establish a theoretical or conceptual framework within which to analyse and present the research findings (Jesson, 2011 & Hart, 1998 & Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001).

From the foregoing theoretical background of literature review, the traditional or narrative approach, which involves a conceptual, critical, and objective analysis of related theological, historical, political, sociological materials was employed in this research work. The literature review provided a new interpretation of existing data and traced the intellectual debates and progression in the field. It also identified gap in data and tried to fill this gap in

literature. Thus, the literature review located the thesis within the context of existing literatures. It summarised prior research works and established how the thesis is linked to them. The review of related materials gave a conceptual framework and laid the background for the fieldwork (collection of primary data) and how these data are analysed.

2.5.2. Literature summary, gap in literature, and prelude to field trip

Nafziger (1972), Ayu (2014), Ajayi (2016), Agu, Okeke, & Idike (2013), (Ojo, & Fagbohun (2014), Isaac (2013), Ochulor (2011), Ogbeidi (2012), Agbor (2012), Imhonopi & Ugochukwu (2013) and others, discussed the historic, political, and social-economic settings of Nigeria, and how these settings have impacts on its social-economic viability. They argue that the Nigerian social-economic development is muted by government failures, corruption, tribal politics, nepotism, lawlessness, political desperation, electoral violence, and thievery. Achebe (1984), Ochulor (2011), Ogbeidi (2012), Agbor (2012) and Efebeh (2015) believe that these factors resulted in social-economic challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, road accidents, poor health facilities, and high mortality rate. Okwori (1995), (Maxwell (1998), Illogu (1985), and Ojo (2006), opine that these social-economic upheavals are the forerunners of the prosperity gospel spirituality in Nigeria.

The literature review provided a conceptual framework about the concept of prosperity gospel. Literatures such as Gutierrez (1974), Phillips (2013), Ehioghae, & Olanrewaju (2015), Amechi (2014) and Pickering (2013) link prosperity gospel with material success. They presume that prosperity gospel is the Christian doctrine that is centred on material prosperity, such as wealth, good health, peace, employment, longevity, and childbearing. The literature review also traces the historical development of the ideology of the prosperity gospel in

Nigeria. It reveals that there are two popular suggestions as to how prosperity gospel emerged in Nigeria. The first school of thought, expressed by Gifford (1990), Achunike (2007), Emeka (2012) and echoed by Kituase (2017), posits that the prosperity theology was originated in America and imported into Nigeria in the 1970s. The second view, expressed by Gaiya (2002), Kalu (2000), Magbadelo (2005), Falorin (2006), Ojo (2006) and Onwu (2006), proposes that the prosperity theology was originated and nurtured in Africa. The later scholars trace the origin of prosperity gospel in Nigeria to social-economic changes that emerged after the Nigerian civil in 1970, and the impacts of the International Monetary Fund and the Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s.

The literature review also identifies several factors that propelled the rapid spread of the prosperity theology in Nigeria. Maxwell (1998), Kalu (2008) and Dora & Onah (2014) identify the spread of Pentecostal prosperity and faith ministries as a catalyst to the spread of prosperity doctrine. Endong & Patrick (2015), Udok & Odunuga (2016) and Adeola (2020) link the development of prosperity gospel to popularity of indigenous prosperity gospel music. Lambert (1999), Nwanfor (2015), Nwanga (2017) and Frouel (2018) see a correlation between modernity and the growth of prosperity teachings. Kalu (2002), Kanu (2013) and Rotimi, Nwadiakor & Ugwuja (2016) presume that the African cosmology plays an important role in the spread of prosperity theology in Nigeria. Other experts such as Rotimi et al. (2016), Kwateng-Yeboah (2017) and Kituase (2005), agree that prosperity teaching becomes popular where there are government failures and existential difficulties.

However, despite the good number of literatures on the prosperity gospel, there is none that has been able to evaluate the responses and impacts of the prosperity gospel on social-economic challenges in Nigeria. This is the literature

gap this thesis attempt to fill. The review of existing literatures traced the intellectual debates and progression in the field. It identified data gap and tried to fill this gap. What it means is that the thesis is located within the context of existing literatures. It summarised prior research works and established how the existing literature served as a springboard to field trip, where the methodologies of interviews, observations and site visits are deployed. The objective of this thesis is to examine the mechanisms the promoters of prosperity gospel adopt in fighting existential troubles, and how effective these mechanisms are in the fight against social-economic poverty. It is the dearth of literature in this field that informed the methodologies that are adopted in this research work. To achieve the aims of this thesis, the researcher adopted methodologies that can generate the needed data. These methodologies are – interviews, observations, and site visits.

2.5.3. Qualitative interviews: Interview is a form of conversation for gathering knowledge or information. A research interview involves both interviewer and interviewees. The interviewer co-ordinates or manages the process of the conversation and asks relevant questions, while the interviewee, responds to questions asked. Though the interviewers are regarded as the most active players in the generation of data, they must see knowledge as being constructed in the process of interviewing through a collaborative effort between the respondent and the interviewer. Interviewing has multiple forms and uses. The most popular form of interviewing is face-to-face, which could be on a group or an individual basis. Other forms of interviewing include telephone survey, internet interview, mailed or questionnaire Interview (Punch, 2006 & Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The aim of the research interview is to evaluate the views, perspectives, experiences, motivations, and beliefs of individuals on specific phenomenon or matter. Qualitative method, such as interview, is said to provide a 'deeper' knowledge of social or religious phenomenon than would be gotten from entirely quantitative methodologies, such as questionnaires. Interview is, therefore, most suitable, where there is little knowledge about the phenomenon being investigated, or where detailed insight is needed from individual respondents. Interview is also particularly suitable for investigating sensitive topics, where interviewees may not be willing to talk about such matters in a group setting. This was the basis for choosing interview method in this thesis to allow respondents to be able to talk and express their understanding, experiences, beliefs, and motivations about prosperity gospel phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003 & Silverman, 2011).

There are three basic ways of designing Interviews depending on the needs the researcher is attempting to address – structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. In structured interviews, the interviewer asks a set of standardised, predetermined questions in a specific order about a phenomenon. The interviewees need to choose their answers from a list of available options. Semi-structured interviews are carried out when the interviewer or researcher uses a set of predetermined questions and the interviewees answer using their own words. A topic guide could also be used to serve as a checklist to make sure all interviewees provide information on the same phenomenon or topics. The interviewee's answer dictates the interviewer's next question or supplementary questions for clarifications. Semi-structured interviews are useful if there is the necessity to have in-depth knowledge or information about a phenomenon from different respondents in a systematic manner. The unstructured format allows the researcher to

investigate all the reasons behind respondents' answers. This helps the researcher with the explanatory premise, which is valuable component of qualitative research (Punch, 2006, Ritchie & Lewis, 2003 & Easwaramoorthy & Zarinpoush, 2006).

In unstructured interviews, the interviewer does not have predetermined questions, no list of options, no restriction, and no specific guidelines. Unstructured interviews are non-standardised and open-ended. The interviewer starts by asking a few broad questions to engage the interviewee in informal, open, and spontaneous conversation. The interviewer asks further questions to gain deeper insight about the topic. Unstructured interviews are particularly useful for getting the stories behind interviewees' experiences and possibly where there is little knowledge about the phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

In this thesis, the researcher adopted the individual face-to-face form of interviewing. Since physical interaction is an essential element of interview, which is interactional, flexible, and could generate richer data, where language and meaning is investigated at deeper level (Punch, 2006). Thus, the face-to-face interview was adopted so that the researcher could control the interactions, to make sure that the targeted interviewees were the respondents. It also afforded the researcher the opportunity to use probe mechanisms and to ask relevant questions, which generated the needed data.

Similarly, the research questions were semi-structured in format and the interview schedules were designed in such a way that the researcher asked the questions that were likely to yield as much information about the study as possible and was able to address the objectives and aims of the research. As Britten (1999) suggests, in a qualitative interview, good questions should be open-ended, requiring more than a yes or no answer, sensitive, and

understandable. It is in this persuasion that the researcher adopted semi-structured questions. This allowed the respondents to talk in some depth, choosing their own words (Kvale, 1996). The researcher started with questions that interviewees could answer easily before attempting more difficult topics. This was to help put participants at ease, build up good rapport and confidence to generate rich data that subsequently developed the interview further (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2002).

To ascertain the suitability of any research methodology, it is often wise to first pilot the methodology on several participants before data collection proper (Punch, 2006). In this regard, the researcher piloted the interview schedule on four persons, and this allowed the researcher to ascertain if the schedule was clear, suitable, understandable, and proficient for answering all the research questions, and to determine if any change to the interview arrangement might be made.

Furthermore, sampling is unbelievably valuable in qualitative research. The researcher cannot study every individual in everywhere doing everything. In this vein, sampling is needed as a way of making decisions about which individuals to interview. However, there is some difficulty in giving a general description of sampling because of variability. Punch (2006) believes that a good qualitative sampling should be concerned about the validity of the research design, which stipulates that sample should correspond with other elements of the study. Punch suggests that there must be internal consistency and a logical coherence among the study components. It means that the sampling plan and structures such as actors, processes, settings, and events must be in consonance with the purpose, the aim, and the research questions of the study. It should be clear

which aspect, case, or incident to study. In other words, the research questions should provide direction to the sampling plan.

Given this theoretical framework and the fact that the researcher was investigating a phenomenon of prosperity gospel that is a popular religious phenomenon in Nigeria, the research was carried out across six churches: The Winners' Chapel, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ Embassy and Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, Anglican Church, and Baptist Church. The researcher carried out eighteen interviews, and three participants each were drawn from each of these churches. The participant churches were made up of four prosperity preaching Pentecostal churches and two mission churches. These four Pentecostal churches: Winners' Chapel, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ Embassy and Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, are the epicentre of prosperity theology in Nigeria. Thus, twelve participants were drawn from them. These four denominations were chosen because they are the chief purveyors and adherents of prosperity gospel and were felt to be better positioned to give their experiences, beliefs, motivations, and views about the phenomenon of prosperity gospel and how it has impacted upon their lives either practically or utopianly.

Furthermore, the mission churches, the Anglican Church, and the Baptist Church, do not adopt prosperity gospel as the centre of their liturgies, but have a soft spot or critical view of it. To this end, six participants were drawn from these two denominations. These mission churches do not preach radical prosperity gospel, and thus were able to give a critical but unique perspective to their motivations, experiences, and views about the prosperity gospel. The choice of the two mission churches was also to capture all divergent views about the phenomenon of prosperity gospel to allow for a balanced analysis. Instead

of having the interviews concentrated on the prosperity preaching Pentecostal churches only, which could generate one sided data, the researcher extended the interviews to the mission churches, represented by the Anglican church and the Baptist Church, to generate a balanced data. In clarity, the researcher had eighteen participants from the six denominations (Winners' Chapel, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ Embassy, Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, Anglican Church, and Baptist Church), with each having three participants. Participants were of different age, occupation, and gender. However, because of anonymity, these personal data were not published. Participants were involved based on their consent to be interviewed. The researcher approached participants individually through the existing structure of the mentioned churches. Individual participants were approached one on one, the church was just the platform to use. The researcher only got three participants from each church and was therefore not necessarily speaking to the whole congregation.

To understand meaning, the interview data must be captured in the natural words of the researcher (Silverman, 2011). To this end, all interviews were audio or visually recorded and transcribed verbatim. Because of the sensitive nature of the interview data, transcribed interviews were not attached as appendixes. This was to protect anonymity of participants. Pseudo names were used in the place of original interviewees to protect their identity.

Any recorded contribution, in written form, on tape etc., or in notes, taken from the interview by the interviewer, was used in accordance with the consent of interviewee and the regulation of the University of Central Lancashire. Interviewees were not named unless their permission was explicitly sought, and this was only done where a name was essential for the pursuit of the research

in question. This means, all data collected during this interview were anonymised.

The researcher adopted open and neutral body language or skills such as nodding and looking interested during interviews to encourage participants to talk more, elaborate and clarify points. The use of restrictive questions that could give a 'yes' or a 'no' answers were avoided. Questions that allowed participants to talk in a deeper manner were adopted. For instance, the researcher avoided questions like, has the prosperity gospel impacted on your life in any way? But instead, the researcher adopted questions such as, tell me, what impact has the prosperity gospel had in your personal life?

2.5.4. Observations and site visits: Observation is one of the most fundamental and oldest research methodologies. It engages with the collection of impressions of the world involving all human senses, especially listening, and looking in a very orderly and purposeful way to gain knowledge about a phenomenon a researcher is studying. It is the viewing of events, values, actions, norms from the perspective of the people being studied. Observational research methodology could be employed on its own or used simultaneously with other research approaches such as interviews and document analysis (Silverman, 2011).

Observation is holistic in its approach – the researcher collects data about several aspects of the research participants and settings. Researchers pay special attention to the participants or actors in a location, collecting sociodemographic information such as gender, age, class or education and descriptive information such as dressing patterns to determine who people are. Events, acts, and activities are watched and recorded to study what people are doing and with whom or for whom. Events are also watched to know what is

happening and why it is happening, and if any patterns or trends could be discerned in these activities (Punch, 2006 & Silverman, 2011). Observers pay attention to what people or participants say, the words they use, explanations and accounts they give of their behaviour and the social and personal meanings and the attitudes, beliefs, motivations that are revealed through what they say. Relationships that exist between people are explored – individually, between individuals, within groups, between people and groups or organisations. The features of the physical environment, including the objects and decorations found in it, are noted. In observational research approach, the observers attend to ordinary and less vital details, with the belief that what is and currently happening is often obvious in what people might see to be trivial and taken for granted. The first-hand knowledge of the settings allows the observer to gain more insight rather than speculating what the context is like. It provides the researcher the opportunity to know things that respondents may be unwilling to discuss in interview (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, Punch, 2006 & Silverman, 2011).

There are controlled, naturalistic or non-participant and participant observations (Silverman, 2011). In controlled observation, the schedules are highly structured and requires a pre-developed plan that is incredibly detailed. Controlled observation is more popular in quantitative research approaches. Naturalistic observation method is commonly used by social scientist and psychologists. In this technique, the researcher observes the spontaneous behaviour of participants in natural setting or surroundings. The observer simply records what is discovered in whatever way possible and appropriate. Participant observation is a variation of the naturalistic observation, here the researcher joins in to become part of the people or groups that are being studied to get a deeper insight into their lives (Punch, 2006).

Aligning with the above theoretical framework, the researcher employed the participant observational technique in this thesis. To this end, the researcher embarked on total of twelve visits to the live service of the six selected churches (Winners' Chapel, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Christ Embassy, Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, Anglican Church, and Baptist Church) to complement the eighteen interviews. This was to join the church services to observe artistic expression such as music, dance, prayers, offerings, sermons, songs, and dressings among both leaders and members of the congregations. Precisely, each of the mentioned denominations were visited twice during their church services. During observations, where the researcher needed further clarifications to certain events and religious spirituality, he probed these through personal discussions with adherents. The researcher also made 'field notes' during each observation, as this helped in data analysis process. Material such as newsletters, bulletins, and images of emblems anointed stickers, wristbands, water, and oil were also collected during site visits. Ethically, during data analysis, the researcher did not make any identifiable reference to a person's behaviour.

2.6. Justification for using eighteen interviews

2.6.1. Data Saturation

According to Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006), the centrality to the number of interviews required in academic research is to be aware of the point at which data reach saturation. Therefore, data saturation is the point at which the interviews are no longer generating new ideas even if more participants are added. Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) admit that the principle of information redundancy is a fundamental key in determining research sample size. What is

implied is that the researcher can end sampling when there is no new information generated by adding more participants.

In this thesis, the researcher adopted the principle of data saturation. Research interviews were limited to eighteen because there was no new information elicited after the eighteenth interview. At the eighteenth interview, there was informational wholeness and saturation. This suggests that the more comprehensive data and information power the eighteen interviews generated, the smaller the number of interviews conducted by the researcher. This methodology is in line with the postulation of Guest, Bunce, & Johnson (2006), and Francis et al (2010). Guest, Bunce, & Johnson recommend that twelve interviews are enough to attain data saturation. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson evaluated sixty interviews and discovered that information saturation was achieved at the twelfth interview. Also, Francis et al (2010), in their theory-driven content evaluation, discovered that information saturation was reached at the seventeenth interview. Thus, the researcher in this research work, achieved information saturation at the eighteenth interview. The researcher's analysis of data suggested that after the eighteenth interview no additional ideas (insights, dimensions, or issues) were identified. To this end, the question of "how many" interview was predicated on the richness of the information elicited and not on the number of interviews. The eighteen interviews were sufficient to allow the unveiling of new and rich insights regarding the prosperity gospel phenomenon in Nigeria. They allowed for a deep and case-oriented evaluation. The more useful data were generated from each participant, the fewer participants were added.

The eighteen interviews were conducted across six churches. Three participants were chosen from each of the six churches. Four radical prosperity preaching

churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Winners Chapel, the Christ Embassy, and the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries were chosen. The rationale for choosing these four churches was that they are the epicentre of prosperity theology in Nigeria. The interview also involved two Churches such as the Anglican church and the Baptist Church that express a soft view about the phenomenon of prosperity gospel. The rationale for adding these two churches was that they do not hold the prosperity gospel as a central spirituality in their liturgical expression but have a soft spot (middle view) for it. The rationale for choosing these six churches was based on the researcher's quest to generate a balance data that covers all strands of the prosperity gospel spirituality. A detailed explanation has been provided in page twenty-seven and page twenty-eight of the thesis. The interviews were conducted in Lagos State and Delta State respectively. A very detailed explanation behind the choice of these two locations has been given in page thirty-seven and page thirty-eight of the thesis.

2.6.2. Quality of data and depth of interviews

Sample adequacy (eighteen interviews) in this research work was achieved based on the relevance of the data generated. The researcher considered quality and trustworthiness of data over number of participants. The number of interviews was limited to eighteen in order to achieved in-depth analysis, which was fundamental to this thesis.

Additionally, the eighteen interviews were purposively selected. That is, they were selected by virtue of their ability to supply rich and quality data relevant to the ideology of prosperity gospel in Nigeria. In this view, purposive sampling as suggested by Campbell et al (2020) is at variance with probability sampling utilised in quantitative research. Purposive sampling is about the richness,

depth, quality, and relevance of data. What the investigator in this thesis subscribed to is the ethos of richness, depth, and relevance of data and not the extensiveness of participants.

Dworkin (2012) opines that in-depth interview is inevitably insightful, in that, it helps to locate highly valuable data. The researcher in this thesis focused on the depth of interviews to glean quality and relevant findings. The interviews gained deep insights because of the one-on-one method of interviewing adopted. It allowed for the exploration of themes that might not have been explored if the researcher had focused on the extensity of participants rather than intensity of insights. The intensity of data provoked the generation of detailed information about participants' motivations, experiences, opinions, and behaviours at a very deep level. This method was discussive in nature and free flowing, flowing from one question to another. It allowed participants to talk at a deeper level in order to have a complete understanding of prosperity gospel in Nigeria. A detailed explanation of the interviewing method adopted in the thesis is already given earlier on from page twenty-three to page twenty-eight.

2.6.3. Mixed methodologies

Mixing research methods elicit richer data sets that can give a better understanding of a research problem. The presumption is that mixed methods of research investigation yield more complementary evidence. In this view, the investigator generates data that are wide and deep (Tashakkori, & Creswell, 2007).

The investigator in this thesis, adopted three methodologies (literature review, interview, and observation/site visits). The three methodologies are complementary to one another. This is another reason the investigator adopted

only eighteen interviews. The interview methodology must not be evaluated in isolated; the whole research methodologies must be considered as complementary when questioning the methodological approach adopted in this thesis. The three research approaches strengthened the research findings through research analytical tool known as triangulation. The investigator has explained triangulation in detail in page thirty-five of this thesis and how he deployed it in data analysis.

The investigator's overall aim of the mixed methodological approaches was to supply a richer insight, by generating a fuller understanding that could enhance new knowledge about prosperity gospel and social-economic challenges in Nigeria. The mixed methodologies adopted in this thesis used data from literature review, interviews, and observation/site visits in one single study. This provided stronger inference instead of just one methodological approach. Practically, the investigator assumed that any unanticipated aspect of the research topic that was not captured by the interviews was captured by observation and literature review or site visits. This assumption helped to investigate the concept of prosperity gospel in relation to social-economic challenges in Nigeria in a holistic manner. This was a holistic approach in the sense that it juxtaposed data generated from the three tools (literature, interviews observation/site visits) and triangulated them to investigate similarities or differences in meaning and insights. Therefore, the eighteen interviews must not be seen as an isolative approach but must be seen strictly as a complementary approach to observation/site visits and literature review.

2.7. Triangulation: Triangulation is a process of adopting multiple sources of data generating tools, or the practice of using multiple methods when analysing generated data in order to add credibility to a research outcome (Salkind, 2010).

Triangulation analytical method was used to interpret data in this thesis. The choice of triangulation method was based on one factor: The multiple methodologies adopted during primary data generation. The research work adopted interviews, observation, and site visits methodologies. Thus, triangulation is a technique applied in analysing the results of a study that adopted different research methodologies during data collection (Flick, 2018). Thus, in the thesis, data generated from the different methodologies were juxtaposed to confirm similarity and validity. What this mean is that data collated from interviews were placed side by side data collated from observation and site visits. Triangulation was important in this thesis because it enhanced validity; it created a more in-depth understanding of the research data; and it provided a comprehensive method of understanding the research data. More specifically, triangulation helped in validating the findings of the research by making sure that the different methodologies adopted for the same phenomenon produced the same results. It helped the researcher to develop a good understanding of the phenomenon of prosperity gospel.

2.8. Thematic analysis: Thematic analysis is an analytical practice, wherein the researcher reads through a data set and identifies and groups the data set in themes according to patterns in meaning. Simply put, it is an analytical enquiry employed to identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report themes embedded within a set of data (Javadi & Zarea, 2016).

In this thesis, once collated data from interviews, observation, and cite visits have been juxtaposed, the researcher adopted a thematic approach. In this thematic approach, the researcher noticed the emergence of certain patterns and themes, such as positive confession, salvation, redemption, giving, prophecy, and prayer items. These themes were compared with every data

regenerated from the different methodologies. The researcher figured out how they all fitted together and then investigated concepts and theories that could explain these findings. In essence, what this means is that in this thematic analysis, the researcher examined a large amount of data and grouped them according to similarities. These themes helped the researcher understand and derive meaning from their contents. This thematic approach helped in making sense of interviewees' experiences, opinions, and views about the phenomenon of prosperity gospel.

2.9. Inductive content analysis: This is a type of analytical enquiry which involves a detailed reading, or examination of raw data set for the purpose of deriving theories, concepts, themes, or models through which raw data are interpreted (Elo, & Kyngäs, 2008).

Because there were no previous studies that explored the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel on social-economic challenges in Nigeria, I also adopted inductive content analysis, while evaluating primary data. The inductive evaluation enabled me to reduce generated data to a set of categories by identifying key themes during thematic analysis. My inductive analysis began with the arrangement of raw data through open coding. Through this coding, I reviewed all generated data, taking notes, and making headings as I went through transcribed interviews. I read through all data repeatedly and transcribed my notes (headings) onto a coding paper. Subsequently, the data were grouped into categories in order to examine and combine comparable headings. These headings further helped to derive concepts and theories used in the data analysis. Through this content analysis, I was able to have clear understanding of the research data.

2.10. Limitation and scope

Data collection is limited to two States in Nigeria: Lagos and Delta States. These states have a high concentration of prosperity preaching churches. The headquarters of most of the popular prosperity preaching churches, like the 'Redeemed Christian of God, the 'Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries,' and the 'Christ Embassy' are located in Lagos, with many of their branches and campgrounds scattered all over Nigeria. The presumption is that most of the theological reflections in these headquarters are replicated in the subsidiary branches. Migration from one city to another and from one village to another and the use of social media, mass media, and television channels make theological expressions travel very quickly among adherents.

There are many prosperity preaching churches in Nigeria. However, the researcher only conducted interviews and visited a sample of them in Lagos State and Delta State.

Prosperity Preaching is an ideology that is popular among Christian communities in Nigeria. There have been varied reactions to the phenomenon of prosperity gospel within different denominations. What is being studied in this thesis is not one distinct church authority, spirituality, structure, or organogram, but the ideology of prosperity preaching, using the churches where it has assumed the centrality of liturgy as a springboard.

2.11. Conclusion

Within chapter one, the reader is acquainted with the aim, objectives, research questions, and methodology adopted by the researcher. The researcher has demonstrated that the specific aim of this thesis is the examination of the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel on social-economic barriers in

Nigeria. Literature review, interviews, and site visits(observation) were deployed as methodology, while triangulation and thematic approaches were adopted for data analysis.

PART II: LITERATURE SURVEY

This part comprises of six chapters (chapters three to eight). These chapters lay down the conceptual, contextual, and historical framework for the thesis and serves as a springboard to field trip, where the responses and impacts of prosperity gospel are investigated. They focus on literature analysis, and they attempt to address the following research topics: Contextualising the Nigerian social-economic challenges, the conceptualisation of prosperity gospel, the historical development of prosperity gospel in Nigeria, precursors to the advancement of prosperity gospel in Nigeria, prosperity gospel and Pentecostal purity movement, and prosperity gospel and mission churches. This segment starts with chapter three and ends with chapter eight.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEXTUALISING THE NIGERIAN SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES.

3.1 Introduction

The inhabitants of Nigeria account for nearly half of the population of West Africa with two hundred (200) million people. It also has one of the largest concentrations of young people in the world. Nigeria is a multi-religious society that has one of the largest populations of Christians and Muslims in the world. It is a multi-tribal and multi-cultural nation, consisting of 36 semi-autonomous states and a Federal Capital Territory located in Abuja.

The first aim here is to analyse this diverse union, with regard to its historic, religious, political, and social-economic settings, and as well dissect how this diverse interaction impacts on social-economic viability of the union. The final aim is to unearth those social-economic challenges prosperity gospel claims to fight within the Nigerian configuration.

3.2 Historical setting

1960, the year Nigerian gained her independence is often suggested as the year that Nigeria was born as a distinct political nation, but it is necessary to observe that 1960 was just the zenith of several events dating back to the 1850s (Ajayi, 2016).

Before the British colonialists forcefully merged together the various ethnic nationalities and tribal groups that constitute the present-day Nigeria, they were already organised into independent kingdoms, groups, empires, clans, caliphates, emirates, cities, and states. British missionaries and traders started visiting the interior of West Africa in the early nineteenth century under the protection of the British Navy. Thus, when the British colonialists arrived at the

shores of Nigeria, on the ground, they met many autonomous groups that were often engaged in inter-tribal wars, disputes, and clashes, but in some instances with far-reaching established commercial relationships. This fragmentary context became a loophole that was utilised by the colonisers who employed several unpleasant strategies, such as plotting, persuasion, pacification, deceit, frontal assaults, and military force to conquer the nationalities before unilaterally merging them into protectorates (Ajayi, 2016). In 1851, the Colony of Lagos was created and annexed. This marked the beginning of British governance in Nigeria. In 1893, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was merged with other conquered coastal territories to form the Niger Coastal Protectorate. In 1897, the Kingdom of Benin was amalgamated as part of the Niger Coastal Protectorate. In 1900, more territories near Lagos were merged with the Niger Coastal Protectorate to become the Southern Protectorate. In 1900, the Northern Protectorate was created to keep out other European powers. In 1906, the Colony of Lagos was joined with the Southern Protectorate. So, in 1906, there existed only two Protectorates, the Southern and the Northern. In 1914, the Southern and the Northern Protectorates were merged together to form Nigeria (Nafziger, 1972 & Ayu, 2014 & Ajayi, 2016).

The administration of Southern and Northern Protectorates was kept separate until 1914 when the two protectorates were amalgamated by Lord Lugard who simultaneously became the Governor General of Nigeria. Before the amalgamation in 1914, the British Government adopted direct rule (led directly by the British Government) for the South and indirect rule (authority was delegated to the indigenous emirs) for the North. Regionalism was introduced in 1939 by the British Colonial Government and the South was divided into the Western and the Eastern Regions and the Northern Region remained undivided. Why the South was divided and the North untouched is not clear, but this might

not be unconnected with the British policy of divide and rule. The British Administration saw the educated South as a growing threat and aimed at weakening its unity, while the less educated North, being comfortable with the British indirect rule, was left undivided. So, as of 1963, after independence in 1960, there was already the existence of four regions: the Northern, Western, Eastern, and Mid-West Regions, and the Federal Capital in Lagos, where the three major groups of Hausa-Fulani, Ibo, and Yoruba ethnic groups became the major contenders for power at the centre (Nafziger, 1972 & Mbachirin, 2006).

Experts have suggested that the merger of the Southern and the Northern Protectorates, in 1914, laid the foundation for the social-political, social-economic, and social-religious problems of Nigeria (Mbachirin, 2006, Ajayi, 2016). This assertion is supported by the suggestion of Mbachirin (2006) that prior to the 1914 amalgamation, the European Colonial Nations met in Berlin, in 1884, to distribute African territories into nations and share Africa among themselves to end their territorial struggle over African territories. As documented by Mbachirin, Africans were not consulted and had no representation in that meeting. The partitioning of Africa was merely done to help the economic interest of European Colonial Nations, and it was not a true reflection of the social-cultural or religious affiliation or geographical realities of Africa. Ethnic groups with close and positive relationships were separated, and those with conflicting hostilities were forcefully brought together (Mbachirin, 2006).

Mbachirin maintains that consequent upon the Berlin partitioning of Africa, territory now known as Nigeria was given to Britain. So, Nigeria emerged as a result of Europe's scramble and partitioning of Africa, as most part of Africa was already conquered by leading European powers. It is on this note that it can be

argued that Nigeria was created with a divisive foundation. Mbachirin believes that the interest of the colonial masters was not to build a strong, workable, and strong nation, but to create an area for exploitation, most especially the shipment of natural resources to industries in Europe and slaves as workforce. So, all of the administrative, political, social, and economic structures created, were geared towards achieving this goal. Therefore, for administrative convenience, the Southern and Northern Protectorates were merged in 1914. (Mbachirin, 2006).

Scholars who are opposed to this view, however, argue that the British administration wanted to create a workable economy and society, like the United Kingdom, with a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary government made up of four separate countries: England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Notwithstanding, it is hard to align with this hypothesis because the British society was shaped by one major religious and cultural tradition, Judeo-Christianity. On the other hand, the Nigerian society has not been shaped into one major religious and cultural tradition. The Nigerian culture is shaped by multi-religious and multi-cultural traditions, with majority traditions, such as Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Thus, instead of the Nigerian union to bring together a people shaped by one tradition, it brought together different ethnic groups, shaped by different languages, traditions, religions, cultures, and histories. This view has also been upheld by Burns (1972) and Okpu (1977). The Colonial Administration did not have knowledge of the historical background and relationship of the various ethnic groups they merged together as one political body under one political umbrella. There were no clear statistical records of the number of ethnic nationalities or groups brought together under Nigeria, but it has been estimated that there were between the minimum of two

hundred and fifty, and a maximum of four hundred with each having its own language, a set of customs and traditions (Burns, 1972).

The ethnic groups that formed the new Nigeria were coerced to be part of the union. Some of the kingdoms were at war with each other and were unwilling to live together for political, religious, and economic reasons and for fear of domination. The various nationalities were at different stages of development. These inalienable differences led to different protests and threats to secede the union (Mbachirin, 2006, Isaac, 2013 & Ajayi, 2016). Before independence in 1960, the North carried out two major threat to secede from Nigeria. The first threat which was based on religious and cultural pluralism was initiated by Northern Emirs. The second threat was a fallout from political and new constitutional contention in the 1950s where the North contended that they be allotted almost half of the senate representation. After independence in 1960, another major threat that occurred was the declaration of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria by the Eastern Region (Okpu,1977).

Other issues that solidify the argument that the amalgamation laid a faulty foundation for Nigeria was that after the 1914 merger, the three Regions of North, South, and West created by the British were not equal. The South and West put together did not equal the North. This uneven regionalism gave the North advantage over the rest of the country in that they dominated in elective positions and in the sharing of national resources. This was due to North's high population density. So, at independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited an unbalanced, shaky, and weak political structure, which was to hurt social-economic viability and stability in the future (Ajayi, 2016).

Furthermore, the political structure was further weakened by the utility of religious bigotry and a geo-ethnic divide, by Nigerian political elites. The political

class saw themselves first as members of their tribal group, second as members of their regions before seeing themselves as nationalists. Ethnic and regional interest was considered far above national interest in economic matters. This tribal and regional sentiment affected national unity and development. Each ethnic group or region sought to dominate others to find a place in the political setting. Ethnicity and regionalism influenced the actions of politicians, and they used the same to gain political and economic relevance (Mbachirin, 2006).

Islam featured dominantly in the Northern Part of Nigeria with Christianity featuring predominantly in the South. With each half passionately securing its religious enclave, the result was intolerance (Isaac, 2013). This North-South dichotomy gave birth to two different political ideologies – Western-Christian democracy and Arab-Islamic theocracy. There was a restrictive policy of the Colonial Administration that limited Christian Missionary activities to the South; there was direct rule adopted in the South and indirect rule adopted in the North. These factors gave the South more advantageous contact with the Western world. Influenced by Western civilization and education, the South tended towards Western moderate nationalism while the North tended towards Islamic theocracy. Thus, the picture of South versus North could best be described as authoritarianism versus democracy, conservatism versus modernism, Islamic allegiance versus Christian individualism. As the North tended towards conservative feudal traditionalism, the Northerners became more interested in Quranic education through Islam than Western education through Christianity (Malumfashi, 2016). The colonial policy of no-interference was put in place to preserve the Northern Islamic institutions, since it did not interfere with British interest. The South took over a greater part of the job market because of Christian education. This gap in educational attainment in

favour of the South created more hostilities between the North and the South (Mbachirin, 2006).

Moreover, the post- independence Civilian Government in its attempt to perpetuate itself in office, consciously employed religious hostility which had negative impacts on national development. National issues, such as elections and census, became sources of concern. After five years of self-rule, the embryonic nation was drifting towards disintegration, by nepotism, religious intolerance, ethnicity, regionalism, and political disillusionment as there was no concrete roadmap to national unity (Isaac, 2013).

The lack of national cohesion, fear of domination and shattered political atmosphere gave rise to military intervention in 1966. Available literatures such as Nafziger (1972), Okpu (1977) and Ajayi (2016) reveal that more than half of the officers involved in the planning and the co-ordination of Nigerian's first ever coup on January 15th, 1966, was of Igbo extraction in the South, while more than half of the casualties were of Northern extraction. Thus, the coup was perceived by the Northerners as an attempt by the Ibo to establish Ibo supremacy. However, there were some narratives that maintained that the coup was an attempt to bring sanity into the political space, which was shattered by the political heavy weights, and by perceived leadership failure; however, the eventual surrender of the coup plotters to another Ibo army officer, Major-General J.T. Aguiyi-Ironsi, was one of the Nigerian Army generals who took over the leadership of the new Federal Military Government, heightening the fear of the Northern Region who believed the coup was mainly targeted at annihilating leading Northern political and military leaders (Nafziger, 1972).

Meanwhile, as the coup partially failed, the coup plotters could not form a government. Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, of Ibo extraction, who became the

beneficiary of the coup, refrained from punishing the plotters of the coup whom he put in protective custody. He surrounded himself with only Ibo technocrats as advisers. He also disproportionately promoted Ibo officers. His subsequent enactment of Decrees 33 and 34 same day (24th May, 1966) which were received with mixed feelings in the North, gave an impetus to the Northerners fear of Ibo domination. Decree 33 banned all political parties, tribal organisations and socio-cultural organisations which had been used as platforms in expressing people's views, while Decree 34 abolished the federal arrangement and proclaimed a unitary system of government, where the regional civil services, were unified into a national civil service to encourage cross cultural, ethnic, and regional mobility of labour. The Northerners who were not as educationally fortunate as the South and who had just lost the top section of their leading political and military elites, viewed this step as anti-North. The Northerners' reaction came swiftly - civil societies and students staged anti-government protests, which soon culminated in general riots against Ibos living in the North (Ojo, & Fagbohun, 2014 & Ajayi, 2016).

On the 29th of July 1966, a countercoup was launched by army officers of Northern extraction where Aguiyi, the Supreme Commander of the Federal Military Regime and other army officers and government officials of Ibo extractions were brutally murdered. On the 1st of August 1966, Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon from a small ethnic minority in the North emerged as the new Head of State to the dissatisfaction of Lt. Col. Ojukwu, the Regional Military Governor of the Eastern Region, claiming Gowon was not the highest-ranking surviving military officer of the Nigerian Army. This scenario and the unabated killing of Igbo elements in the North and the nonchalant attitude of the Federal Military Government under Gowon's leadership towards the massacre forced Ojukwu to ask all Ibos living in the North to return to the East.

This led to massive flight of Ibos to their homeland in the Eastern Region (Nafziger, 1972 & Ajayi, 2016).

The two coups and mistrust among military officers of the major ethnic nationalities could not allow the Supreme Military Council and other Regional Military Governors to meet to discuss the future of the country until January 1967, in a neutral venue of Aburi, Ghana. The Aburi Acord enshrined that more regional autonomy be given to the four regions as against the unitary government. What seemed like the event that finally triggered declaration of independence of the Eastern Region (Biafra) from Nigeria was the renegeing on the "Aburi Acord" by Gowon, when he created twelve more states from the four existing regions and capital territory. The new arrangement cut off major industrial ports, the major oil producing communities, the city of Port Harcourt, dominated by Ibos from the Eastern central state of the Ibos. The Eastern leaders considered this new structure as a violation of the "Aburi Acord" that granted greater autonomy to the regional administrations. These developments encouraged the hurt Eastern elites, both military and civilian, to opt for separation from Nigeria. The Eastern Region led by Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, with little or no support from its non-Ibo speaking minorities, declared independence from the Nigerian Federation, as the Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967. The attempt by the Military Regime of Gowon to crush the succession led to the Biafra civil war that had devastating impacts on the social-economic activities of Nigeria (Nafziger, 1972).

The civil war, which was fought with much bitterness resulted in the loss of three million lives and properties. The seeds of mutual distrust initially sowed by the colonial policy of divide and rule, incited by political elites in the form of ethnic rivalry and hostilities metamorphosed into full blown civil war that threatened

the corporate existence of Nigeria (Ajayi, 2016). The civil war, which lasted for about thirty months, before Biafra forces were subdued by the Nigerian forces, brought backwardness in socio-economic development. The war had negative impacts on socio-economic development as many infrastructural facilities were destroyed during the war (Ojo, & Fagbohun, 2014 & Isaac, 2013).

3.3. Social-political setting

The details of the intricate political interactions that characterised the divergent phases of Nigeria's uneven political history have been evaluated. The task here is to examine the post-civil war political atmosphere and its impact on social-economic development.

Documented literatures such as Ochulor (2011), Ogbeidi (2012), Agbor (2012) and Imhonopi & Ugochukwu (2013) show that the history of political development of Nigeria since after the civil war fought from 1967-1970 show that the banes of social-economic development have always been the result of a leadership that has fallen into the hands of a political class that showed more interest in tribalism, selfishness, greed, private or group gains than in the overall development of the Nigerian State. Political power has been exchanged between civilian and military regimes since the end of the civil war. According to Ogbeidi (2012) and Agbor (2012), none of the two categories that ruled the country made enough concerted effort to put the country on the part of meaningful social-economic development. Instead, the political leadership class succeeded in ingraining corruption, religious sentiments, and ethnic strife, rather than supplying a productive ground for the flourishing of socio-economic, social-cultural, and political development.

Political corruption has remained one of the banes of meaningful development in Nigeria since after the civil war, up until the present time. Although there is no extensive or complete definition as to what constitutes corruption, the most leading definitions share similar elements of an abuse of public trust and power, or of using a public position for personal advantage. A simplified dictionary meaning of corruption suggests that it is the absence of virtue and moral principles (Ogundiya, 2009). The World Bank and Transparency International (TI) view corruption as the abuse of public office for personal or third-party benefits, by the holder of that office. Understood from these meanings, political corruption can be viewed as any unethical behaviour that violates the norms of a political process, order, or system. Essentially, political corruption can be for personal, private or group gains and can as well be for power monopoly purposes. These forms of political corruption are keenly connected. In many cases, these processes or features are involved in the larger and more serious political corruption scandals. In this vein, political corruption usually includes abuse of power such as embezzlement and cronyism by political office holders as well as abuses, such as extortion, bribery, and fraud (Ogbeidi, 2012 & Agbor, 2012).

From the meaning and explanations of corruption espoused above, it is explicitly clear that corruption threatens good government practices, sustainable economic growth, democratic process, and conducive business environment. Thus, when the political elites of a nation breed corruption, it becomes difficult to create a path that will positively benefit the state and its citizens. This could best describe the setting of the Nigerian State since independence and after the civil war. Like a deadly virus, political corruption has attacked the important systems and structures that support the progressive functionality of society. The Nigerian scourge of corruption has reduced social-economic progress,

discouraged foreign investment, undermined social welfare and infrastructural development. The effects of corruption leave the poor disproportionately under-privileged, as it tends to thwart poverty alleviation programmes. It also has negative implications on development of a healthy democracy and just society. When assets are diverted away from their intended purpose, or when unqualified hands are hired or elected to political offices, based on ethnicity or religion, bad government and lack of sustainable development is inevitable (Imhonopi & Ugochukwu, 2013).

Achebe (1984) & Ochulor (2011) have opined that for most Nigerian politicians, political office is all about the 'national cake'. Expanding this hypothesis, it means a politics of ideology is sacrificed at the altar of selfish interest, mediocrity, and nepotism. Whoever has a larger part of the national cake has the support of the people. Competent Nigerians with leadership prowess and vision are easily marginalised, thereby creating a class of mediocre rulers who succumb to corrupt practices for their selfish gains. Such selfish rulers have been described by Ochulor (2011) as nothing but weak masters who find joy in the robbery of their subjects, instead of leading them. They are said to engage in promoting mere religious or personal or sectional interests thereby favouring some parts of the country against the national interest.

So, without doubt, the successive leadership failure of the political elites in managing the Nigerian businesses and vast mineral resources and human capital due to ethnic and religious bias has hindered the emergence of a prosperous society. This is also observed by Achebe (1984) & Ochulor (2011) when they argued that Nigeria's post-civil bureaucratic and military leaders had selfishly mismanaged national patrimony and the commonwealth of the nation, thereby denying the populace the dividends of good leadership. To this end, Afegbua, &

Adejuwon (2012) guess that over the years, Nigeria has seen the emergence of entrenched political corruption most times radiating from the political class and pervading all institutions of government with negative effects on the entire society. Thus, poverty is said to have become the direct or indirect effect of the corruption practices orchestrated by insensitive political leaders since the emergence of Nigeria as an independent state. The poverty cycle keeps developing with all of its attendant negative results as the rate of unemployment stays high. The celebration of impunity and mediocrity over excellence through nepotism and cronyism has resulted in the dearth of intellectual capital, which is the bedrock of meaningful development and advancement. Intellectual capital has continued to move abroad in search of a better life (Ocholor, 2011 & Afegbua, & Adejuwon, 2012).

These myriads of social-economic challenges have made the Nigerian populace an inevitable victim of corruption. The education sector and healthcare delivery system have been thrown in a state of comatose and are nearing total annihilation as the money earmarked for these vital social sector finds itself in private coffers. Government spending has also been significantly reduced towards social services that benefit the poor (Yimer, 2015). The mismanagement of the national treasure, meant for development purposes and the abandonment of social programmes that benefit the poor, is said to have condemned many to acute poverty while the small class of the political elite, military, and civilians alike, are hugely rich. Uneven allocation of oil blocks, dishonest appointments, bogus contract awards, indiscriminate promotion and outright siphoning of common funds, are some of the corrupt practices perpetrated by this ruling elites. This class of political predators cut across tribal, regional, or religious divides. The shared feature is access to state power. The neo-colonial economy of centralisation where power is not only concentrated

on the centre but becomes extremely attractive with repository of huge financial resources has given impetus to pursue the cornering of public funds for private accumulation. The effects of this unpleasant development and political structure have made the interests of the populace in the Nigerian State to be ignored. They now interact with the Nigerian State as an alien body created not for their existential betterment, but to serve the reserved interests of the political class. (Isaac, A. 2013).

Apart from political corruption, emphasis on ethnic affiliation is yet another cause of bad leadership in Nigeria (Nwabueze, 2018). It has been observed that tribal sentiments have perhaps been one of the major factors that have nullified all efforts at developing a national leadership structure that can fulfil a national dream. The politics of tribalism and regionalism permitted and encouraged excessive nepotism and mediocrity in national duties. The failure of sectionalism is that it concentrates on the part and ignored the whole. The contention is basically between the three major languages of Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba (Achebe, 1984 & Ochulor, 2011).

For fear of being side-lined, there emerged different social-political and social-cultural organisations that contended for regional interest. These organisations have noteworthy influence in the political scene (Mbaeze, Okoli & Okonkwo, 2016). To the North is the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) which is a cultural and political platform that brings together leaders from Northern Nigeria. Arewa which means "Northern" is coined from Hausa the primary language of the region (Mbaeze, Okoli & Okonkwo, 2016). To the Western part of Nigeria is the Afenifere coined from Yoruba language meaning "those who wish good things" (blessings, goodness, good fortune). The Afenifere is a social-cultural body that stands for the interest of Nigerians of Yoruba ethnic nationality (Makinde &

Dada, 2017). To the East is the Ohanaeze Ndigbo. This is an apex Ibo socio-cultural body, and it stands for all Ibo communities within and outside Nigeria (Okaneme, 2020). Recently, there has also been the emergence of the Middle Belt Forum (MBF) and the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF). The Middle Belt Forum (MBF) is a socio-cultural umbrella that furthers the interests of people from the Middle Belt Region, an area between the Muslim-Hausa controlled North and the largely Christian Ibo of the East and the Yoruba Region of the West. The Middle Belt has extremely diverse population. The forum serves as a voice for minority ethnic groups. The Pan Niger Delta Forum is the umbrella organisation for the interest of the Niger Delta peoples, most especially people from the South-South Geo-political Zone. There are over 250 ethnic nationalities that speak over 400 languages in Nigeria, many live in the Niger Delta and the Middle Belt Regions (Cookey,1986).

The basic interest of these social-political groups is on common regional agenda. For instance, Afenifere recently criticised the inability of Yoruba governors in the West to build a common front on critical issues that affect the interest of the Yoruba ethnic nationalities. The group enjoined governors of the South-Western States to remain concentrated on a common regional interest (Ocholor, 2011). This call has led to the formation of the South-West security outfit, “Operation Amotekun,” to curb the tide of serial killings and kidnappings by Fulani herders (Oyewale, 2020, Bello, 2020 & Aidonojie & Egielewa, 2020). The Federal Government of Nigeria had intended to move a proposed University of Petroleum from the Niger-Delta Region to the Northern Region. However, the governors of the South-South States, who saw this move as a subtle plan to disenfranchise the region that feeds the nation, resolved not to support the Federal Government amnesty programme, offered to the youths of the region who were destroying federal oil facilities. Having weighed the economic impacts

of the governor's resolution, the Federal government was forced to drop the plan of moving the proposed University of Petroleum from the region. Similarly, the formation of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the North, to complement the Nigerian Military fight against the Boko Haram group, also furthered a Northern regional agenda (Bamidele, 2016).

A further cause of misrule in Nigeria, as echoed by Imhonopi & Ugochukwu (2013) is ethnic pressure on public servants. Imhonopi & Ugochukwu maintain that Nigerian public servants at times could be pushed into corrupt practices. People, villages, towns communities, or tribes, whose children are in government departments, often come with a litany of demands. Such demands are often impossible to meet without resorting to a corrupt use of one's office. The incumbent becomes a worthy son or daughter of the soil if these outrageous demands are met, and if not met, the incumbent becomes a fool that should be treated with disdain. Ocholor (2011) observes that this distorted attitude compels leaders to loot the common treasury. It is on this basis, one will notice that towns, cities, regions, or villages, undergo rapid transformation once they have a public office holder. At the expiration of the tenure, the office holder is heralded as a hero and given special reception and special chieftaincy titles for sacrificing the common good for the development of his ethnic region. To this end, regions that are not privileged having one of their own in government, are left to wallow without the dividends of governance (Achebe, 1984, Ocholor, 2011 & Imhonopi & Ugochukwu, 2013).

This implies, just like the Thrasymachus puzzlingly claims in Plato's Republic (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./2000), that rulers are always right and that any practitioner or expert in a skill (τέχνη) is always reliable, the Nigerian political leaders are said to operate with impunity to serve the parochial interest. Like Thrasymachus,

who thinks that comfort and happiness is achieved by serving the interest of the stronger, and in being greedy and amassing more than one's own fair share of the good things of life, the Nigerian political office holder is portrayed as someone who betrays his trust and disappoints the nation for the selfish and parochial interest of a region or group or tribe, or a small village or town (Nawar, 2018). Leaders who engage in this injustice and misrule do not acknowledge it as a misdemeanour, because they feel it is their turn to have a share of the 'national cake.' Tribal leaning, by and large, does not pay attention to how, when, and what is stolen, but it is more about who stole and from which ethnic background he comes from. Consequently, vital issues of public interest, such as anti-corruption, accountability, unjust enrichment and the abuse of office, and equality, have become rather like a chase after the wind (Ocholor, 2011).

Another obvious factor that waters the ground for bad social politics, as documented by Muse & Narsiah (2015), is the assumption of spectator posture by the masses. Politics appears to be a spectator-sports. The lack of interest in the political process and an inability to intelligently follow every action of governance, paves way for misrule by the political players. Ocholor (2011) suggests that many Nigerians encourage bad governance through taking a defeatist posture. The Nigerian constitution bestows the control of government on the populace. It asserts that sovereignty belongs to the masses. It holds that the powers to elect leaders belong to the people. The Nigerian constitution presupposes that freedom of expression and election of leaders is a fundamental right in which, absence, tyranny, greed, and political rascality, reign supreme (Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution, 1999).

Muse & Narsiah (2015) notes that voters' apathy about the electioneering process relates to politicians' desperation to win at all costs, resulting in

violence, vote stuffing, vote buying, ballot box snatching or destruction, vote cancellation, voter intimidation and compromised election umpires. This seems to have eroded the confidence of prospective voters and established a widespread apathy amongst voters. This inability to produce and deliver secure, fair, transparent, and authentic electoral results with general acceptability is the central challenge of the electoral process of Nigeria. This has resulted in only a small percentage of the voting population partaking. Thus, it could be suggested that this is an affront to the ideals of majority rule which is acclaimed as one of the basic tenets of a democracy (Agu, Okeke, & Idike, 2013).

As Steward (1999) advances, one of the most accepted systems of government in the world today is democracy. The involvement of citizens and active participation in political and civic activities is core to the practice of democracy (Saward, 1998). Democratic governance is said to be the most generally accepted form of government that aligns with the citizenry, because of the people-centred principles underlying its operation (Asaju, 2014). Thus, to sustain democracy at all levels, there must be the involvement of citizens in the act of governance and in the decision-making. Falade (2015) & Ubanyionwu (2019) opines that this is not the case in Nigeria. This suggestion is premised on the fact that in a population of about 200 million, there are 82.3 million registered voters according to the electoral umpire, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), however, only 28.6 million voted in the 2019 elections. This suggests that only a small 35% of the registered voters cast their vote in this election. It shows that instead of a majority leadership, there is minority one (Falade, 2015 & Ubanyionwu, 2019).

Similarly, according to Efebeh (2015), another catalyst that quickens social-political chaos in Nigeria is the absence of the rule of law. Raz (2017) claims that

the rule of law is the legal framework that underpins good governance. It is primarily referred to as the authority of law and its positive impacts on society, most particularly as a restraint upon behaviour of government and the governed. The concept was familiar to classical philosophers such as Aristotle, who opines that "law should govern" (Aristotle ca. 350BCE/2012). The rule of law simply means that all citizens are subject to the law of the nation, including makers of the law themselves (Efebeh, 2015). In this persuasion, it is opposed to dictatorship, autocracy, or oligarchy, where the rulers are not subject to the law of the land. The absence of the rule of law can be found in both democracies and dictatorships. This can be as a result of corruption, an inordinate quest to remain in power, the neglect or ignorance of law, and a lack of corrective instruments for administrative abuse, and the failure of institutions (Efebeh, 2015).

The decision of a government to obey preexisting legal rules can provide a good background to gaining broad support and acceptability. Such respect for the nation's laws as enshrined in a constitution and in laws approved via a credible democratic procedure is the beauty of the rule of law (O'donnell, 2004). Therefore, the rule of law makes democracy thrive in that it is the collective will of a nation. It brings about equity, justice, and social order. Elements such as legitimacy, order, and security, checks and balances, impartiality, integrity, effective application, and the supremacy of the rules are identifiable characteristics of rule of law. To this end, it is apt to postulate that, the rule of law is the substratum of modern legitimate democracy (O'donnell, 2004 & Efebeh, 2015).

This is precipitated by its vital role in stopping authoritarianism and by bringing about applauded constitutional democracy in modern times. Yet, there has been

serious difficulty in adhering to the rule of law by successive governments in Nigeria since independence in October of 1960. One of the reasons the plotters of the January 15, 1966, coup espoused for staging the coup d'état, was that corruption and indiscipline have become the norm of the ruling class. Thus, the overthrow of the government of the day could not end corrupt practices, as subsequent regimes, both military and civilian, not only allowed it, but celebrated it through their actions and inactions (Achebe, 1984).

The rule of law and good governance are inseparable features that are necessary for the survival of what Plato describes in *"The Republic"* as a "perfect" or an "ideal state" (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E/2000). The first paradox is simple: An "ideal state," as Plato evaluates it, is made up of un-ideal people - both the masses and warriors are limited in reason and thus must be led by a philosopher-king. However, it is difficult to legitimately attribute perfection to a nation when a good proportion of its citizens are imperfect. While Plato later admits in *"The Statesman"* that, in the ideal state concept, it is wrongly believed that that every state promotes the rule of law and good governance even if these are achieved through primitive, crude, or autocratic means. So, for democracy to be sustained, the rule of law should be activated as a stimulating and enabling environment for good governance (Tamanaha, 2012). Thus, the rule of law sustains democracy while good governance, on the other hand, helps it in furthering and strengthening both the rule of law and democracy in every civilized nation (Efebeh, 2015).

On gaining independence on 1st October 1960, a civil democratic system was adopted by the government of post-independent Nigeria, which was interrupted from 1966 to 1979 by military incursion. Nevertheless, the return to democracy in 1979 did not last beyond 31st December 1983. Another military takeover of

governance resurfaced, demolishing all the existent democratic institutions and structures. Again, another democratic dispensation began on 29th May 1999 (Lewis, 1994). Notwithstanding, the emergence of the new and current civil democracy in 1999 has failed to make any meaningful impacts on the social-economic and general wellbeing of the Nigerian populace. This is because of the manipulative nature and selfish tendencies of the political class to abuse the rule of law. The rule of law advocates the primacy of law in any society. This presupposes a context where the law, and nothing else, is important in the state as everyone is subject to the same law. The leader and the led are not only subject to the rule of law but are as well treated equally in eyes of the law. The fundamental human rights of the citizens are protected by the rule of law (Ifamose, 2009).

Meyerson (2004) notes that the rule of law flourishes in a society where there is a separation of powers among the tiers of government: the executive, legislature, and the judiciary. This is acknowledged so that the powers to make, execute and adjudicate laws are decentralised and not concentrated in the hands of one person or group of persons (Meyerson, 2004 & Raz, 2017). As Dalberg-Acton (2019) observes “absolute power corrupts absolutely,” it follows therefore that to discourage tyrannical and oppressive tendencies, the rule of law should correspondingly exemplify the separation of powers. This allows each arm or tier of government to serve as a check on the other arm. It is on this basis that democracy can survive in a society. Efebeh (2015) and Nazir, Ahmad & Khan Afghani (2017) claim that the rule of law, if observed within the circumference of a practical separation of powers, guarantees checks and balances within and among the executives, the legislature, and the judiciary, ensuring that none of the arms of government arrogates to itself the powers of the other organs. This in turn allows for strong governmental institutions and

structures and reduces the tyranny of the rulers. In any society such as the Nigerian state, where there is no functional separation of powers, checks and balances are difficult to enact. Thus, the abuse of power and authoritarianism become the order of the day. This has made the promotion of the rule of law and the protection of the basic rights of the citizenry a difficult task in Nigeria (Nwabuzor, 2005). There appears to be a strong, rooted tradition wherein the executive arm of government tries to override the decisions or wield it over the other arm and the citizenry. Though some observers have ascribed this to the lengthy period and consistent military incursion in Nigerian politics, where the principle of the rule of law was trampled underfoot, this may not be a strong alibi for the current proclivity for impunity, abuse of power and seeming barbarity of the average political leaders in Nigeria. In line with this understanding therefore, the culture of disregard for the rule of law was nurtured by both successive civilian and military governments. Thus, frequent abuse of the rule of law in the Nigerian State by the political class and their associates, emanates from the fact that rather than build strong structures and institutions of governance, strong individuals are built. Institutions and structures of government are built around individual leaders. This has made it virtually impossible for such institutions to function properly, independently, and unbiasedly to address poor leadership, political corruption, impunity, abuse of power and judicial ineptitude and rascality (Ifamose, 2009).

3.4. Social-economic setting

3.4.1. Poverty: Official statistics suggests that the rate of poverty in Nigeria between 1980 and 2010 increased by 62.76% if measured by the \$1.25 USD/person/day 2005 PPP line benchmark. The corresponding number of those living in poverty increased from 39.2 million to 112.47 million despite the

increase in GDP per capita by approximately 19% and a 17.1% reduction in inequality level measured in terms of Gini index (Dapel, 2018). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) suggests that 60.9% of people in Nigeria were living in "absolute poverty" in 2010, this figure rose from 54.7% in 2004. The overall poverty statistic covering the period between 2009 and 2010 calculated using a per capita approach, was put at 62.6%. The NBS determined that poverty based on income and consumption, and the poverty line, was ₦55,235.20 per person per year. Rural poverty was put at 69.0%, while urban poverty stood at 51.2% (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2010). In 2018, a new statistic, from The World Data Lab's Poverty Clock, suggests that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the poorest inhabitants in the world. The Indian population is seven times larger than that of Nigeria. About 90 million people now living in extreme poverty in Nigeria represents approximately about 50% or half of its total population. Juxtaposed in another context, if those living in extreme poverty in Nigeria were to form a country, it would be more populous than countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, or France. The World Data Lab's Poverty Clock maintains that almost six people fall into the trap of extreme poverty every minute in Nigeria (World Data Lab, 2018).

Controversy has always been associated with extreme poverty statistics. Several countries and experts do not agree that poverty statistics should solely be measured in monetary terms, most especially the benchmark of \$1.90 earnings per-day expressed by the World Bank. On this view, the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (2019) outlines a model that goes beyond income and consumption as the sole indicator for poverty in a society, by evaluating the ways in which poverty is experienced in terms of education, health, and standard of living. The MPI report shows that in Nigeria, there is an increase in the number of people who are multi-dimensionally poor, from 86 million to 98

million between, 2007 and 2017. When compared to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics report, which measured income and consumption, a larger proportion of 51% of Nigerians are multi-dimensionally poorer than the 46% proportion that are income poor. These statistics vary across geopolitical zones, regions, states, and areas. The Muslim Northern Region has the highest poverty burden, while the Christian Southern Region has the lower one. The Christian South is obsessed with Western education and civilisation and has stronger links with Western values as against the North, which encourages more of Qur'anic education, presumably against Western values, and modern civilisation. Thus, the bottom line is, no matter how excellent the arguments might appear, or how contentious poverty statistics might be, at the heart of poverty lies the absence of the basic needs of life, such as shelter, food, healthcare, and drinkable water. The primary determinant of poverty is based on the availability of basic needs of life, the absence of which, will create multidimensional social issues that will have negative impacts on society. Abounding evidence shows that tackling these issues potentially lifts people out of extreme poverty (UNDP, 2018 & World Bank Group, 2019).

Despite being endowed with natural resources such as oil, Nigeria has not been able to translate its natural resources into rising living standards. Nigeria is the highest oil producer in Africa and the eighth in the world; by the current oil production and sales in the global market, the Nigerian state is said to be rich and yet harbours the largest proportion of poor people in Africa's sub-Saharan region. The pervasively high-income inequality has perpetuated a calamitous concentration of wealth in the hands of a few individuals. This ugly condition has given birth to social vices such as prostitution, internet fraud, armed robbery, kidnapping, insecurity, and drug misuse, with some citizens migrating out of the country to America, Europe, or South Africa (Ijah, 2013 & Deinne & Ajayi, 2019).

A few of the underlying factors responsible for poverty will be addressed. According to Ihebuzor, Lawrence, & Lawrence (2021) and Dauda (2019), these factors are bad policy initiatives and mono economy. It is expedient to analyse these factors one after the other. Bad policy initiatives contribute to the prevalent poverty rate in Nigeria (Dauda, 2019). Theoretical policies that look good on paper without contextualisation, no matter how fantastic they are would not address the high and increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria. This is due to the fact that some of the policies are holistically imported from other societies and implemented without considering the unique nature of Nigeria's societal and political environment. The resultant effect is that the policies meet a brick wall, with some of the policies waning as others perform below expectation. This is further complicated with either lack of policy direction or continuity. While some policies are replaced with new ones, others merely exist on paper. Successive governments have abandoned programmes of previous administrations and introduced new ones, in order to access funds. (Dauda, 2019).

Abiola, Kolawole & Adebayo (2019) identify corruption as another challenge facing policy implementation in Nigeria. Corruption manifests in the form of the diversion of funds meant for poverty alleviation programmes into private pockets. Corrupt practices also manifest in the form of contract inflation, clannism, ethnicity, cronyism and religious and political considerations in the appointment or employment of people into sensitive offices, without consideration for capability and excellence. Dialoke, Ukah & Maduagwuna (2017) also suggest that the challenge of Poor funding is also a factor negatively impacting on poverty alleviation policies in Nigeria. This may imply that poverty alleviation programmes are under budgeted, or monies budgeted for the smooth running of poverty alleviation programmes are either delayed or

slashed, and as such, a successful implementation is hampered. Lack of adequate funding to cover the cost of project execution without a doubt slows down the fight against poverty. Failure to involve all stakeholders in the budgeting, planning and implementation process brings about misunderstanding and a clash of interests. In all, the lack of political will and commitment to thwart corrupt tendencies can sabotage smooth budgeting, planning, and the implementation of poverty alleviation policies (Dauda, 2019).

Furthermore, the Nigerian mono economy has the potential of limiting economic progress (Eze, 2019). The non-diversification of Nigeria's economy from the oil sector has squeezed other sectors of the economy. In 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence, the economy of Nigeria was dependent mainly on the agricultural sector. Oil export revenue that constituted only just 1% rose to 97% by 1984 and has since risen to 90% and above. In 2018, 97.5% of export revenue, 81% of government revenue, and 17% GDP were from the oil and gas sector. Other sources of income have been ignored, making Nigeria to solely depend on oil exportation (Eze, 2019). This dependence on natural resources has created a less competitive mono economy. It implies growth is reduced as other sectors such as the agricultural sector that once boomed has become non-profitable because of the increase in oil revenue. It has closed exploration and exports in other promising economic sectors (Ucha, 2010). The oil sector is less labour-intensive, and as such does not have enough trickle-down effect on wealth. It muzzles up other sectors that might generate employment. Societies with economic activities that are propelled by labour-intensive sectors will naturally experience greater poverty reductions. While Nigeria has experienced appreciable growth in the oil sectors, the agricultural sector has shrunk, thereby reducing employment opportunities to the detriment of the Nigeria's growing population. The implication of the absence of

employment opportunities in the labour-intensive sectors is that wealth continues to be concentrated among the upper class while the majority of Nigeria's population remains unemployed (Ucha, 2010). The concentration of scarce jobs in the hands of the affluent has created a growing inequality among the Nigerian population. This income inequality has intensified poverty dimension. The abounding income inequality between the rich and the poor and those living in rural and urban areas is noticeably high in that most of the population of those living in the rural areas notably depend on agricultural revenue which is no more a thriving business as the oil sector monopolises the economy (Ucha, 2010).

3.4.2. Unemployment: The unemployment rate in Nigeria for 2015 was 5.31percent, this is a 0.88 percent increase from 2014. The unemployment rate for 2016 was 6.24 percent, this is a 0.92 percent increase from 2015. The unemployment rate for 2017 was 6.01 percent, this is a 0.22 percent decline from 2016. The unemployment rate for 2018 was 6.03 percent, this is a 0.01 percent increase from 2017 (Macrotrends, 2020). Nigeria's unemployment rate increased by nearly 30 percent in 2020 to sixteen million and another two million are projected to be unemployed before the year ends. (Trading Economics, 2020). This unemployment data shows that the unemployment rate is without doubt high in the country. Most unemployment rates in Nigeria are both voluntary and involuntary. It is voluntary in the sense that some graduates are more interested in government jobs than creating their independent business ideas so they can become employers of labour. The essence of human capital development is for people to be equipped with the complexities of innovative ideals geared towards entrepreneurial development, in order to complement government efforts. Secondly, many of the young population and their parents have this notion that the only secure path to success is through the

pursuit of career in the highly skilled or elite professions such, as law, engineering, and medicine, regardless of whether they possess the right potentials, aptitude, interest, or resources. This is perhaps propelled by the loss of old age tested value system of dignity of labour in pursuit of wealth. (Salami, 2013). Also, the high unemployment rate is involuntary because of the lack of constant electricity supply. The inability of the Nigerian government to provide stable electricity has made the youths with creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial mindsets to be discouraged from engaging in business ventures. This is because constant power supply is necessary for the survival and success of most businesses in Nigeria (Salami, 2013 & Kayode, Arome, & Silas, 2014).

Consequently, unemployment has become a major contributing factor to poverty in Nigeria. Saunders (2002) recognises a strong connection between unemployment and poverty. This implies that the more people are unemployed, the more they are unable to provide for their necessities. The more they are unable to provide for their necessities, the more they are susceptible to crime. Hooghe, Vanhoutte, Hardyns & Bircan (2011) show that the unemployment-induced poverty has the potentials of increasing crime rate and violence in a country. Unemployment leads to crimes such as armed robbery, killing, kidnapping for ransom, prostitution, human trafficking, internet fraud and other forms of fraudulent activities and social vices. The high unemployment rate in Nigeria which has reached a crescendo, with an alarming dimension, with about 29.7 percent of young population within the age range of 15-35years being in the unemployment market in 2018 has created a very wide gap of income and social inequality and in turn created social upheavals (Aiyedogbon & Ohwofasa, 2012 & Trading economics, 2020).

3.4.3. Diseases, sicknesses, and poor health care facilities: Nigerian health care indices are some of the worst in Africa. Globally, Nigeria has one of the fastest growing populations. The country has about 5.5 live births per woman and an annual population growth rate of 3.2% that is projected to reach about four hundred and forty million people by the year 2050. Conversely, Nigeria has not been able to have a rapidly developing health care system that cater for its rapidly growing population (Osibogun, 2004).

In the 1970s, the average life expectancy for women was 36.7 years and for men, it was 37.2 years. There was an improvement by 2011, when these statistics increased for women to 55.3, and for men to 48.9, as result of improvement in medical care. Though there is an improvement in the quality of medical care as the current life expectancy in Nigeria stands at 54.07 years, yet the life expectancy of the country is still ranked 16th in Africa and 216th in the world. The ranking falls below appreciable level when compared with European countries such as Spain, Iceland, and Switzerland where life expectancy is 82 years and in China and Japan where it stands at 83-84 years respectively (Osibogun, 2004 & Nigeria Health Watch, 2020).

Africa has more than 1% of total maternal deaths of 11% of all births globally, when juxtaposed with that of the developed nations which has less than 1 %. According to World Health Organization (WHO), Nigeria accounts for about 14 % of maternal mortality globally – this was among the highest in the world in 2010. As of 2015, Nigeria had a maternal mortality ratio of about eight hundred and fourteen per one hundred thousand live births (Sageer et al., 2019). In the same vein, the lifetime risk and the vulnerability of maternal death is 1 in 13 in Nigeria. A variety of reasons are triggers to these alarming, unacceptable and glaringly high rate of maternal mortality and morbidity in the country. These

include government insensitivity, lack of health care services most especially in rural areas, inability to access health care services due to poverty, geographical location, harmful traditions, and cultures such as child marriage (Harrison, 2009 & Ujah et al., 2005).

In sub-Saharan Africa, malaria, typhoid, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis diseases constitute a public health care challenge that has continued to mount pressure and weaken public health care services. Malaria infection constitutes a great health challenge in Africa. Of the three hundred to four hundred million acute infections that are recorded globally each year, more than 75% of the cases and deaths are in Tropical Africa. Malaria infection has become one of the leading reasons for out-patient visits to health care providers, clinics, and hospitals. It has also been documented as one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the country. Records reveal that at least 50% of the Nigerian population goes down with at least one quota of malaria infection each year. Malaria infection is said to account for nearly 45% of all out-patient visit to health care providers (Okwa, 2019). Similarly, more than two billion people are infected with tuberculosis globally: this is one third of the population of the world. Between two hundred and fifty and three hundred thousand cases are recorded in Nigeria in 2007, of which 50% are smear positive. Globally, the country with the fourth highest number of cases of tuberculosis in 2007 was Nigeria (Umeokonkwo et al., 2019).

The factors that are responsible for the high cases of malaria and tuberculosis infections in Nigeria are obvious. They include inadequate use of insecticide treated net, inability to abide by personal precautionary measures, consistent breeding of mosquitoes due to poor environmental conditions, and a lack of proper environmental monitoring by sanitary inspectors (Okunlola, & Oyeyemi,

2019). For the spread of tuberculosis, the issues are - lack of adequate knowledge about the disease in communities, lack of timely access to medical treatment due to poverty, lack of the awareness of free medicinal drugs, victims opting for traditional remedies instead of certified medications, poor contact tracing, drug resistance and people defaulting from treatment (Umeokonkwo et al., 2019).

To some extent, there is lack of clean drinking water in Nigeria - only 57% of the population have unrestricted access to clean drinking water. The provision of cleaning water is poorly sponsored and managed, thereby reducing the quality of water supply. This causes disease such as typhoid and cholera. The most prominent cause of outbreaks of enteric-infectious diseases has been severally traced to contaminated water since about 43% of the populace do not have access to permanent potable drinking water. Cholera outbreaks have been reported in Nigeria especially in the Northern Region, leading to the death of many people (Abubakar, 2019). Another special challenge of Nigerian health care is HIV/AIDS. The country is among the top ten nations in the world with the highest number of HIV/AIDS patients. There were about 3.6 million HIV/AIDS-infected patients in 2003 with three hundred thousand deaths. Currently, there are between 3-5 million HIV/AIDS-infected people in Nigeria. In 2017, one hundred and fifty thousand people died from HIV/AIDS and only about 33% of victims had access to medical treatment due to poor health care facilities, elevated level of stigmatisation and discrimination and poor or no access to anti-retroviral drugs. Though from the 2000s, there has been the implementation of national programme to combat HIV/AIDS, this has not yielded the desired result (Oke et al., 2019).

3.4.4. Road Traffic Accidents: The overall rate of road traffic crashes in Nigeria is estimated at 41 per 1,000 people, with a mortality rate of about 1.6 per 1,000 people yearly. Nigeria, with human population of between 180-200 million and a land mass of 910,771 square kilometres is the 7th most populous nation in the world, and the most populous country in Africa. Its extensive land mass and massive population corresponds with its high rate of vehicular movement, projected at 7.6 million, with road lengths estimated at 94,000 kilometres. The population density of Nigeria varies from rural to urban settlements, assumedly, 51.7% to 48.3% respectively. Mathematically, this translates to 860 persons per square kilometre as regards population and road ratio. Thus, there is intense traffic stress on the Nigerian road network (Akinyemi et al., 2019 & Anebonam et al., 2019). The Nigerian government in order to address the malady of the persistent high rate of road traffic crashes and its consequent negative effects of loss of lives and properties, established the necessary agencies, such as the Road Safety Corps. However, it is appalling that the rate of road traffic crashes and mortality are still high, amidst the government remedial actions taken in recent times to annihilate the menace. Various factors such as driver skills, vehicle conditions, roadway characteristics, weather conditions, bad roads, speed violations, sleeping whilst on steering, lack of concentration, careless driving, loss of control, mechanical factors, road obstructions, alcohol consumption, and violation of traffic rules, such as overloading or wrong overtaking, are hazards that are contributing to road traffic accidents. Thus, road traffic accidents remain a social-economic challenge that many Nigerians grapple with on a daily basis. (Detho et al., 2019; Alkali, 2019; Akinyemi et al., 2019; Iyanda, 2019 & Anebonam et al., 2019).

3.4.5. Insecurity: Insecurity is the state of being open to threat or danger, or the state of not being secured or, the lack of protection (Nwabueze & Ebeze, 2013).

The Nigeria state has always been grappling with one form of insecurity or another. This sense of insecurity has become a source of social concern for the populace as they go about their daily routine. There are many factors that trigger insecurity within the Nigerian environment (Idris, 2013). However, only a few are discussed here.

Politically motivated violence: The history of politically based violence in Nigeria is long and obvious. Ewatan & Urhie, (2014) notes that the Nigerian electoral process, right from 1960, when Nigeria attained independence, has been marred with violent conflicts, political assassination and thuggery, voter intimidation, and more recently, ballot snatching. One of the effects of this ugly trend is that the materials benefits attached to political offices has made election to become a do or die affairs with politicians ready to employ any crooked, violent, and illegal means to win elections at all costs. Politics has been seen as the easiest and quickest path to wealth. This political desperation, violent struggle, and inordinate quest for political offices among the political elites have created a fragile environment, vulnerable to insecurity. These misdemeanours to satisfy one's whims and caprices have often led to the catastrophic decimation of innocent lives, destruction of properties worth millions of Naira, and the abrupt disruption of economic activities. When the populace feels short-changed, in that their endorsed candidate is wrongfully cheated, through the manipulation of figures, umpire bias, and a dysfunctional process, they take to riots, destruction of property, and sometimes killing of innocent citizens (Ewatan & Urhie, 2014).

Economically motivated violence: Garfinkel & Syropoulos (2019) has laid much emphasis on the role generation and distribution of resources play in conflict creation and management in different economies across the globe. In Nigeria,

agitation for resource control and revenue sharing formula often saturate political discourse across political divide and between proponents and opponents and among community actors. The Niger-Delta resource control struggle is a typical example. The Niger-delta region produces 90% of the crude oil on which the Nigerian economy has depended since the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria (Ewatan & Urhie, 2014). With the destruction of the ecological, aquatic, and economic viability of the inhabitants through crude oil exploration, air pollution and environmental degradation and the subsequent failure of government to provide alternative means of livelihoods, agitation for economic survival through resource control and review of sharing formula becomes inevitable (Oluwaniyi, 2010). The centralised system which concentrates the resources at the central government pays lip service to the plight of the Niger-Deltans, whose sources of livelihoods have been shattered in the process of feeding the nation without commensurate compensations to the communities from which backyard the crude oil is explored. The consequence of this neglect gave birth to the Niger-Delta militancy, whose target is the destruction of oil facilities and the kidnapping of oil workers, expatriates, and government officials (Ukiwo & et al., 2011). These violent agitations have resulted in the destruction of properties worth billions of Naira and the sudden demise of many foreign nationals and Nigerian military and paramilitary personnel. The militant activities also resulted in economic crisis, as a result of shortfall in oil production, exports, and revenue generation, due to disruptive force of militancy targeted at oil installations in the Niger-Delta Region (Ewatan & Urhie, 2014). Notwithstanding, it must be established that economically motivated violence is not limited to oil exploration and militancy even though it is the most prevalent campaign when investigating the link between resources and conflicts in Nigeria. Oil revenues has given rise to conflicts among national, state, and local

authorities, among distinct groups and classes, among different camps and affiliations, among different zones and regions, and as well among different community leaderships. Despite the prevalence of the oil factor in the economically based conflicts in Nigeria, there are other factors such as grazing and farming, land and farming, and farming and water (Ewatan & Urhie, 2014 & Ikezue, & Ezeah, 2017).

Although Nigeria is mainly recognised for its oil and gas production, the agricultural sector still plays a dominant role in the labour force. The North-Central and the Southern parts of the country engage in the production of most of the tubers and vegetables crops. The pastoralists in the Northern parts produce most of the grains and livestock. Over the decades, there have been increasingly violent conflicts between farmers of the South and North-Central and the herders of the North. Pastoralists who are forced to the South and North-Central to seek green pastures for their cows often encroach into indigenous farmlands where crops worth millions of Naira are destroyed. When the audacious tendencies of the Fulani herders are challenged by the local farmers, it generally results in conflict leading to loss of lives and property (Ewatan & Urhie, 2014 & Shehu, 2018). Violent conflicts between Muslim Fulani pastoralists from predominantly Muslim North and Christian farmers from ethnically diverse and predominantly Christian South has taken a religious, tribal, and regional dimensions. Coordinated attacks orchestrated by Fulani militia against Indigenous farmers has resulted in fatalities with many locals displaced from their ancestral homes (NigeriaWatch, 2020).

Terrorism: Terrorism in Nigeria dates to the notorious activities of Islamic sect called “Metaisine” in the Northern Region of Nigeria, during the civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the second republic in 1983. The maiden terrorism

campaign was crushed by General Mohamadu Buhari who aborted the Shagari regime through military coup in 1983 (Duke, 2018). In 1999, during the civilian administration of the fourth republic, headed by Olusegun Obasanjo, another form of religious terrorism manifested itself through Islamic riots where tens of thousands of Christians were killed in Plateau State of the North-Central. Similarly, during the civilian administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, in 2010, there was the emergence of another form of religious terrorism, in the form of Boko Haram. The origin of Boko Haram can be traced to the religious ideology of Mohammed Yusulf, an Islamic cleric who believed that western education and civilisation (Boko) is forbidden (Haram) in Islam. Yusuf began the propagation of his radical ideology in 2009. (Majekodunmi, 2015).

In recent times, terrorism in Nigeria, fronted by Boko Haram has sprouted beyond religious frontiers and has assumed political dimensions, where political aspirants use it as a campaign tool in every electioneering period (Sergie & Johnson, 2015 & Anyadike & Nkechi, 2013). Terrorism has also been linked with social-economic, social-political, and social-religious factors. Whilst terrorism in Nigeria has its origin in Islamic extremism and fanaticism, catalysts such as inequalities, poor governance, illiteracy, and poverty, have driven its spread (Kenny, 1996 & Adenrele, 2012).

Ethno-religious conflicts: Nigeria is multi-Religious and multi-ethnic nation. Etim & Nwagboso, (2019) posits that mismanagement of this complex union has resulted in mistrusts and conflicts amongst different tribes and religious groups. Ethno-Religious crisis arises where there are lacks of cordiality, mutual understanding, and tolerance among members of one religion or ethnic group or among members of different tribes or religions in a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and multi-religious society, and where there is tendency towards

violent confrontation (Nnabuihe, 2019). The consistent religious crisis between the two dominant religions of Christianity and Islam bears credence to this narrative and this has constituted a major insecurity challenge (Kenny, 1996). There are also other forms of ethno-religious conflicts that have arisen due to new forms of political consciousness, agenda, identities that are strictly structured to fulfil a myopic tribal or religious goal. The emergent crisis is further amplified by the inability of political leaders to equitably distribute scarce resources and developmental dividends. Factors such as accusations, suspicion, exploitation, discrimination, marginalization, bigotry, nepotism, and domination have also played an active role in triggering ethno-religious rifts in Nigeria. The frequent occurrence of religious or ethnic rifts have snowballed into social, political, religious, and tribal anarchy, with a disintegrative tendency that is threatening the stability, peace, and developmental strides of the nation (Mmahi & Ojo, 2018).

Crime: Crime is a destabiliser of social-economic development, it retards psychological wellbeing. It brings about social upheavals (Reitano, 2018). Crime is as old as humanity and society. Two scriptural narratives attest to this: the fall of Adam and Eve in which they disobeyed the commandment of God not to eat of the forbidden fruit located in the Garden of Eden, and the killing of Abel by Cain (Gen. 3: 6 & 4:8).

A number of factors could be responsible for the prevalence of crime in society. These include the inordinate quest for wealth, poverty, inequality, instability, governmental failure, failed judicial systems, a porous security architecture and religious sentiments (Dong, Egger, & Guo, 2020). There has been an increase in crime across many parts of Nigeria. Such crimes range from murder, rape, stealing, and kidnapping to vandalism. Government at various levels has taken

drastic steps by putting measures in place to checkmate the increasing crime rate, but this has not fully yielded the desired effects, as armed robbery and kidnapping have targeted travellers on the road or individuals in their homes (Ogbeide & Aguegbunam, 2017). Online crime, such as the stealing of personal banking information, targeted towards vulnerable individual, has also increased. The availability of social media platforms, where scammers disguise their identity, have helped to aid the complexities of the operational tactics of Internet fraud (Adesina, 2017). To this end, it is not out of place to agree with Ogbeide & Aguegbunam, (2017) that there is a prevalence of crime in the Nigerian society, and this has constituted a social malady such as loss of income, valuables, lives, and properties,

Conclusively, the argument here is that insecurity in Nigeria is prevalent, and driven by the enumerated factors, and has constituted a social malady. This is because it thwarts business engagement, and discourages both local and foreign investments, thereby stifling socio-economic progress. The presence of insecurity at the community and individual levels retards development goals. The correlation between insecurity and underdevelopment can be further highlighted in terms of the negative effects it has on not just economic growth, but on exports, imports, consumption per capita, and government revenues. Bamba & Eikemo, (2018) have recognised a link between economic insecurity and unemployment. This shows that the more economic life is shattered, the more there is sense of job insecurity. Singer et al (2020) has also supplied data suggesting there is also a relationship between perceived insecurity (whether food, job or property or life insecurity) with anxiety. The more people feel threatened, the more it affects their wellbeing. To this end, insecurity becomes social-economic issues that must be contended with.

3.5. Conclusion

The contextual background of Nigeria with all of its historical, social-political, and social-economic complexity has been mapped out. The reader has been made to understand how the Nigerian historical and political setting impacted upon social-economic challenges that became the dilemma of the citizens. Prosperity is the theology that is presented as solution to all material hardship. This chapter has laid the social-economic background in which the prosperity gospel can be understood. The reader will see subsequently how faith communities tend to deploy the mechanism of prosperity to fight these contextual challenges within the Nigerian configuration.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL

4.1. Introduction

Considering the many controversies surrounding the meaning of prosperity, a cautionary step must be taken to explain what is meant by prosperity gospel. There have been many forms of Christianity's perceptions about Prosperity. Prosperity may mean different thing to different people. This may create a bit of confusion to the reader. To layout the conceptual framework that is applied throughout the thesis, this chapter introduces the reader to the meaning of prosperity gospel as a concept. The reader will be familiarised with the meaning of prosperity gospel and its features.

4.2. Conceptual framework

The term "prosperity" comes from the Latin word "prosperitas" which means the state of being prosperous. It has to do with being successful in what is done. It is the favourable outcome of things. In the English language, the word prosperity stems from the verb "*to prosper*" (Butterflied, 2015). The verb to prosper communicates two meanings. Firstly, it means to become rich or successful. Secondly, it indicates the ability to develop or grow. Thus, to be prosperous signifies the act of being wealthy or successful in all areas of human endeavour. This implies that prosperity is not only limited to money. It covers areas such as being successful in one's journey, endeavour, engagement, or being in good health, being wealthy, being happy, or being successful in a career. In summary, prosperity is the act of developing, growing, and succeeding in whatever human engagement one is involved in (Butterflied, 2015).

Experts have recognised some forms of prosperities, such as emotional, ecological, economic, material, and spiritual prosperities that are worth

exploring briefly (Diener, Ng, Harter, & Arora, 2010). Psychological prosperity or mental prosperity, or emotional prosperity is the absence of pains, suffering, or unpleasant feelings of emotional or psychological distress. For instance, the need for love, companionship, acceptance, achievement, autonomy, forgiveness and affiliation, or the need to avoid disgrace, harm, embarrassment, or shame. Spiritual prosperity is assumed to have occurred when one practices religious tenets that stipulate piety and focus attention on the hereafter, rather than the here and now (Stratton, 2011). Ecological prosperity focuses attention on the extent to which species are able to survive under certain conditions. The sense expressed here is that a prospering specie is that which flourishes in any environment, regardless of the circumstances. Economic prosperity is basically the type of prosperity often linked with economic growth. This essentially infers that economic growth, such as GDP per capita, is one of the indices for the measurement of prosperity. Material prosperity is related to material possessions, such as cars, property, and money, instead of more abstract things, such as ideas or knowledge. Economic and material prosperity have been suggested to have been inseparably interwoven, and often contend with the spiritual notion of prosperity. For instance, an attention on material benefits is implied to have some level of negative consequence on one's attentions of heavenly matters (Diener, Ng, Harter & Arora, 2010).

Having outlined the possible interpretation of prosperity, the next task is to investigate what prosperity gospel experts mean by prosperity. Does prosperity gospel align with any of the interpretations provided earlier? The answer to this is to carefully examine some of the teachings expressed by prosperity gospel proponents, in order to understand what they mean by prosperity. This route will help to deduce prosperity gospel meaning from the proponents' perception. This will help defeat the temptation of assumption.

Joseph Prince is a senior Pastor of New Creation Church, a prosperity congregation in Singapore, which has a membership of more than twenty thousand worshippers. Prince, in his book, entitled, *“Unmerited Favour”* intimates us with an interpretation of prosperity gospel that extols the merits and accomplishments of Jesus’ death on the cross, and links these to the overcoming of poverty (Prince, 2010). This position comes down to the question of dependence on the redeeming power of Jesus to alleviate all human suffering. This is a summon not to depend on worldly systems, or one’s ability, but on what God can do for the believer. Prince posits that when people depend on themselves, they are bound to fail and carry their burden and anxieties themselves. The solution therefore is to forfeit one's physical strength and look up to the redeeming grace of Jesus in order to conquer human suffering. While Prince’s suggestion is worthy of emphasis, in that it acknowledges the supremacy of God, it does not appear to appreciate human innovation and creativity in addressing hardship. It is a call for humanity to surrender to God, their inalienable creative endowment.

Bishop David Oyedekpo, the founder of the *‘Winners’ Chapel,* a thirty thousand seating capacity church in Nigeria, in his book entitled, *“Pillars of destiny,”* based his interpretation on II Corinthians 8:9 and links his understanding of prosperity gospel with the concept of redemption. Hence, he sees redemption as a means to all-inclusive prosperity and deliverance from the bondage of economic poverty (Oyedekpo 2008). The assumption is that redemption cures poverty in that it gives the Christian unrestricted access to wealth. Oyedepo’s suggestion is applauded as it points out that redemption has the entirety of humanity’s existential challenges at heart. And that from the incarnation to the death of Jesus, God in His infinite mercies show great concern for humanity. If it is understood from this perspective, human redemption is something positive.

That God entered humanity by giving His only begotten son to live among human beings surely is supportive of the evidence that God has His creatures at heart. To this end, it is worthy of acceptance that redemption has both material prosperity and spiritual blessing for humanity, but that these prosperities are automatic without human choice and action is arguable. Sustainable prosperity must involve human inputs such as the kind of job one is engaged in, the policies of the government of the day, and the choices that one makes on daily basis.

Pastor Joel Osteen, the Pastor of the '*Lakewood Church*,' one of the megachurches in the United States of America provides a compelling insight in his book, entitled, "*Living in the abundance of God.*" Pastor Joel Osteen encourages the adherent to engage in positive thinking, in order to achieve prosperity (Osteen, 2013). The sense at which this advocacy of positive thinking is expressed is to ignore all existential challenges in the path to successful living. Adherents are cautioned against thinking about the problems, the pains, the sickness, the loss of job, instead they are encouraged to concentrate on the opposite of their condition. What is propagated in this perception is that one's positive thoughts, faith and hope have the potency to always bring forth positive outcomes. Joel's interpretation does not provide a concrete road map from one's calamities, instead the adherent is only left with the option of unending hope. The problem of theodicy is radically wished away. There is an allusion that the problem of good and evil and human imperfection will automatically give way to one's positive wish. The susceptibility of human beings to make the wrong decision, which can lead to human sufferings, is also downplayed.

Pastor Chris Oyakilome, the owner of the '*Christ Embassy*' church, one of the leading prosperity gospel churches in Nigeria, also echoes the power of positive confession in his daily devotional, "*Rhapsody of Realities*" (Oyakhilome, 2018). He

believes that Christians have automatic right to good health, wealth, success, longevity, and happiness. He believes that all born again Christians possess power and anointing to succeed in all areas of life. To achieve all-inclusive success, Oyakilome believes that Christians must avoid using their mouth to say bad things about their life, in that the power of life and death is in the tongue. Oyakhilome also suggest that if believers want to secure their rightful place of abundant living, where they can progress with giant strides, they must be involved in seed sowing, in addition to positive declarations. He maintains that the miracle of prosperity grows from seed sowing. Any Christian that is hoping for a financial success or believing God for healing must start with sowing of a precious seed that can provoke the hand of God to act on his behalf. Oyakhilome contends that to the believer who gives bountifully, a multiple harvest of good health and financial success is assured. Giving of the believer's precious gift is a demonstration of faith in God's promises of all -round victory in life. Invariably, he argues that redemption from disease and poverty and all life's challenges are anchored on the believer's money. To this end, he believes that the believer's gift of money to God smoothens his path to success. Oyakilome's assertion presents a notion of a God who is a puppet that can only be awoken to act when offered money. The scenarios such as the healing of the woman with menstrual bleeding problem, the lamed man at the pool of Bethesda, where God helped the poor, the loners, the helpless who did not have material gifts to offer to Jesus, is neglected.

Pastor Kenneth Max Copeland, the founder of the *'Eagle Mountain International Church'* in Texas, an American televangelist, a proponent of prosperity gospel associated with the charismatic movement, in his prosperity gospel teaching, links prosperity with material success. In his book, entitled, *"God's will is prosperity: A roadmap to spiritual, emotional & financial wholeness"* (Copeland,

1978), he identifies and draws a correlation among three layers of prosperity: mental prosperity, physical prosperity, and spiritual prosperity. The first realm of prosperity is spiritual prosperity. This means a regeneration of heart achieved through being born again. Being born again is the act of receiving Jesus as Lord and personal saviour and the subsequent receipt of the Holy Spirit (Copeland, 1974). Copeland maintains that when the heart is regenerated through the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer experiences mental prosperity, the prosperity of the mind. A prosperous mind according to Copeland, operates in consistence and harmony with the mind of God which in turn divinely positions the believer to have access to physical prosperity. The physical prosperity guarantees the believer access to all the good things God promised for believers in the scriptures. The physical prosperity enables the Christian to have personal wealth such as gold and silver, political favour, social favour, and fame. Thus, in view of Copeland, prosperity is the all-inclusive material success given to believers by God.

The all-inclusive prosperity view is also shared by Cho (1987), when he advocates that the all-embracing prosperity that God wants to see in believer's lives, covers success in all areas of our living ranging from but not limited to childbearing, careers, finances, joy, marriages, health, relationships, security, and education. The prosperity advanced here is about the total wellbeing of the Christian in all spheres of life; it is living a blissful life on earth. It is the act of succeeding in all fronts of life. Cho's interpretation entirely excludes the idea of human suffering. A suffering Christian is assumed to have had a distant relationship with God, for such, does not have access to God's blessings. The story of Job who experienced suffering, even though he was said to be righteous, with a good relationship with his God, is at variance with Cho's theology (Job 1: 1 & 2: 4-14).

Also, Ukpai, a popular prosperity gospel preacher in Nigeria, in his book, entitled, "Supernatural Abundance," believes that prosperity is God's supernatural, and abundant blessings to the believer. Ukpai suggests that supernatural blessings are the believer's covenant right which are activated the moment God takes over the believer's life. It is not in the will of God to allow the believer to sojourn on earth in futility, but to be able to achieve an enlarged, buoyant, and effortless God's divine and supernatural prosperity. Ukpai sees believers as financial 'highfliers' who are to possess the blessings of the earth. Poverty or suffering is never an option for the believer since he has been divinely equipped for greatness. Ukpai's belief about the covenant right of the believer is also expressed by Bishop David Oyedekpo in his book, entitled, "*The Miracle Seed*," when he opines that the ultimate will of God is to bring believers into the realm of all-round blessing if the believer can enter a covenant relationship demonstrated in faith and giving. Here, the believer must demonstrate absolute love towards God, by faith that is revealed by giving financially for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God on earth. This bold faith is said to usher in supernatural breakthrough in all aspects of life. Oyedekpo contends that prosperity is the buoyant release of supernatural grace that make the believer have abundant wealth to overcome every challenge of life. It is the absence of earthly pains, sorrows, sickness, and failures. In this vein, prosperity is the believer's ability to live abundant life where lack is experienced. This opinion excludes the idea of hard work and the place of the inevitability of human challenges. It sees the world from the angle of perfection (Ecclesiastes 3:1- 8).

Furthermore, Essek William Kenyon, the Pastor of the '*New Covenant Baptist Church*,' United State of American, put a Christian coloration to the idea of positive confession, which was popular within the New Thought Movement. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the idea of the individual

thought power influenced the spirituality of Kenyon (Bowler, 2013). Kenyon believed that the believer must control material event through the power of his thought. He argued that people should stop thinking or saying negative things that related to poverty or sickness about themselves. (Kenyon, 1983) He also sees prosperity as the believer's ability to be delivered from poverty and to be able to deliver others. Prosperity is believed to have been given to the believer as a birth right and the Christian in return becomes a source of blessing to others. The believer is seen as a possessor and provider of prosperity. He receives prosperity from God and gives to others. Here, the believer is the sole owner of prosperity, but out of goodwill becomes a channel of blessing to his generations. Kenyon argues that the believer must be the distributor of God's prosperity to others who are in poverty. Thus, prosperity is conceived as a means by which all the basic needs of both the believer and the other people around him are met. It is the believer's ability to have all basic human needs of life and subsequently reaching out to others who are in need.

Oral Robert is another prosperity gospel adherent, who views Christian prosperity as overcoming all insurmountable problems and living an abundant life (Robert, 1970). To achieve greatness or live a problem free life, Robert believes that the believer must engage in seed sowing. He maintains that Christians can only receive from God the multiple of the seeds they sow in faith. Sowing seed of faith means giving to provoke God to bring about supernatural blessings in one's life. Robert assumes that the seed the believer gives is multiplied by God and given back so that the believers can have abundant "meat" in his store house and have more than enough money to meet his personal needs. In this assumption, God becomes the assuring agent of bountiful returns of the believer's investment. In Roberts' understanding, the believer is assured of God's obligation to give a multiplied portion or version of

his investment. The multiplied version is likely to be received in form of financial prosperity and success in all fronts which will enable the believer to live a suffering-free, painless and failure-free life.

Therefore, from the foregoing, the concept of prosperity gospel is the theology of all-inclusive success. It is fixed on God's full material success. It is understood as the Christian teaching that emphasises all-round physical well-being, such as good health, financial success, prestige, personal empowerment, long life, peace, and happiness. It propagates all-inclusive prosperity without recourse to suffering. It is the gospel that claims to possess the solution to all human difficulties such as unemployment, poverty, failure, diseases, barrenness, and insecurity. It is appropriated as a panacea to all social economic woes by people who are seeking an explanation for bad conditions in life (Phillips, 2013, Ehioghae, & Olanrewaju, 2015 & Pickering, 2013).

As already intimated, prosperity theology advocates all-inclusive material endowment for every believer. Thus, prosperity is said to be a sign of healthy relationship with God. However, to provoke one's material prosperity the believer must engage in praying certain forms of prayers; repeat certain positive confessions; quote prescribed scriptures; and sow certain seeds of faith in order to receive whatever one desires. This notion presupposes that the predicament of a poor, sick, suffering Christian is as a result of the absence of faith or disobedience of the believer (Osteen, 2013). The implication is that there is the chance of people feeling guilty if they inevitably get sick, have financial challenges, or career crisis. Therefore, prosperity theology is built on foundational concepts such as blessing, salvation and being born again, with features such as positive confession, seed sowing, positive thinking, faith, and

prayers playing prominent roles (Prince, 2010). I shall discuss these in detail in subsequent sections.

4.3. Basic biblical concepts used to endorse prosperity gospel.

The biblical foundation for the concept of prosperity gospel is based on the concept of blessing in the Old Testament and the concept of salvation in the New Testament (Pickering, 2013). Prosperity gospel preachers appropriate Old Testament and New Testaments scriptures to back up their teachings of prosperity. Prosperity gospel preachers interpret the concept of prosperity in relation to the concept of blessing in the Old Testament (Pickering, 2013). In this sense, blessing is perceived as the act of bestowal of divine favour on an individual or group of persons by God (Genesis 1:28). Thus, “To bless” is interpreted as an expression which conveys the bestowal of God’s material prosperity on His subjects. Prosperity gospel theology assumes that to be blessed is to receive favour from God with resulting material benefits. This prosperity is believed to be manifested in forms of peace, safety, states of wellbeing, offspring, and material possessions (Deuteronomy 7:13, Genesis 2:8 & Psalm 25). As an expression of favour, God who is full of liberality and generosity is said to bless His subjects with material prosperity. What this intends is that when God’s favoured people are promised prosperity, God does that within the perimeter of blessing. To this end, the concept of prosperity as preached by prosperity gospel adherents falls within the meaning of material blessing. Prosperity gospel preachers think that virtually everything that falls within the confines of prosperity is aligned with the understanding of blessings in the Old Testament. Thus, in this context, prosperity gospel exponents understand prosperity in relation to material blessings (Albuquerque, 2020). With this background, the biblical foundation for the concept of prosperity will

be evaluated in five spheres in the Old Testament vis a vis Edenic blessing, Noahic blessing, Abrahamic blessing, Melchizedekic blessing and Deteronomic blessing. This, however, does not erode the fact that there are also such things, such as Davidic blessing, messianic blessings, or prophetic blessings. It means I am only restricting the analysis to these five forms of blessings.

Edenic blessing: According to prosperity gospel claimants, In the Old Testament, God took the initiative to bless man and woman with a comfortable environment in the Garden of Eden after the creation of the world (Genesis 2:8). Eden signified a place of bliss and convenience. The word Garden, “παράδεισον” in Greek and “Paradisum” in Latin emanated from the Persian culture where the king sat or hunted in the choicest and most beautiful park. Metaphorically, this was related to the Jewish and Christian idea of a paradise. A paradise was a place of delight and pleasure. The garden of Eden was described to have had distinguishable richness and beauty. It was enriched with the best of fruits good for food. Thus, prosperity gospel claims that God, in His immeasurable goodness, desired that Adam and Eve should be comfortable, peaceful, and profitable hence, the pleasant Garden of Eden was given to them to live in (Levy, 2017 & schacter, 2013).

Prosperity gossellers suggest that after God’s placement of the first man and woman in the beautiful Garden of Eden, what followed was the declaration of material prosperity for the functionality of Adam and Eve in the new garden. The phrase “And God blessed them,” they believe conveys the conferment of God’s material blessings for the wellbeing of His new creatures. Secondly, prosperity proponents propose that Adam and Eve received material blessings as captioned in the words, “Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Their understanding is that man and woman were to fill the large

estate of Eden given to them by God through procreation. In this vein, they were to produce more offerings to occupy the earth, and to increase and enjoy the good of the land (Pett, 2013). Therefore, prosperity gossellers contend that the multiplication of human beings upon the face of the earth, as intended by God, is one of the fulfilments of God's material blessing and prosperity. Barrenness is something that should not be accepted as the will of God (Folarin, 2007). This assertion needs some critical evaluation. As science keeps advancing, there has been the discovery of different methods of infertility treatment, such as fertility drugs, artificial Insemination, donor sperm, in vitro fertilization (IVF), Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), donor eggs, surrogacy, donor Embryos, reproductive surgery, gamete Intrafallopian transfer (GIFT) and zygote Intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT), that are outside of natural method of reproduction. If these medical interventions become a reality, prosperity gospel theology stipulation of procreation through man and woman alone becomes a hard nut to crack. Furthermore, if atheists are assured of having children through scientific methods, outside of the sacred method prescribed by prosperity theology, prosperity gospel's exclusive claim to replenishing the earth is thus rendered comatose.

Back to the analysis, prosperity gospel claims that the life of bliss enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden during creation was lost because the Edenic covenant where God told Abraham not to eat of the forbidden fruit was broken. The sin of disobedience has broken the good relationship between God and Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve have eaten of the forbidden fruit in the garden, which God told them not to eat, and they have lost the Edenic blessings. However, exponents of the theology of prosperity suggest that God conceived the idea of how to restore man back to Himself. Here, prosperity gospel advocates opine that God decided to restore the estranged human beings back

to Himself because of His love to prosper His subjects whom He did not intend suffering for, and that restoring man back to the lost paradise became a task before God (Genesis 3: 1-7).

Noahic blessing: Prosperity gospel claims that, to restore man to the prosperous life lost through the breaking of the Edenic covenant, God initiated the Noahic covenant, whereby God promised Noah and his children blessings immediately after the earth was destroyed by the great flood that lasted for forty days and forty nights. God destroyed the earth when there was too much violence and wickedness on the earth. Noah and his son were saved, and God entered a covenant of blessing with Noah and his sons. In this Noahic covenant, God re-established His promise of fruitfulness and multiplication to Noah and his sons, that had had earlier been made to Adam and Eve. In this covenant relationship, they were to be obedient to God, in order for God to prosper them (Genesis 9:1-17). Prosperity gospel preachers suggest that the Noahic covenant, where God promised blessings to Noah and his sons, was for all generations, and that all true believers who obey God are inheritors of this covenant of blessing. They believe that the promises of God in this covenant indicate that God was still committed to His creation and that this commitment guaranteed the prosperity of all subsequent believers on earth (Chalmer, 2009). To the promoters of prosperity teaching, this covenant of blessings has been extended to all of Christianity. Hence, God's special material restoration is understood as not to all of humanity, but to the chosen generation of those who believe. By claiming these blessings, one is perceived as taking what rightfully belongs to him. The implication is that this spirituality can arouse an entitlement mentality and create the mind-set of a superiority complex over unbelievers. The Christian then sees himself as privileged, with special a relationship with the Supplier of

all material prosperity, and the believer as one who is doomed, in that he is outside of the covenant relationship with God.

Abrahamic blessings: Prosperity purveyors presume that God started working out His plan of restoring humankind to Himself through Abraham, after the Noahic covenant failed, and that it was Abraham, God gave a special blessing of prosperity (Genesis 12:2-10). This notion puts forward the belief that the process of the restoration of humanity to the life of prosperity by God began with a command to Abraham to forfeit his homeland for a prosperous future in the land of Canaan that was flowing with milk and honey with the condition of being obedient (Genesis 12: 1-10). The Blessing Abraham was to receive was not just for him alone but to his descendants and through him all the people of the earth would receive blessing. From the perspective of prosperity gospel, this Abrahamic covenant was for Abraham to be blessed materially and become an agent of material blessing for subsequent generations. In this vein, Christians are said to be the spiritual children of Abraham and are qualified as beneficiaries of the material blessings promised to Abraham (Pickering, 2013).

Abraham obeyed the command to “GO” upon hearing the ambiguous call of an unknown God. Upon arriving in the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, God spoke to Abraham assuring him that He would give the land to his descendants (Genesis 12: 7). Having been assured of arrival in the Promised Land, Abraham, set off with a series of ambiguous but valorous deeds of faith, by erecting altars of worship for God in the territory occupied by the Canaanites. In the centre of Canaanite religions and a hostile environment, he pledged God’s claim to the land (Genesis 13:4). To exponents of prosperity gospel, the heroic action taken by Abraham was a practical demonstration of faith in God, and that it was an act of spiritual conquest that would eventually manifest in material blessings. They

believe it was a sign to show God has come to take over the land and its blessings from the heathen occupants. No longer will the glory of the Canaanite gods reign supreme; hence the altars of YHWH must replace the place of the Canaanite gods. Prosperity gospel theology's assumption is that God had called Abraham into a covenant relationship with Him and promised Abraham the land of Canaan. Thus, in faith, Abraham had to raise the altars of YHWH amidst the Canaanite shrines to lay claim to the land of Canaan. From the understanding of prosperity gospel preachers, God rewarded Abraham with the land of Canaan, a land flowing with riches and great prosperity in livestock, long life and with a promised son, Isaac from whose seed came the Israelites because of his faith in God. Thus, believers must claim these Abrahamic blessings to live a prosperous life. Like Abraham, wherever believer find themselves, and where their feet touch, they shall possess material wealth (Sarna, 1989).

Melchizedekic blessing: Apart from the Abrahamic covenant of blessing, where God promised to bless Abraham, prosperity gospel exponents also discuss the prosperity of Abraham in relation to his encounter with Melchizedek, where Abraham was blessed by him. In this regard, Prosperity gospel is discussed in relation to Abraham's payment of one tenth of his war booty to Melchizedek and Abraham's receipt of Melchizedekic blessing (kitause, 2005). Abraham has gone to rescue Lot, his kidnapped nephew, by defeating the coalition of the kings of Mesopotamia. Upon Abraham's return, Melchizedek welcomed him, blessed Abraham, and received his tithe of the war booty:

*Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and
blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!
(Genesis 14:19)*

In the encounter, Abraham was said to have paid one tenth of his booty to Melchizedek, the king of Silom, who was the Priest of God Most High (Genesis 14: 17). Melchizedek was described as a Priest of the Highest God, the El 'elyon, - Supreme Ruler of the universe. The כהן (kohen) or Priest that is here alluded to in the Old Testament for the first time, was acting in sacred matters on behalf of others. He was one who mediated between God and man and represented God by stretching out the hand of mercy to man. And man in return, reached forth to the hand of mercy through faith. The duty of the priest was to offer sacrifice and to intercede on behalf of others. He appealed for the mercy of God for others (Genesis 14:17). In this line of argument, prosperity gospel preachers view Abraham's offering of his tithe, or one tenth of his booty, as a religious and holy deed that provoked God's blessings upon him. (Oyedekpo,1986). It is difficult to understand Abraham's choice of Melchizedek because he was neither the only King that existed during that time nor the only one that welcomed him upon his return from his victorious escapades over the confederated Mesopotamian Kings. It is also difficult to identify the role of divine directions in Abraham's choice of Melchizedek as the recipient of the tithe. However, prosperity gossellers contend that by choosing Melchizedek, Abraham acknowledged the priestly authority of Melchizedek over his life. To them, Abraham recognised Melchizedek's spiritual superiority, and this was what motivated him to receive blessings from Melchizedek and to subsequently pay one tenth of what he had to him. Prosperity gossellers believe that Abraham knew what he was doing and did it deliberately with full faith that he would prosper when blessed by Melchizedek (Kitause, 2005).

From this belief of prosperity advocates, it is taken that for the superior to bless the inferior, there must be an inducement through giving that should be expressed through the payment of tithe. Therefore, for believers to be blessed,

first they must recognise the spiritual authority of their Pastor. Secondly, they must pay the one tenth of whatever income they have to the Pastor who will stand as the Priest of God most High and as the representative of God, like Melchizedek, to declare the blessings of God upon the subject. Prosperity gospel promoters assume that it is this declaration that provokes the outpouring of God's blessing upon the believer (Fitzmyer, 2000 & Oyedekpo, 2008). Having been blessed, the believer is therefore positioned to live a prosperous life, a life of no lack and no pain. It is in the persuasion of prosperity gospel Christians that tithe payment stands as one means by which God blesses His children. The giving of tithes is believed to be reciprocal; it is like reaping and sowing. There is connection between payment of one's tithe and prosperity. Prosperity gospels see God as the source of all prosperity who blesses His children when they genuinely give money to Him (Kitause, 2005).

Deuteronomic blessing: The entire idea of the Deuteronomic blessing is wrapped in the following analysis: The children of Israel spent forty years in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. In the eleventh month of the fortieth year while they camped in the eastern side of the River Jordan in Arabah, Moab, and as they were about to cross over into the promise land, Moses gave an inspiring speech on how they should relate to God. This speech contained the law on how God intended to bless the Israelis, only if they would remain obedient to Him (Deuteronomy 29, 30, 31). The Israelites have spent forty years in the wilderness in a journey that should have taken them eleven days, because of their rebellion against God in terms of disobedience. The Old generation that left Egypt had died in the wilderness, their children were about to enter Canaan, the promised land, and there was a need to prepare them on how to live a prosperous life upon their entry into the promised land. After a brief emphasis on how God performed mighty acts among the people, wherein God delivered Israel from

Egyptian slavery, parted the sea of reeds, and provided mana from heaven, and how Israel disobeyed. Moses the leader had to renew the law of God to the Israelites, this is the legal contract that binds Israel with God. In the legal contract God promised blessings to the Israelites with the condition of obedience. This is a renewal of the promise of prosperity made by God to the patriarch, Abraham (Deuteronomy 29,30,29). The contents of the promise of prosperity renewed here can be summed up in three dimensions: exalted name or great name, a successful farming, and the blessing of children. This could mean being prominent and above other nations, Israel would be in position of a 'super nation' and feared by other nations. This could imply that Israel will assume the role of a leading nation, as well as have peace. It depicts a flourishing nation with flourishing cities without external threats. Successful farming could mean that Israel would have a bountiful harvest of food. This could imply prosperity of farm and livestock and appropriate rain. The blessing of children could mean that Israel would have a multiplicity of children. This could imply the absence of barrenness or a stillbirth (Deuteronomy 1, 6, 28). It is these material blessings that advocates of prosperity lay claim to. Thus, within this context, prosperity gossellers argue that the Deuteronomic blessings are for all believers, and that the preconditions for claiming these material entitlements are faith and confession (Capps, 1987 & Pickering, 2013).

Thus, to sum up the foregoing argument, prosperity gossellers believe that the sin of disobedience made God to eject Adam from the Garden of Eden and stopped him from having access to the tree of life. The result was a curse, suffering and death to humankind, and for God to call and give Abraham a promise of a prosperous life showed God's intention to reverse that curse. This indicates that the prosperity of humankind assumes a primary goal in the heart of God (Malick 2008). Prosperity gossellers are persuaded that the initiation of

the Noahic covenant and the restorative call of Abraham, and the promise of blissful life in Canaan after the breaking of the Edenic covenant by Adam and Eve was a demonstration of God's intention to make humankind to live a life of prosperity. They are also convinced that the encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek where the later blessed the former and the Deuteronomic blessing where God promised to bless the children of Israel were all part of God's plan to prosper humanity (Chalmer, 2009, Phillips, 2013, & Pickering, 2013).

To prosperity gospel exponents, wrath and suffering were not primary in the divine arrangement of God (Pickering, 2013). They contend that wrath and suffering come as a response to a world that is disobedient to God. In this vein, the wrath of God is a compulsory reaction to a world of rebellion, but not eternal, fixed, or a permanent state of the being of God. The assumption is that the intention of God during creation and in the Edenic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Melchizedekic and Deuteronomic blessings where God demonstrated His love, care, liberality for humanity to live a prosperous life, should be recognised as primary, inalienable and synonymous to His character. The central argument put forward by this notion is that the gift of wealth, prosperity, love, peace, security is always at the heart of God in His dealing with His creation. On the other hand, the sin of disobedience and lack of faith by humanity has the potential of obstructing this divine prosperity. However, irrespective of humanity's frail character, God must, call, restore and bless in that it shows His inalienable character of love and His desire to make humanity live a prosperous life. Thus, according to prosperity gospel belief, the foundation for prosperity for the believer in the Old Testament is laid on the bestowal of God's blessing on His children (Malick, 2008).

Similarly, the New Testament foundation for prosperity gospel will be discussed having discussed the Old Testament foundation. In the New Testament, prosperity gospel is based on the concept of salvation. The word salvation comes from the Greek verb "sozo" (σῶζω) which means "to save". It means to rescue or deliver from danger, harm, peril, suffering, disease, and the bondage of sin (Capps, 1987). First, it has a materialistic usage as in the case of Jesus calming the storm to save the sinking boat when His disciples cried for safety; in the case of Jesus calling upon God to save Him from His coming death of the cross; and in the case of Paul's confession of his rescue from the mouth of the lion (Matthew 9:22, John 12:27, 2Timothy 4:18). The sense behind the usage here is materialistic, it is motivated towards the wellbeing of humanity. The second sense in which sozo is used connects with the idea of Parousia. It relates to those that will be saved during the parousia (παρουσία). Parousia in this context means the second coming of Jesus Christ. What is alluded to here is the safety or the deliverance of faithful Christians during Jesus' second coming. This is the preservation of the elect from eternal damnation (Mark 13:20). The usage here is apocalyptic. Thirdly, sozo is used with reference to the immediate spiritual salvation given to those who believe on Jesus' name as exemplified in the case of the three thousand people who accepted Jesus on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 27). The usage here is spiritual. The fourth used is with regard to the power of God to deliver humanity from sin. It is believed that humanity has been corrupted with sin of Adam and Eve and needs to be delivered from the Adamic sin into God's marvellous light (Matthew 1:21 & Romans 5:10).

Meanwhile, the sense in which salvation is used by prosperity gospel preachers is in consonance with the materialistic usage (Capps, 1987). The materialistic usage is further advocated in relation to liberation. In prosperity gospel, salvation is liberation. It is believed that the salvific work of Jesus Christ is a

fundamental liberation from all social-economic challenges of man (Gutierrez, 1974). Advocates of prosperity gospel argue that salvation should be understood as something that transforms all human lives from misery to triumph, from sickness to health, from poverty to riches, from premature death to longevity and from failure to success. Jesus by His death conquered all human sufferings and by His resurrection brought prosperity to humanity. The liberating power of salvation is not something for the past but for here and now and should take place in any human condition that is characterised by social-economic challenges. In this light, prosperity gossellers contend that the church has centred its message on the soul of man for too long. It failed to address the social economic plight of man. What is clear from prosperity gospel advocacy is that salvation is not entirely about deliverance from the Adamic sin or atonement for the inability of the believer to meet the standard of God as advocated by the church, but it is more concentrated on everyday realities of life. It is more about how the believer could succeed in business, how to be healed of any ailment, how to bear children, how to live a long life, how to have enough money to solve basic issues of life and how to be happy in life (Gutierrez, 1974, & Amechi, 2014).

Capps (1987) argues that the whole essence of salvation if divorced from its ability to liberate humankind from suffering, it apparently becomes a mere ideology. The idea communicated here is that a current witness to the covenant promise of God in the Old Testament as renewed by the salvific work of Jesus on the cross becomes more communicable and believable when understood from the emancipative power of the gospel. Thus, to prosperity gospel ideology, it is difficult to believe in a Christian message that does not identify with the social-economic challenges of humanity. The emancipation that brings about total wellbeing of humankind is the basis for the possibility of contemporary

belief in the work of salvation. The death and resurrection of Jesus from death brings about the reversal of human suffering. The central argument of prosperity gospel preacher is that the work of salvation puts an end to the believer's suffering and ushers the believer into an abundant life (Simon, 2002).

4.4. General features of the prosperity gospel teachings.

Prosperity theology has grown to become a global phenomenon. In the process it has gained a strong footing in such diverse locations as the United States, Africa, Latin America, and South Korea. Prosperity gospel has enjoyed a good amount of popularity among varied groups of people, depending on their contextual challenges. Its subscribers cut across the urban middle-class, the poor, the indigenous tribes, and ethnic minorities (Coleman 2000).

In the United States, the phenomenon of prosperity gospel has attracted many believers from the middle class, drawn from both the rural and urban areas. Experts, such as Harris (1981) and Coleman (2000), have identified a few factors responsible for the wide spread of prosperity gospel ideology in the United States of America: contempt for social liberalism during the 1970s, economic hope during 1950s and 1990s, religious secularisation, an attempt at fulfilling the American Dream through sacred means. Prosperity theology is also widespread among poor Americans, drawn from the suburbs, specifically, those who are seeking social and personal prosperity. It has particularly experienced significant growth among immigrants, and Black and Hispanic communities. Robbins (2010) believes that the popularity of prosperity gospel in the Global South is because, it creates a sense of belonging and a capitalist mind-set, as it emphasises economic security and help. Robbins notes that adherents have the sense of belonging to a complicated gift-exchange belief system, where they are enjoined to give to God and then await a hundred-fold return. In South Korea,

prosperity ideology has a correlation with the practice of shamanism (Ro,1998). Ro (1998) argues that the prosperity doctrine of giving, and blessings has been contextualised to reflect the tradition of giving money to shaman in exchange for healing and victory over social-economic problems. In Africa, experts such as Kwateng-Yeboah (2017) and Kitause (2005), have also identified factors, such as poverty, fear of perceived evil agents, government failure, as precursors to the advancement of prosperity gospel.

Thus, the teaching of prosperity gospel has elements of fluidity, but it follows a general form. The teaching is fluid because it adapts to any environment to address contextual matters that adherents are faced with. It follows a general pattern in that it has some universal features such as giving, positive thinking, faith and visualisation that are identifiable wherever it is found. (Folarin, 2007).

In prosperity theology, Christ's atonement signifies abundant life in the here and now. The age long teaching of the church has been that Jesus died to atone for the sins of Christians through His death and resurrection (Isaiah 53:1-10), and that as a sequel to this great achievement, Christians will experience the eternal life that He brought to humanity (John 10:10). And that though Christians experience some gains from the atonement in the here and now, in the form of the forgiveness of sins and an assurance of eternal life, the atonement only points the believer to eternal prosperity that will not fully be attained until heaven. The church has often maintained that in heaven, the believer will receive a glorified body, and death, sin, suffering, pain, and sorrow will be things of the past. However, prosperity gospel refutes this belief system, and teaches that health, happiness, and material wealth are secured for the believer through the atonement. Thus, this interpretation encourages adherents of prosperity

gospel to expect complete happiness, monetary riches, healing, and an all-inclusive success in every area of their earthly life.

Prosperity gospel advocates contend that the believer's salvation is not only limited to being saved from sin but that it extends to the victory Christ won over forces that stop the believer's success in life (Ehioghae & Olanrewaju, 2015). They believe that through His death, Christ has met all the needs of humanity. Thus, it is the will of the all-sufficient God to prosper those who believe in the salvific or atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross of cavalry. To live in sickness or poverty, to die prematurely, live an unemployed life or to be barren without a child, is to live under the power of sin and satanic forces. However, the consequences of victory over sin and satanic powers are shown in all round success of financial stability, childbearing, good health, longevity of life, peace, and happiness (Ehioghae & Olanrewaju, 2015).

Prosperity gospel opines that to be saved is not only about the life after now but about what believers are experiencing in their everyday living. God is not just seen as a distinct Being, who is seated far above the sky and only interested in the life after now, but as a Being who is interested in the daily affairs of men. God is seen as a liberator who can liberate men from worldly challenges. Thus, whoever is redeemed by God, who is interested in the affairs of believers on earth. has been captured from poverty to riches, from sickness to health, failure to success, from sin to righteousness and from darkness to light (Omavuebe, 2017).

Proponents of prosperity gospel claim that the God they serve is not a poor God as they practically live it out as identifiable in their flamboyant lifestyle. They contend that there is no Christian who is destined by God to live in bondage of poverty, fear, or mediocrity. To be a victim of failure is not the will of God, the

ultimate will of God is to live a life of prosperity. In this regard prosperity gospel does not recognise failure, sickness, or suffering. Failure is a thing that must be discarded by one's choice. The first step to discarding failure is to be born again. Here the believer is said to have repented of his sin and become a part of God's family. Subsequently, the believer must be transformed by the indwelling of the power of the Holy Spirit. Equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit the believer is now in position to receive the fullness of God's blessings (John 3: 1-5).

Prosperity gospel adherents places much emphasis on the power of the Holy spirit (pneumatology (Studebaker, 2003). The term pneumatology emanates from two Greek words, pneuma (πνεῦμα meaning spirit) and logos (λόγος meaning about). Pneumatology is the teaching about the work of the Holy spirit in the life of the believer (Studebaker, 2003). To prosperity gospel preachers, one of the works of the Holy spirit is to energise the believer to make positive declaration about his life, speak in tongues and make quality donation to the church. This means, to practically work out prosperity, the believer is enjoined to give faithfully to advance the kingdom of God. This giving comes in various forms, such as offerings, seed faith, or tithes and is known as sowing and reaping. This sowing and reaping come in varied forms: giving of money, land, cars, clothing, houses, abilities, or time to support church projects, missions, evangelism or as a gift to the pastor to support his welfare. This sowing and reaping are done to receive a flamboyant harvest of blessings in the form of good health, promotion in the workplace, long life, peace, security, and financial success. Adherents are encouraged to expect a commensurate return when giving is done faithfully. What this means is that Christian giving opens the channel through which God's abundant supplies is poured forth in appropriate return. What is given comes back in a multiplied form (Kwateng-Yeboah, 2017).

Prosperity theology views the relationship between God and Christians as transactional (Garcia, 2014 and Kwateng-Yeboah, 2017). The transactional relationship is a contract between God and believers: if Christians have faith in God, He will deliver good health, security happiness and prosperity. The transactional elements are paramount to the believer's success. The ability to fulfill the transactional elements of the contract determines the success of the individual Christian. The fulfilment of transactional elements such as faith, giving and positive confession means the expectation and appearance of all-round blessing in a concrete manner. Like the transactional processes whereby money is exchanged for good and services, the individual Christian must give his money, demonstrate his faith, and engage in positive thinking, visualization, and confession to show his allegiance to God. God must give prosperity to the individual Christian in return to keep to part of His covenant. For this religious transaction to succeed and for perfectly amazing things to happen, the prosperity gospel adherent must be completely honest, most especially when he pays the one tenth of his tithes to the church (Kwateng-Yeboah, 2017).

Prosperity theology presumes that faith is a force one can use to control God. The church has taught that Christians are justified by faith (Romans 5:1-2), that Christians by faith have overcome the world (1 John 5:5-6), and that all Christian people live by faith as a result of what Jesus has done through His death and resurrection (Galatians 2:20). The church sees faith as the evidence of trust in God and links its interpretation with salvation. Incompatibly, prosperity gospel lovers reject this orthodox view on faith, as they often coin the phrase "Word of Faith" to express their brand of spirituality. They view faith as a force one can deploy to achieve one's desire from God. Their argument is that if the believer is able to obtain justification and salvation through faith, why cannot the same believer obtain material wealth in a similar way? In essence, this prosperity

gospel doctrine is solidified by the view that the will of God is to save humanity and make it materially prosperous. In this theological ideology, right belief, right thought, and right word when aligned with faith can create tangible prosperity (Morris, 2012).

Finally, prosperity theology preaching churches are independent and non-denominational, even though some churches have formed alignments and networks with one another (Coleman,2000). Prosperity theology has more popularity within Pentecostal churches. Most prosperity gospel Pentecostal churches basically do not accept the presbyterian organogram of leadership, where the pastor must as a matter law be accountable to church elders. As a common practice, pastors of prosperity gospel Pentecostal churches are often the owner and highest authority. Posner and Conason, (2008) argues that prosperity theology leaders develop authoritarian tendencies. They maintain that promoters of prosperity gospel ideology are susceptible to controlling the lives of adherents, by laying claims to sacred authority.

4.5. Conclusion

Within this chapter, the concept of prosperity gospel was mapped out so that a non-specialist reader can understand the theology. The prosperity theology concept was defined as the Christian doctrine that stresses all-round material blessings, such as money, good health, longevity, peace, happiness as the believer's birth right, so long as he is born again. Subsequently, the chapter delved into the foundational concepts that proponents use to explain prosperity theology. In this vein, biblical concepts such as blessings and liberation were analysed in tandem with how they fit into prosperity theology promoter's worldview. The chapter ended with providing for the reader the universally identifiable elements of prosperity teachings.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN NIGERIA

5.1. Introduction

There are two popular suggestions as to how prosperity gospel emerged in Nigeria. The first school of thought, upheld by Emeka (2012) and echoed by Kituase (2017), posits that the phenomenon of prosperity gospel is exclusively an American ideology, imported into Nigeria. The second view, expressed by Gaiya (2002) and Kalu (2000), and subscribed to by Ojo (2006) and Onwu (2006), holds that it is entirely an African ideology, nurtured with African ingredients and popularised in African soil.

This historic evaluation of the development of prosperity gospel in Nigeria takes a radical shift from the two popular views that solely attribute the emergence of the prosperity gospel ideology to either the Nigerian indigenous Pentecostal revivalism or the American prosperity and the word of faith movement. Therefore, the central postulation presented in this historical analysis is that the Nigerian prosperity gospel is an amalgamated ideology of the Nigerian indigenous charismatic Pentecost revivalism and the American prosperity gospel phenomenon. For clarity's sake, the root of the African Pentecostal revivalism will be examined first. Secondly, the root of the American word of faith movement and positive confession will be analysed. Thirdly, how these two different religious traditions converged to form the Nigerian prosperity gospel ideology will be examined.

5.2. Origin of Nigerian Pentecostal Revivalism.

Pentecostal revivalism was a phenomenon that was internally motivated in Nigeria (Kalu, 2000). It started with the activities of Garrick Braide; an Anglican

lay preacher in 1912. Pentecostal revivalism was initiated as a direct response to the failure of European missionaries to advance a Christian gospel that was adaptive to the African context and cultural orientation (Olofinjana, 2012). Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism originated as a quest for a Christian tradition that could be interpreted through African cosmological understanding. European missionaries had propagated a Christian tradition that was wrapped up and coloured with Western cultures (Magbadelo, 2004). The Christian message was not indigenised to suit the spiritual needs and aspirations of Africans. Foreign languages such as English and Latin were adopted for church services instead of Indigenous languages. This non-inclusive and Westernised Christianity seemed alien to Africans, thereby making native tribes have the feeling of unacceptability (Omavuebe, 2017).

Furthermore, the exhibition of a superiority complex and a white supremacy tendency could not allow European missionaries to see anything good about African indigenous cultures, thereby disrespecting indigenous cultural dispositions. Africans and their indigenous cultures were degraded and termed “savages,” who were believed to be living in a barbaric stage of human existence, and who must accept the white man’s culture and value system to be civilised. In this thinking, the European missionaries believed that the primitive African cultures must be discarded to embrace Europeanisation. This was visible in both material and non-material aspect of cultures. To become Christians, Africans were made to take up European names and African organisational systems were modelled according to that of Europe. The being of the colonised Africans had to be replaced with the being of the European colonisers. To this end, the colonised felt rejected and disrespected, a development that created a vacuum for the advancement of another brand of Christianity, which found its interpretation through African cosmological orientation (Isichei, 1995).

It is important to note that African cosmology was highly sacralised. The visible and the invisible worlds were inseparable. The spirit world was said to control the physical world. What happened in the material world was determined by what happened in the world of the spirit. Evil forces were said to inhabit the spirit world and were believed to possess power to control the affairs of humanity. Everything that happened to human beings, whether good or bad, was attributed to the actions of a spirit being. The total life of the African was like going through a cosmic battle. This was the battle of how to succeed amidst evil forces and tendencies. The question of power and how to succeed amidst evil machinations was unavoidable in African cosmology. European missionaries responded by avoiding the question of power and cosmic battle, by building charity and educational institutions and by pointing Africans to the God of love who was seated far above the heavens. To the Africans, this European God of love, was too far away in the sky, and could not fight their daily battles of evil plotting. This approach which could not answer the question of power to win cosmic battles left the field to be fertilised for the rise of indigenous revivalism (Kalu, 2002).

The catalyst to indigenous revivalism in Nigeria was Garick Sokari Braide in 1912. Braide's emphasis was on the power of God for divine healing and victory over satanic forces. He campaigned that believer must be prayerful and holy to overcome evil forces. The religious ideology that surrounded Braide's movement was victory over evil forces. In 1916, Braide's revival campaign gave birth to the Aladura Churches and the Christ Army Church which were the pioneer Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria (Gaiya, 2002 and Olofinjana, 2012). Between 1920 and 1947, another wave of revival emerged within the Aladura Movement. The exponents of this revival were: Joseph Babalola, the founder of Christ Apostolic Church, Samuel Oshoffa, the founder of Celestial Church of

Christ, Moses Orimolade Tunolase and Christiana Abiodun, the founders of Cherubim and Seraphim Church, and Oshitelu, the founder of Church of the Lord (Tuner, 1967). There is a change in the character of every indigenous religious revolution in every decade and every generation, depending on the contextual circumstances of the people (Rotimi, Nwadiakor and Ugwuja, 2016). The religious ideology that drove this revival within the Aladura Movement was fasting, prayer and divine healing. There was an outbreak of an incurable influenza in Yoruba land in 1918. Desperate need for a cure for the deadly influenza, which eluded missionary medicine, pushed the Aladura Movement into fasting and prayer, and seeking the face of God for a divine solution. As what might be defined as heavenly intervention in the affairs of humankind, the deadly influenza stopped, and many lives were saved (Isichei, 1995). Isichei's suggestion lacks scientific premise, however, though there is no scientific evidence to show the correlation between the prayer offered and the disappearance of the influenza virus, I will propose three possibilities.

The influenza virus is classified into four types: A, B, C and D. Types A and B are suggested to be responsible for causing seasonal epidemics, particularly during the winter (flu) season in the West and rainy season in Africa. Type C is only known to cause mild illness and is believed not to be responsible for flu epidemics. Type D is only known to infect cattle, not humans (Cohen et al., 2014, Szretter et al., 2006). Thus, as there were no vaccines in 1918 that could have immunised people against the virus, the first possible explanation to the disappearance of the influenza virus may be the change of the season, which created unfavourable conditions for the virus to thrive. The second reality could be that people might have developed a natural immunity to the virus because of prolonged exposure. The third possibility is the intervention of immortality in humanity. The Bible is saturated with incidences of God intervening in the affairs

of His people: He healed Naaman of his leprosy and Job of his infectious boils, and Jesus healed a woman with a blood issue and 10 lepers (2 Kings 5:1–14; Job 42:10–17; Luke 8:43–48, 17:11–19). Strengthened by what they believed was divine intervention, the Aladura movement famously spread across Nigeria. With an emphasis on prayer, fasting and divine healing, the emerging indigenous groups began to have a more Pentecostal direction (Isichei, 1995).

As the Aladura revival churches were growing in popularity and spreading rapidly, there was a simultaneous hostility from European missionaries, who felt threatened by the audacity of the movement. The quest for legitimisation and protection from the persecution of missionary churches led by colonial authorities compelled the Aladura churches to identify with other Pentecostal movements, such as the Assemblies of God Church and the Four Gospel Church from the USA and the Apostolic Church in Britain. It was an alliance that led to another wave of revivalism between the 1960s and 1970s. American preachers such as Billy Graham, Tommy Lee Osborn and Morris Cerullo, and British preachers such as John Stott, became involved in organising a great gospel campaign that resulted in the mass conversion of people at their open-air gospel crusades (Kalu, 2008). The religious ideology changed from fasting, praying, and healing to repentance, personal encounter with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. This Pentecostal revival saw the emergence of such interdenominational Christian groups as the Christian Union, Scripture Union and Christian Student Movement in colleges and universities in Nigeria. Students in colleges and universities of higher learning who encountered the inspiring messages of personal regeneration and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer began to create worship spaces for themselves where they could express their newly acquired gifts of the Holy Spirit. The influx of audio messages, Christian tracts and books from the USA aided the stability of the

charismatic renewal. Strengthened by the new wave of revivalism, students who were caught up in the fervour of the revival embarked on intensive and extensive evangelism to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unreached (Kalu, 2008, Kalu, 2010). Idahosa, a university student who later became a pioneer agent of another brand of revivalism known as the prosperity gospel within the Pentecostal faith, was a part of this revival campaign in the 1970s.

In 1972, Idahosa founded the Church of God Mission, with its headquarters in Benin City, Nigeria; the ideological foundation of Idahosa's church was all-inclusive prosperity. Earthly possession was the focus of Idahosa's teachings. To achieve prosperity, Idahosa contended that Christians must be born again, possess the power of the Holy Spirit, be delivered from demonic forces, make positive confessions and exercise faith in the Word of God, as well as engaging in seed faith, tithes, the giving of offerings and donations. Today, Idahosa is considered as the father of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria (Folarin, 2007, Kitause, 2017). However, it is expedient to note that Idahosa's prosperity gospel was a combination of elements of African Pentecostal revivalism and American Word of Faith and positive confession movement. Idahosa picked ingredients from the Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism, such as being born again, the power of the Holy Spirit, victory over satanic forces and exorcism, and combined them with elements of the American Word of Faith and positive confession movement that he encountered while studying as a student in the USA (Folarin, 2007, Kitause, 2017).

5.3. Origin of American prosperity gospel.

Situating the origin of prosperity gospel ideology in the USA is not so simple. The American roots of the prosperity gospel as expressed through the Word of Faith and positive declaration are long and complicated. It emerged from the New

Thought movement in the 19th century, which was popular with such non-religious exponents as Ralph Emerson, who propounded that there was a causal relationship between human thoughts and experiences, and that individuals possessed thought power, which could be exercised over the material world. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the idea of individual thought power influenced EW Kenyon, who imbued it with Christian overtones (Bowler, 2013). Kenyon suggested that Christians should always harbour positive thoughts in their minds. He argued that people should stop thinking or saying negative things that related to poverty or sickness in regard with themselves. Kenyon's prescription was that people should start saying positive things associated with health, success, and prosperity. This reliance on individual mind power was to transform thoughts and words into blessings sent from heaven. Kenyon became a link to the famous prosperity gossellers, who laid the foundations of modern prosperity gospel ideology (Bowler, 2013). Norman Vincent Peale, a pastor at Marble Collegiate Church in New York, introduced a modern ingredient into the teachings of the New Thought movement with his popular book, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, in 1952 (Peale, 1952). Peale contended that when a believer engaged in positive thinking, they set in motion positive forces or power that produced amazing positive results. Modern prosperity gospel advocates, such as Oral Roberts, mixed the elements of positive declaration with Kenneth Hagin's Pentecostal teaching of word of faith, miracle healing, and material wealth, to produce the theology of all-round material success in the late 20th century (Robert, 1970). This theology of all-round success was widely adopted and spread by Pentecostal television preachers in the 1950s. It was a short step from the Pentecostal idea of baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, earlier pioneered by Charles Fox Parham, and popularised by William J Seymour in 1912, to faith prosperity. America's first Pentecostal televangelists in the

1950s and 1960s created a succession of prosperity gossellers who utilised the media to reach out to a growing audience across the globe. These believers were challenged to donate to the church to receive a sevenfold blessing in return (Bowler, 2013, Kenyon, 2004, Roberts, 1970).

The analysis is that the American prosperity gospel as it is, has its origins in the New Thought movement, which is characterised by the positive declaration and the Word of Faith phenomenon, which, in turn, is characterised by physical healing, material wealth and all-round physical well-being (Bowler, 2013). Exponents of the prosperity gospel speculate that in order to achieve all-round physical blessing, believers must engage in positive thought, positive confessions, and financial donations to their churches (Kenyon, 2004; Roberts, 1970).

5.4. The meeting point between the Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism and the American prosperity gospel.

In 1972, Benson Idahosa enrolled for theological training in Christ for the Nations Institute in the USA. It was during this period that Idahosa personally encountered the American prosperity gospel through his exposure to American prosperity gospel preachers such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Tommy Lee Osborn, and Jim Baker, who had a tremendous influence on his life, Christian views, and ministry (Achunike, 2007). The result was Idahosa's adoption of the prosperity gospel, which was indigenised to suit the Nigerian cultural belief in the existence of demonic entities and the prevailing economic difficulties (Okwori, 1995). Nigerian cosmological belief acknowledged the ability of demonic forces to prevent one's good fortune in life (Kalu, 2000). The prevailing economic difficulties in Nigeria in the 1970s were the result of the effects of three years of civil unrest that had ravaged economic life and the subsequent

government failure to address these difficulties squarely (Nafziger, 1972). Socio-economic challenges such as poverty, sickness and poor health facilities, insecurity, unemployment, high mortality rates and infrastructural decay were the basic precursors for the audacious and rapid spread of the prosperity gospel in Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular. The emphasis on all-round financial success, peace, poverty alleviation, self-empowerment, longevity, divine security, and divine healing helped the prosperity gospel to spread rapidly. As socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, sickness, high mortality rates and the lack of basic amenities remained, and as there were promises of a quick fix as well as the persistent perception that a deity was capable of solving human challenges and protecting a devotee from evil machinations, the prosperity gospel flourished. It represented a spirituality that provided an immediate solution to the prevailing socio-economic challenges (Oyakhilome, 2019). To this end, it appealed not just to victims of socio-economic difficulties caused by the three years of civil unrest and subsequent political exploitation, but also to those who were motivated by the quest for divine protection, healing and provision, or the drive for upward economic mobility (Folarin, 2006; Kalu, 2000, Kitause and Achunike, 2015, Magbadelo, 2004). In this vein, it is not out of place to subscribe to the hypothesis of Maxwell (1998) that a religion of hope shines brighter at times of human challenges. Similarly, Ilogu (1974) posits that religious movements thrive during socio-economic challenges. Where contextual challenges hold sway, there is the probability that people will quickly accept and adopt a contextual theology model that speaks to their condition. Hence, it was for this reason that many Africans – and especially Nigerians – wanted to overcome or escape poverty, unemployment, or sickness by embracing the gospel of prosperity in the 1970s (Folarin, 2006, Kalu, 2000, Kitause and Achunike, 2015, Magbadelo, 2004).

Thus, the indigenised theology of success was composed using the ingredients of the prevailing socio-economic hardships, the African cosmological orientation of demonology, witchcraft and wizardry, and God's supreme power to deliver the victims of terrestrial oppression to make it more contextual and appealing to Nigerians. God was presented as a liberator who could free Christians simultaneously from evil forces that were presumed to have mitigated their success in life and from the prevailing socio-economic challenges faced by the individual Christian (Kitause, 2017 & Rotimi et al., 2016). The fundamentals for attaining a successful life were to be born again, possess the power of the Holy Spirit, cast out demons of failure, and engage in faith giving, positive confessions and faith healing. To this end, Idahosa combined elements of the American prosperity gospel – donations, positive confessions, seed faith, the Word of Faith and faith healing – with the Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism – regeneration, the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers, the power of God over satanic forces and deliverance from demonic power (Kalu, 2000, Oyakhilome, 2018, Roberts, 1970). This was the meeting point between the American prosperity gospel and the Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism. Like contextual theology, the imported elements of the American prosperity gospel phenomenon were indigenised with the prevailing elements of the Nigerian indigenous Pentecostal theology. In this persuasion, it is appropriately appealing to disagree with Achunike (2007) and Gifford (1990), who posit that the Nigerian prosperity gospel was entirely a foreign element, and Gaiya (2002), Kalu (2000), Ojo (2013) and Onwu (2006), who attribute the advent of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria exclusively to African indigenous Pentecostal revivalism. It is in this sense that the Nigerian prosperity gospel is described as a mixture of elements of the American prosperity theology and the Nigerian indigenous Pentecostal revivalism.

The amalgamated Nigerian prosperity gospel ideology espoused by Idahosa resulted in the frequent visits of first-generation and second-generation American prosperity gospel preachers like Oral Roberts, Tommy Lee Osborn, and Benny Hinn to Nigeria in the 1980s at the invitation of Idahosa (Kitause, 2017). Why Idahosa adopted the prosperity gospel can be best described on three levels: his personal experience of tough economic realities; his belief in a universe inhabited by evil mercenaries capable of thwarting one's success in life; and his feeling of an omnipotent God who was able to subdue evil forces and abundantly bless His subjects. The harsh socio-economic atmosphere resulting from the three years of civil war in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970 and subsequent government failure to address these challenges swiftly created the socio-economic terrain in which Idahosa grew up and deprived him of certain life pleasures. This difficult experience created in him the passion to overcome poverty. While studying in the USA, the prosperity gospel appealed to his curiosity, context, and beliefs (Kitause, 2017). It was therefore an opportunity to adopt a new spirituality as the American prosperity theology emphasised poverty alleviation and all-round success. There he met with a God who was said to be interested not just in the financial viability of humankind, but also in the all-inclusive success of believers. This was the God of happiness, personal empowerment, and all-round success; the only thing the individual needed to do was engage in positive confessions, visualisation, and seed faith to expect a hundredfold return in material blessings.

The second reason Idahosa adopted the prosperity gospel was his orientation to the African religious cosmos. Within the African religious universe, spirits are forces that can be manipulated for effective performance by a good mastery of spiritual processes and the use of the right invocations by whoever controls them. This is where magicians and diviners who have the gift of being able to

invoke the spirits can use them either for the good of the society – such as inner peace, mediation, civil justice, or harmony with nature – or for the bad of the community – such as causing drought, wreaking havoc on crops or animals (resulting in an economic meltdown), or causing sickness and death. The African belief system sees everything through the eyes of the spirits. Socio-economic challenges are often linked with the actions of evil powers.

With his personal experience of a harsh socio-economic environment, the impact of his African cosmological belief in evil mercenaries that could mitigate one's material prosperity, and his belief in an all-powerful Christian God, Idahosa started articulating the model of his mixed theology of success, using elements of the Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism and the American prosperity gospel. The American prosperity gospel, with its central emphasis on material wealth, appealed to his personal experience of socio-economic challenges, while the Nigerian indigenous Pentecostal revivalism addressed his fears of demonic agents capable of mitigating his personal success. These actions led him to be regarded as the pioneer of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria and other African countries (Folarin, 2006, 2007).

Idahosa's adoption of the prosperity gospel could be summed up in the phrase 'Live big because you have a big God.' He reiterated that it was God's will for Christians to be emancipated from power, shackles, and the influence of poverty for a life of abundant wealth, health, and all-inclusive blessings in Christ Jesus, who conquered the spirit of limitation through death and resurrection. In this thinking, he believed that Christians were worshipping a rich and powerful God who never intended poverty, sickness, unemployment, or sudden death for humanity (Achunike, 2007). He claimed that God could supply all humanity's needs according to His riches in glory (Phil. 4:19). What Christians needed to do

was ask whatever they wanted, and God, in His infinite mercy and goodness, would supply it. He posited that believers should honour God with their resources, and they would become prosperous in all areas of their lives. Idahosa demonstrated his belief in the prosperity gospel with his lifestyle – his flamboyant dress, use of the best cars and engagement in massive projects with big budget allocations (Rotimi et al., 2016). Idahosa also believed that there were demonic agents that possessed human beings to perpetuate evil against Christians. These agents were believed to be the cause of human misery, calamities, failures, and sickness. He upheld that such agents could be conquered when the believer possessed the power of God, which was the ultimate power. He maintained that this power was an endowment from the Holy Spirit when the believer was born again. ‘Born again’ here meant being lifted from poverty to riches. Idahosa assumed that a born-again Christian was a conquering Christian who, through the power of God, engaged in a frontal attack on the demonic powers that were responsible for human adversity. Idahosa’s prosperity teachings reached out to things that permeated the here and now of the African people. There was abundant evidence of Nigerian Christians who attended his camps, crusades, and church services primarily in search of healing, prosperity, employment, and victory over the evil forces that they believed were militating against their success (Rotimi et al., 2016).

Today, the mixed prosperity gospel ideology initiated by Idahosa has become so popular that you hardly hear any messages from the pulpit that do not emphasise material prosperity. At the heart of this amalgamated theology is the notion that the liberating power of salvation is not something of the past, but for the here and now, and should take place in any human condition that is characterised by socio-economic challenges. In this light, the Nigerian prosperity gospel theology assumes that the church has centred its message on the soul of

man for too long. The church is presumed to have failed to address the socio-economic plight of man. What is clear from prosperity gospel advocacy is that salvation is not entirely about deliverance from the Adamic sin or atonement for the inability of the believer to meet the standard of God as advocated by the church but is more about the everyday realities of life. It is more about how the believer can succeed in business, be healed of any ailment, bear children, live a long life, have enough money to solve the basic issues of life and be happy in life (Amechi, 2014, Gutierrez, 1974).

However, to activate or claim these socio-economic blessings, exponents of the prosperity gospel posit that the Christian must, through faith, engage in financial giving, positive declaration, and visualisation, as well as exorcism (Oyakhilome, 2018, Roberts, 1970). In this sense, the prosperity theology views the relationship between God and Christians as transactional. The transactional relationship is a contract between God and believers – like the transactional process where money is exchanged for goods and services, the individual Christian must give money, demonstrate their faith, and engage in positive thinking, visualisation, and confessions, as well as cast out the demons that are responsible for their failure to show allegiance to God, to receive amazing all-round blessings in a concrete manner. The Nigerian prosperity theology posits that, for this religious transaction to succeed, the believer must fulfil the transactional elements (faith, giving, positive confessions, visualisation, and exorcism) of the contract and God must give prosperity to the individual Christian in return to keep His part of His covenant (Kwateng-Yeboah, 2017).

To spread the doctrine of prosperity gospel, Idahosa built bible college where he trained disciples. Many disciples groomed in the prosperity gospel idea who graduated from the Bible college became ambassadors of prosperity gospel in

their separate locations. Many prosperity preachers can trace their origin either directly or indirectly back to the ministry of Idahosa. This helped prosperity gospel to spread not just in Nigeria, but in other countries around the world. For consolidation, he embarked on frequent visits to his disciples. He mentored preachers like Earl Pearly Paulk of Cathedral at Chapel Hill, Duncan-Williams of Christian Action Faith Ministries (Action Chapel International), Reverend Christie Doe-Tetteh of Solid Rock Chapel International, Charles Agyin-Asare of Word Miracle Church International Bishop David Oyedepo of Winners Chapel, Pastor Enoch Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God. Bishop Francis Wale Oke of Sword of the Spirit Ministries, Ayo Oritsejafor of word of life Bible Church and Bishop Mike Okwonkwo of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM) (Kitause, 2017).

Since the advent of prosperity gospel in Nigeria, it has been able to penetrate the religious space with great audacity. Although, the phenomenon of prosperity gospel started from amongst the Pentecostal circle, it has cut across barriers. Prosperity messages are widespread in mainstream orthodox, Pentecostal, and charismatic churches in varying degrees in Africa. Prosperity theology was made to travel internationally. The religious strand that began in Nigeria was exported abroad through the utilisation of the mass media, such as television, radio, printed posters, and leaflets. Prosperity message penetrated and conquered the African religious landscape (Magbadelo, 2004 & Folarin, 2006). The Pew Research Centre (2010) posits that more than half of Christian believers in sub-Saharan Africa are subscribers to prosperity gospel ideology. The notion of prosperity gospel has spread from Pentecostal milieus to the general body of African Christianity. Prosperity gospel is now advocated from many Christian pulpits in Nigeria.

5.5. Conclusion

I have demonstrated that the historical development of the Nigerian prosperity preaching is fluid. This is because it is a mixture of American prosperity doctrine and Nigerian indigenous revivalism. This is a radical shift from the popular opinion that solely attribute the emergence of prosperity preaching to America prosperity movement. It also a great shift from the popular belief that the Nigerian prosperity ideology emerged from Nigerian indigenous theology. This insight provides a new perspective about the configuration of the prosperity preaching in Nigeria as a mixed ideology.

CHAPTER SIX: PRECURSORS TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN NIGERIA.

6.1. Introduction

In chapter four, the researcher evaluated the historical development of the phenomenon of prosperity gospel in Nigeria. The reader can critically ask, what were the factors that enabled the rapid spread of prosperity teaching in an environment such as Nigeria? This chapter is meant to fill that lacuna. The researcher will demonstrate that the prosperity gospel ideology did not spread in a vacuum, and that certain factors served as a catalyst.

6.2. The Nigerian civil war and successive leadership failure

As noted in chapter one, the social-economic structure of Nigeria was radically shattered with the effects of war and political unrest. The coup d'états of 1966 and the subsequent civil war of 1967-1970 and successive leadership failures had an overbearing effect on the economic life of Nigeria. (Nafziger, 1972).

The political intrigues and background that led to the Nigerian civil war and how successive political elites failed to create a prosperous society has been extensively discussed in chapter one. The space here will be restricted to the negative effects of the civil disturbances and the failures of subsequent governments on the Nigerian economy, and how the failing economy later served as a catalysing agent for the spread of prosperity gospel teachings.

Disruptive effects of the war resulted in cutbacks to agricultural production and exports. There was a steady and sharp decline in the agricultural sector as the economy was mobilised towards the war instead of agricultural production, and as result the prices of basic food items and clothing increased. The war cost the

Nigerian Government significant resources as it lost huge workforce, and effort and attention were given to the purchase of armaments. In terms of domestic trade, there was a cut back on transport, a restriction on imports, restrictive policies that were not favourable to the private sector and the movement of traders to their region of origin, creating unpalatable conditions for internal trade. Rail and road traffic disruption because of the civil war had adverse effects on export and domestic trade, creating shortages and inflated cost of goods and services in parts of Nigeria. There was a decline in the growth rate in manufacturing output, due to a loss of skilled labourer, who were either killed or moved to their homeland of origin. There was damage to the Nigeria economy through attacks on oil installations, which had negative impact on oil exports. Many Nigerians, especially those from the Eastern Region, were unable to be engaged in economic activities, as many cities suffered from military bombardment. Many family bread winners were killed, and their dependants caught up in the exchange of fire (Nafziger, 1972).

The economy was ravaged, and many Nigerians lost their lives and sources of livelihood. The period witnessed the loss of homes and jobs. Most industries stopped functioning, a situation that led to mass unemployment and hunger. The educational sector and private sector were shut down, the prices of commodities went up immensely and many were left to grapple with overwhelming social-economic challenges. In summary, the social-economic activities of Nigeria were greatly ruined. After the civil instability, subsequent governments could not change things for the better, it would take decades for GDP, trade, law, and order to be stabilised and for good fortune to be restored (Kanu, 2012).

To this end, the social-economic challenges, faced by Nigerians and a desperate need to have a good life, left the scene to be ripe for the advent of prosperity gospel, which promised good life, peace, and prosperity in all areas of life. Prosperity gospel became an appealing commodity, a few years after the civil war, as its proponents promised new life of material prosperity, peace, and good health (Kalu, 2000, Magbadelo, 2005 & Falorin, 2006).

6.3. The spread of Pentecostal prosperity and faith ministries.

The beginning of the spread of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is traceable to the pre-independence period. The missionary churches had propagated a westernised type of Christianity, which did not take into cognizance the spiritual aspiration of Indigenous Nigerians (Kalu, 2008). Music, church buildings, church organogram, Christian messages, dress codes, and prayer patterns, were all modelled according to western Christianity. The music pattern was hymn singing and canticle chanting, the prayers were written and read by the service leader from a prayer book, lessons were selected from a lectionary, the sermons were about the life after now and not about present social-economic or spiritual conditions. The Roman Catholic Church restricted bible reading to the Priests, and services conducted in Latin rather than Indigenous languages. The alienation of Indigenous cultures saw the emergence and spread of another brand of Christianity, interpreted using the African cultural orientation. As indigenous Christians started seeing themselves as outsiders, and not insiders, there arose a quest for a Christian message interpreted using African cosmological and cultural ingredients (Omavuebe, 2017). Consequent upon this development, there sprang up Indigenous independent Christian groups with a Pentecostal orientation. Initially the Indigenous independent groups claimed to be inter-denominational, that is, they professed to be non-denominational but

later turned around and become churches. Most of the African Independent Churches, cum Pentecostal Churches, existing in Nigeria today, such as the Christ Apostolic Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Celestial Church of God, Christ Chosen, Winners Chapel, Christ Embassy to mention but a few, are products of indigenous revivalism in Nigeria. Thousands of Pentecostal churches have sprung up and are still springing up (Diora & Onah, 2014). The Newswatch Magazine (2001) identifies one thousand and eighteen major Pentecostal churches in Nigeria (Diora & Onah, 2014). Diora & Onah (2014) adopted Kalu Ogbu's nine classifications of the Pentecostal churches - the Evangelical or Holiness Ministries, the Deliverance Ministries, the Missionary and Rural ministries, the Interdenominational Ministries, the Bible Distribution Ministries, the Classical Pentecostals, the Children Evangelism Ministries, the Prosperity and Faith Ministries and Intercessory Ministries. Diora & Onah (2014), postulate that the line of demarcation between the different Pentecostal classifications is between churches and fellowships, and between prosperity groups and holiness groups.

Therefore, it is interesting to note that the group that helped the spread of prosperity gospel in Nigeria is the Prosperity and Faith Ministries. The proliferation of prosperity gospel ministries began with the advent of Benson Idahosa, who founded the Church of God Mission in 1972. This new wave of charismatic Pentecostalism, which focused on prosperity messaging, gained popularity in the 1980s and 1990s. The catchment areas were the cities and urban areas, where there were high concentrations of the working class, who were craving upward mobility and believed that the mechanism of prosperity could give them unlimited access to God's favour. There were also a sizeable number of prosperity adherents in the rural areas, where there were large numbers of the unemployed and poor, who believed that God was able to end

their poverty. Today, the churches are rising in not just the cities and the urban areas, but in every nook and cranny of Nigeria. Rented apartments, shops, warehouses, and unused buildings, have been tuned into churches that are propagating the messages of prosperity. It is common to see a sizeable number of streets turned into a “church street.” During worship times, a cacophony of sounds erupts, ranging from drumming and singing, to preaching and clapping. This reveals how these streets have been saturated with religious activities. For these churches, suffering is not the believer's portion, poverty is a curse, and it is something that should be cast out by faith, positive confession and faith giving. They enjoin followers to believe in miracles and divine intervention. The emphasis on miracle and divine intervention by prosperity and faith ministries becomes a contributory factor to the spread of prosperity gospel. Churches that do not subscribe to prosperity gospel are no longer enjoying massive patronage and popularity Diora & Onah (2014).

As the Pentecostal prosperity and faith ministries spread, the phenomenon of prosperity gospel is advanced. To effectively advance the course of prosperity gospel, the Nigerian prosperity preacher must master the act of effective and public communication to capture his audience. The use of phonetics must be employed to add to the oratory prowess of the preacher. The act of erudite oratory, flamboyant lifestyles, use of flashy cars and, attractive dressing, each portray prosperity gospel teachers as the epitome of success, excellence, decency, and modernity. Successful preachers become role models that upcoming preachers look up to. The replicable effects are seen in the way young prosperity preachers imitate those that they see as role a model. This is explanatory for the rapid growth of the prosperity ideology. (Maxwell, 1998 & Magbadelo, 2004).

The promotion and growth of the church is directly proportional to, or a function of the personal ambition of the founder. The bigger the faith, the bigger the ambition, and this is subsequently expressed through positive confession: “I serve a big God who can do massive thing.” The driving force to achieve remarkable things, or do exploits for the Lord, pushes the founder to exploit the social-economic situation of members to advance the big dream. Through the promise of a prosperous life, the congregation is enjoined to engage in seed sowing and believe in a miraculous intervention to end their social economic situation. In this thinking, members believe that the more the gospel of the kingdom of God is spread and the house of God built, the more God pours His riches upon them. To contribute towards the big dream, championed by the founder, is synonymous with receiving a big harvest in return. This in turn translates into the spread of the prosperity gospel (Magbadelo, 2004).

The urge to spread the prosperity message via the utility of the media is dramatic in the spread of prosperity gospel ideology. Pentecostal prosperity preachers seem to have adopted televisions, social media, print media and radio to reach a wider audience. Competitiveness emerges among prosperity gospel purveyors as result of the longing to outsmart one another in terms of popularity. The focal point is the advertisement of miracles of healings, promotion, deliverance from death or sudden accident and financial breakthrough. Members are shown in television testifying of their miraculous harvest, after the prayer of the ‘man of God.’ This in turn portrays the preacher as a superman of God who can perform miracle. In his sermon, the super man of God uses instances, where he has performed miracles of healing of people with diverse sickness, ranging from the blind, the lame, the deaf or raising of the dead, as an illustration to back up his assertion. People who are passing through similar conditions are urged to come for their miracles by visiting the church. The prosperity gospel preacher

maximises the medium to draw the attention of the public to himself and his church. Basically, this is to attract members to the church's indoor and outdoor gatherings (Kitause, & Achunike, 2015).

The preacher's continuity in using the media platform is dependent on the members' giving ability. The congregation and viewers are encouraged to give bountifully for the preacher to feature regularly in the expectation to be blessed. Bank accounts are displayed on the television screen wherein viewers are to deposit their miracle offering to support the ministry; givers are directed to a miracle prayer line where to connect with the preacher for special prayers. It is common to tune on to different radio or television stations and hear the voices of different prosperity gospel preachers. Therefore, the argument is that the spread of Pentecostal prosperity and faith ministries helped and helps the spread of the prosperity gospel ideology in Nigeria (Kitause, 2017).

6.4. IMF and SAP

The social- economic changes of the 1980s and 1990s, created by the effects of the International Monetary fund (IMF) and Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), resulted in social-economic difficulties for Nigeria. The IMF and World Bank since the 1980s, have required developing nations or economies to create conditions that are favourable to corporations and governments in the West. These conditions are referred to as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP). The requirement of SAP is for government to reduce public spending, such as subsidies for medical care, food, and education. Governments in Africa responded by cutting back on public spending policies and programmes that benefited the downtrodden, poor, women, children, and other groups in society, during the well-known and widespread Structural Adjustment

Programme (SAP) of the 1980s and 1990s (Ahmed, & Lipton, 1997 & Githua, 2013). Thus, the directed change created social-economic challenges.

The economies of many countries in Africa were truncated and the pace and pendulum of economic development, growth and progress were stagnated as the neo-liberal policies of SAP were adopted and implemented. The deregulation and privatisation policy led to unemployment crises. Currency devaluation and the cutting back on social subsidies hit Africans with severe poverty and social economic challenges, in that it reduced people's purchasing power and increased an inaccessibility to basic social services, such as hospitals, schools, and food. The policies of SAP in Africa and Nigeria elevated the upsurge of international multinationals corporations, a situation that plundered the resources of Nigeria for the advantage of its shareholders in America and Europe (Githua, 2013).

The social-economic challenges created by the adoption and implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria, in the 1980s and 1990s, compelled the religious space to bow to the appealing message of prosperity gospel (Kalu,2000). As social crisis remained, prosperity gospel flourished because of its appeal to material prosperity. Prosperity theology shined brightest during this time of uncertainty (Maxwell (1998). Illogic (1985) has suggested that religious spirituality strives in a time of human uncertainty. This implies that where human crisis is prevalent, there is the probability that people tend to lean towards religious inclination, as means a of hope and personal consolidation. As prosperity gospel offered hope and, urged adherents to appeal to God to take them out of crisis, many people embraced it as an option. Prosperity gospel became a ladder many perceived that they could use to climb out of human misery. This escapist mind-set envisaged a brighter future despite

looming and overwhelming difficulties. With prosperity gospel, people believed that present social-economic challenges would be short lived, and that God would descend with His great power to take away sickness, poverty, unemployment, wars, and all human failures. Therefore, the Structural Adjustment Programme and International Monetary Fund of the 1980s, and 1990s, having impacted on the economies of Africa, led to the spread of prosperity teachings in Nigeria (Kalu, 2000, Magbadelo, 2005, Falorin, 2006 & Kitause & Ahunike, 2015).

6.5. Modernity

In this research work, modernity is a term that is used to distinguish something that is discovered more recently. It implies that what is current as opposed to what is old; what is later as opposed to what is former; what is innovative as opposed to what is customary. Nevertheless, it is understood that what is considered modern in a specific place, time, civilisation, or culture may not obviously be considered modern in other context or in the future. Phenomena with similar characteristics may be understood differently when placed in different context. Since there is changing perception of what is modern and what is ancient, it is safer to contend that what is modern is therefore in the eyes of the observer. Thus, what is considered new in the observer's perspective is always opposed to the old (Lambert,1999 & Frouel, 2018).

Human beings can think, reason, imagine and invent things. Human beings have created well organised and complex structures, systems, devices, and technologies that are quicker in accomplishing a task. For many years, the process of human invention has been very accelerative and virtually impeded by nothing. This phenomenal change has affected every area of human existence, from culture to religion and from politics to government. The industrial

revolution has changed the human world. Technological and scientific advancement and the emergence of innovative ideas have dramatically influenced manners and customs, traditions and beliefs and the human mind as well. For example, the emergence of railways, automobiles, ethernet, mobile phones, computers, allow people to accomplish enormous task within a brief period with less labour and allow people to move faster and farther. This development has challenged geographical and cultural limitations (Lambert,1999).

Information has saturated every nook and cranny of the world. The media has been extremely informative. The print media, television and radio have been able to help humanity access information of both local and global dimensions. The internet has enabled people to communicate, pay and work with diverse and different people simultaneously all over the world. Through the web, the task of shopping, reading, learning, or exploring new frontiers can be done without leaving the confine of one's home. Culture, beliefs, traditions, and religious belief can be transmitted electronically. To write a letter people do not have to look for paper and pen because of the availability of the computer. Before the emergence of these technological revolutions, to create cultural or social links or speak to one another or to interact physically, people must travel for hours, days or miles to meets others (Lambert,1999).

The permeation of religious establishments with modern techniques are inevitably central to the religious changes observed in the nineteenth, twentieth twenty first centuries. In communications, church programmes are not held in the local settings but often televised to reach greater audiences. Pastoral visitations have been replaced with telephone calls. E-mails sent within a second have replaced long time of waiting for the arrival of pastoral letters. In financial

drive, the liquidity of wealth and well-organised financial structure such as online banking, mobile banking help successful promoters of prosperity gospel to generate and dispense financial resources to exercise influence (Lambert,1999 & Frouel, 2018).

The advocacy or claim to new insights into traditional religious practices is another way modernity has helped to promote prosperity gospel. Typical example is the traditional teaching of the church on the life after now. The traditional church had concentrated much on the well-being of the soul than the flesh, it discouraged believers from acquisition of wealth and that the love of money is the route to all kinds of evils (1 timothy 3: 3, 6: 10 & Hebrews 13: 5). This is in sharp contrast to the prosperity gospel that emphasises gaining worldly possession in this life. The new idea or claim by prosperity gossellers is frequently embraced because it concentrates on the physical wellbeing of humanity especially people who are looking for an escape route from human hardship. The celebration of this modern religious idea of prosperity is explicit attempt to shift or reject the old traditions (Nwanfor, 2015 & Nwanga, 2017).

The natural cravings of humanity for total control of the here and now is greatly impacting the belief system, the dressing pattern, the programmes, and products of this age. Prosperity gospel purveyors have radically recast and reorganised the church and believer's mind-set to suit what is modern in terms of religious idea of 'living big.' Exorbitant praise and lifestyle have been introduced in the church circle. Sunday church services have become a fashion and beauty contest in line with the ideals of positive confession. Members must confess outwardly via their dressing that they are rich. The more expensive the dressing, the godlier a member is assumed to be. Spiritual maturity and viability are synonymous to outward confession. The more the flamboyant display of

wealth, the godlier the believer is perceived to be, and the more the modern religious idea of prosperity is celebrated and advanced (Nwanfor, 2015 & Nwanga, 2017).

6.6. Power factor in African cosmology

It is expedient to first evaluate what is “African cosmology” and its subsidiary elements to give the analysis a concrete direction. Etymologically, the word cosmology is from two Greek words: cosmos meaning ‘universe’ and logos meaning ‘study.’ Therefore, cosmology is the study of the universe. Similarly, universe means worldview. In this analysis, cosmology and worldview will be used interchangeably. Cosmology has to do with how the value systems, assumptions, and allegiance of members of society is reconstructed in relation to how they behave, understand, and interpret the world around them. It is a framework of behaviours, ideas and attitudes about the world and people. It is a comprehensive pattern, and model and system of beliefs of members of society. Cosmology examines the relationship and place of man in the universe; it is the drive behind every behaviour and thus helps to give meaning and proper understanding to human environments to reduce the complexities associated with it. It is hereditary and transmissible like the rest of culture (Kalu, 2002). African cosmology is therefore how African people contemplate, perceive, conceive, and articulate the world around them. It is the cultural lens through which Africans view human reality and experience that affect their attitudinal orientation and value system. African cosmology is that underlining ideology, or thought, which binds and links African morality, philosophy of life, value system, norms, rituals, folklores, rites, myths, social conduct, rules, taboos, and theologies (Kalu, 2002 & Kanu, 2012).

A profound investigation reveals that an 'African world view' is not constructible considering the innumerability of cultures that exist on the continent of Africa (Arinze, 2001 & Arinze, 2005). In this understanding, an African worldview should be understood in two ways, the general sense, and the limited sense in that what is known as an African worldview is not that which is shared by every African group in its wholeness. What is shared by all African people is some characteristic elements and features common amongst African worldviews. These underlying and deep-rooted cultural features of the common elements are what make the African people to be African. How the persistent core elements are achieved varies from place to place. The identifiable core elements are time and space, the supreme being, man, the ancestors, divinities, spirits, sacrifices, magic, and evil forces (Kalu, 2002 & Kanu, 2013).

Africans believe that time moves in a cyclical order. This cyclical movement of destiny is from the time of birth to death and back to life through reincarnation. They believe that the destiny of man is patterned in accordance with the cyclical and endless movement of the sun and moon that appear, disappear, reappear, and re-disappear. Human destiny is understood as a journey through the cosmos, crossing the equator of death. What gives meaning to life is the demarcation between the dead and the living (Kalu, 2002). Death serves as a boundary line between two inseparable worlds of reality. This is to suggest that death is not the ultimate end but the beginning of a new life in the world of the spirit. At death, the individual is not annihilated but departs the physical world by dissolving into immortality. The individual moves on to join the living dead, the company of the departed. Even though the physical body decays, the spirit lives on (Opoku, 1993 & Oguntola-Laguda, 2014). However, though life is viewed as moving in an endless circle, many Africans are still afraid to die in that they believe that departing this physical world involves an individualised agony of

death. Besides, in death the individual is believed to live in a diminished state of life even though retaining the power to interfere with issue of life on earth. This paradoxical perception of death has compelled Africans to identify four probable causes of death in a view to avoiding it (Nyang, 1980 & Kyalo, 2013). The first and most identifiable causes are: magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. To be a victim of such evil practices is extremely dangerous, hence Africans try to escape to avoid being a wandering ghost that does not have rest. The second cause of death is curse. Every precautionary measure is taken in order not to violate taboos, rules, traditions, and customs. It is taught in many African societies that such act of violation brings a curse to members and subsequently leads to death. The third cause of death identified by Africans is the living dead. The living dead, or the souls of the departed member of the family, may be offended by the activities of the surviving members of the family and decide to visit them with calamities, so they can change their ways. The fourth cause of death is God. In the African cosmology, God represents the Supreme Being, and sits at the zenith of power from, where He decides the fate of humanity, either directly or indirectly, through His intermediaries. God, the Supreme Being, can decide to kill those who are evil in the society, and because of this belief, members of society strive to live a pious life (Kalu, 2002).

The four causes of death identified within the African cosmology, have the potential of affecting the destiny of individuals, which becomes unfulfilled in case of the occurrence of death. It is this fear of death that is the driving force that moves people toward the magicians and the diviners. The diviners and magicians are mediators between susceptible individuals and spiritual powers that are capable of truncating human destiny. They are deep-rooted in knowledge of the mystical arts and can subdue their clients imagined or real targets, thereby allaying their fears. With the advent of prosperity gospel, the

prosperity preacher who claims that the death and resurrection of Jesus has conquered the spirit of death, assumes the position of the magician, whose responsibility it is to subdue the fear of death (Nyang, 1980).

It is now expedient to discuss the African notion of space. Kalu (2002) suggests that that the Africa notion of space can be examined in three dimensions: the sky, the earth which consists of water and land, and the earth beneath. While I acknowledge Kalu's three-dimensional depiction, I wish to suggest the fourth dimension, which is the human body. There is a deep-rooted belief in African societies that each of the spaces are occupied by spiritual powers. God, the Supreme Being, from whom all things flow, and his subsidiaries, are the occupiers of the sky. God, the occupier of the sky, is not only seen as creator but as a father, mother, provider, and protector. This persuasion provides a sense of security to the individual or community. This fatherhood of God is a necessity in times of needs, such as sickness, sorrow, misery, pain, or danger. There is the longing for protection from imagined or real evil forces. When an individual is exposed to hunger or the machinations of evil powers, the fatherhood or provision of God becomes very important in the cosmic struggle. Africans believe that God is involved in their daily life and can be trusted in times of suffering and pains (Nyang, 1980 & kalu, 2002).

The earth is the second dimension. The major occupiers of the earth are deities, divinities, animals, and human beings. Africans believe that God created the world through gods, deities, or divinities. These intermediary spirits have their abode in trees, rocks, mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, and streams (Arinze, 2001& 2005). Individuals who are seeking blessings, victory over perceived enemies, and protection against evil forces, worship these deities by offering sacrifices in the lakes, hills, and mountains. Africans also believe that these divinities give

economic and professional success to devotees. This can be in trading, fishing, hunting or blacksmithing. The overwhelming concern is with the life of all-round prosperity. This is not life in its abstract form, but in its concrete and fullest form. What it means is enjoyment of long life, good health, happiness, riches, and peace. It is a life void of suffering and perturbation. The devotee realises that there are some evil powers that are mitigating his success or that of his family or community. To live abundant life, the individual needs the mediation of the divinities. To succeed, the individual's hands are constantly lifted and prayers and sacrifices constantly offered in expectation of divine intervention and aid from the deities (Kalu, 2002).

Sometimes, the uncertainties and the anxieties faced by individuals may range from daily problems of life to those which emanate from fear of evil forces and malicious individual such as witches, wizards, and sorcerers. In maintenance or reactivation of the protective power of the benevolent divinities, the individual, family, or community must engage in rituals that invoke and ward off supernatural powers that can cause misfortune. Protective ritual and rite serve as spiritual immunisation for the potential victims from the hand of evil forces. In the African cosmological orientation, there is balance in the universe and human life. Crises, whether caused by evil forces or natural occurrence, signify a break in that cosmic balance and the fundamental method of restoring harmony is through rituals. The purpose of the ritual is to bring balance to the individual life thereby ending every calamity. The ritual and rite can take the form of purification or purgation wherein dangers or spiritual pollutions which destroy the spiritual immunity of the individual concerned is removed. The rite or ritual of purgation is done to rid of all physical, moral, and evil impacts which seek to stop the prosperity of the individual. The divinities are therefore appeased in case there is any offence and petition to prosper and protect the

individual. Similarly, the rite of invigoration is done to galvanise vitality and secure a new lease of life (Kyalo, 2013).

As the analysis continues, it should be remembered that the third dimension is the underworld or earth beneath. The occupants of this space are the ancestors. Like the divinities, ancestors are the intermediary between human beings and the Supreme Being. Ancestors are regarded as functional members of the community, clan, or family. By the virtue of their transition into the underworld, they are the living dead and have authority over their survivors and must be treated with utmost respect and dignity. The principle of honour for seniors, extends to the ancestors whose departure from the world of the living is seen as merely a change of social status, but not as permanent exit. In African cosmology, individuals offer sacrifices to ancestors as a mark of honour, so they can bless them with fertility, good health, good farming seasons, longevity, and good luck (Arinze, 2001).

The human body is the fourth dimension. Africans believe that the human body can be an abode to spiritual forces. Such spiritual forces manifest in forms of evil spirit, witchcraft, wizardry, sorcery, and magic. Individuals possessed of spiritual powers are adjudged to have been automatically possessed of the power to either do evil or good (Omavuebe, 2017). For instance, it is revealed by Opoku, (1993), Kalu (2002) and Oguntola-Laguda (2014) that witches and wizards, sorcerers and magicians can attack people through different means and for distinct reasons. They can cause mysterious harm to their victim's life by words, incantation, curses, manipulations, and divinations. For instance, Omavuebe (20017), posits that individuals who possess the powers of witchcraft, magic, or sorcery, can engage in magical incantation using mystical words, calabash, herbs, bitter-kola, and native pot. In Africa cosmology, witches, wizards, and

magicians can attack enemies to show their supremacy, they can as well attack people at the request of another person. In this sense, they act as assassins or mercenary fighters. Witches sometimes can cause illness, accidents, or kill by sucking the blood of their victims. Many African societies also believe that witches are responsible for the social-economic challenges of their victims, clan, or communities. The prospect of living a successful life can be ruined by the activities of evil and envious individuals. And as such, it is perceived that the victim of witchcraft can experience social-economic failures, manifested in the form of unemployment, hardship, barrenness, marital crisis, and sometime sudden death (Kalu, 2002 & Omavuebe, 2017).

Magicians, wizards, and witches are feared and dignified in African society because of the enormous spiritual power at their disposal. They use such spiritual powers to intimidate people to submission to their whims and caprices. Moreover, to combat activities of the evil individuals, a traditional priest or diviner who has higher spiritual power must be invited to subdue and proffer a solution to the problems of the victims of witchcraft activities. In this vein, the diviner must diagnose the problem of the victim spiritually. The result of the diagnosis determines the solution. The solution can take the form of rites, libation, ritual, or sacrifices. To this end, the diviner must propitiate the divinities, gods or ancestors through rituals, rite, and sacrifices. The ritual and sacrifices involve the slaughtering of animal, fowl or bird and bathing with some herbal mixture. This can either take place in the night or in the day, in the house or at a crossroad, in the river or in the stream, on the mountain or in the valley depending on the dictates of the deity consulted. Depending on the diviner or the dictates of the deity consulted, the ritual could also involve cutting a part of the body, in order to apply magical concoction. The ritual can also involve wearing of charms in the arm, neck, or waist, and burying of charms in either

the back, front, or middle of the compound as a defence mechanism against evil (Kalu, 2002 & Omavuebe, 2017).

What should be understood in this analysis is the power factor in the African cosmology. The life of the Africans is equivalent to going through cosmic struggle. It is this cosmic battle that the prosperity gospel advocates understand very well, allowing them to contextualise their theology to suit the African cosmological affiliations. Prosperity teachings reach out to things that permeate the here and now of the African people. Rotimi, Nwadiolor & Ugwuja (2016) suggest that Nigerian prosperity Christians who attend camps, crusades, and church services of prosperity gospel preachers, do so primarily in search of healing, prosperity, employment, and victory over evil forces, which they believe are militating against their success. This implies that they are there because they want an escape route from the problem of witchcraft attack. Or they are there because of the fear of death caused by the activities of magicians, sorcerers, witchcraft, or curses caused by violating some taboos, or possibly because, they have offended the living dead or the Supreme Being. One of the cardinal teachings of prosperity gospel is exorcism. Subscribers contend that to be prosperous in life one must be delivered from all the evil spirits and the ancestral affiliations that are responsible for Christians' failure. They teach that the power in the name of Jesus, faith, positive confession, and deliverance can neutralise every evil machination, taboo, or ancestral power that are aimed at stopping members' prosperity. Here, prosperity gospel adherents take the ingredient of African cosmology, most especially the power factor to form prosperity gospel theology. Hence, this is in line with the suggestion of Rotimi, Nwadiolor & Ugwuja (2016) that the circumstances of a people determine their theology. Rotimi, Nwadiolor & Ugwuja argue that prosperity teaching was never divorced from Nigerians' existential problem. It provides such belief that Jesus and not

any divinity is supremely equipped to take members of society from every social-economic challenge that the activities of envious and evil individuals have caused.

6.7. Indigenous prosperity gospel music

Music plays a significant role in religious expression. Religion and music are indisputably intertwined. Music is relevant in building man and God relationship. In Christian faith, music is one of the central parts of worship; it is a fundamental part in Church liturgical affirmation, and it drives the concentration of the worshipper towards the divine (Udok & Odunuga, 2016).

When European Missionaries introduced Christianity to Nigeria in the nineteenth century, after the first attempt embarked upon by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century failed, the kind of music introduced was hymn singing and chanting. This music pattern garnished with European flavour and cultural orientation excluded indigenous embellishments. Nigerian Christianity adopted the European liturgical music style, excluding any native musical practice and instrumental expression (Omavuebe, 2017). When indigenous Pentecostal movements emerged as a new brand of Christian body searching for personal meaning, relationship, attachment, and revival, it adopted and adapted to a new musical pattern of emotive expression, which involved singing, clapping, dancing, the lifting of hands or bowing as a sign of reverence to God. This could have been a carry-over from African traditional worship, where the devotee dances, claps, lifts his hands or bow to worship his deity. This persistent indigenous religious expression saw new expression in indigenous Pentecostal movements (Udok & Odunuga, 2016).

Similarly, the Pentecostal Christian musical expression was ornamented with African indigenous instrumentation and idioms. Vidal (2012) writes that many African composers and musicians at this time, refused to stress missionary religious dogma, in their songs and during worship, but stressed indigenous cultural values, language, and instrumentation. Attempts were made to replace the strict and solemn atmosphere during church services, introduced by the missionaries with indigenous styles of worship, where the believer danced, clapped, and made a joyful noise unto the Lord. Christian songs were garnished with such theme as victory over satanic forces, salvation, peace, repentance, faith, revival, love encouragement, and praise. African indigenous Pentecostal music, which adopted its flavour and ingredients from the African soil, has metamorphosed to identify with nomenclatures, such as Christian reggae music, gospel music, high praise music, praise and worship music, Christian Pop music and Christian rock music. This was due to cross-cultural, cross-religious, transnational, and global impacts, most especially with the United States (Corten, & Marshall-Fratani, 2001). However, it is important to note that, though the Nigeria indigenous Pentecostal music has developed and grown to identify with global musical nomenclatures, such as rock, pop, reggae, its contents, ingredients, and flavour are strictly indigenous to Africa. This means, it is the variation of Christian musical expression as practised in the African soil as we know of European, Asian, and American Christian music, but explicitly different in cultural content and setting (Vidal, 2012).

Furthermore, when Prosperity Gospel Movement emerged in 1972 within the Pentecostal Movement, there was a musical manifestation directed towards prosperity gospel. The expansion of prosperity gospel with music building its emotive crescendo, created a sense of spiritual security to adherents. The infusion of experiential faith and the power of religious feeling, as articulated in

prosperity gospel songs, helped prosperity gospel preachers to create a mass spiritual persuasion and followership. Songs that highlighted human's helplessness and total dependence on God, rendered through the ebb and flow of emotion and transfixed by sentiment, helped the audiences to see God as the only source of prosperity in times of social-economic crisis. Amidst life's travails, and the feeling of vulnerability, indigenous gospel songs supplied a canopy under which people have a sense of divine succour. The music pattern echoes people's longing for a better future, believing that someday all difficulties will end. What language the songs were performed in was not an issue, what mattered was the message of hope and faith that rang deeply into the heart of people (Adeola, 2020).

As music became an indispensable evangelism tool for the propagation of prosperity gospel, it perfected a marriage between prosperity gospel music artist and prosperity gospel preachers that attracted preachers and artists to perform before their ready and enthusiastic Christian audience (Bowler & Reagan, 2014 & Udok & Odunuga, 2016). The alliance between preachers and music artists brought about a dramatic improvement in spiritual flavour which further impacted upon the quality of church services. The popularity of this holy alliance inspired the growth of prosperity gospel churches as an attempt was made to showcase their alluring services and church programmes on televisions. This brought prosperity gospel ideology parcelled in music to ever ready and ever-expanding audiences. In the same vein, as the alliance between prosperity gospel music artist and preacher also saw the expansion of prosperity preacher's congregation, there was the simultaneous great harvest of souls. Audio tapes of songs ministrations by prosperity gospel artists were produced and sold, bringing in great profit and fame to prosperity gospel music artists. The Prosperity gospel music supporting industry was not left out, as it received a great boom and

financial turn over as prosperity gospel songs were sold in their millions (Bowler, & Reagan, 2014 & Adeola, 2020).

Prosperity gospel music had shown itself as a necessary evangelism tool. Pentecostal churches became the most enticing training platform for up-and-coming musicians who lacked the funds to procure expensive instruments. And as prosperity preaching Pentecostal churches spread, the quest for gospel artists provided job opportunity and income. And as gospel music concerts surfaced, with churches providing sponsorship, prosperity gospel songs were popularised (Endong & Patrick, 2015). As prosperity gospel songs were popularised, there emanated a newly professionalised stage where a trained and competent audio-visual staff was needed to manage the lighting system, harmonise complex audio sounds on the soundboard and in the gigantic and multicolour sanctuary. Expert musicians, celebrated divas, professional guitarist who could monopolised a stage and manoeuvre over multiple solos retired the volunteer musical talents of the past. This new musical experience needed a lead singer. The appealing leader of the music team and the alluring individual who could direct the great congregation from songs to songs, from clapping to clapping and from one dancing step to the other through the praised and worship session. The musical team leader became the musical eye of the senior pastor, bishop, or apostle. The ability of the musical team to render different Christian songs using different musical pattern such as reggae, pop, rock, gospel, praise, and worship music with cultural embellishments, aroused the fascination of the youth and subsequent generation. The incorporation of youth culture, combining its stress on beauty and the cheery vibrancy of the church's image, helped to capture the youth population into the prosperity gospel ideology (Bowler, & Reagan, 2014).

The large arena offered room for a mass choir, coordinated dancers, organised band, and a beautified stage. A charismatic leader who is adoringly dressed, roamed the stage with a microphone, captivating voice, spirited facial expressions and inviting hand gestures. This musical ornamentation, that was melodramatically engulfed in revivalism, aglow with vibrancy, dynamic coloration, and crooned in multiple representation of various musical luxuries, became very appealing to a majority of Christian adherents. Hence, these improving, fascinating and complex musical models were introduced into both Sunday and weekly services. Motivated by prosperity gospel ideology that always stressed affluence, dominion, empowerment, prestige, and all-inclusive prosperity, prosperity gospel music became a marketing strategy that captured both the young and old. Prosperity gospel music was regularly heard in many churches, zoomed across many theological traditions, and celebrated by many adherents (Bowler, & Reagan, 2014 & Endong & Patrick, 2015).

The prosperity gospel music was widely encouraged by the Nigeria music industry (Ojo, 1998). As the inspiration behind the composition, production and consumption of prosperity gospel songs, Pentecostal prosperity churches found a special collaboration with the music industry. With great followership, large television outreaches, and a collection of gifted worship artists, prosperity gospel churches supplied the music industry with a ready market of consumers. The consumer market provided more popularity for the prosperity gospel songs and artists, thereby not only creating Indigenous prosperity gospel music celebrities, but more expansion for prosperity gospel ideology. Pentecostal prosperity gospel churches utilised the ever-growing Christian music industry and prosperity gospel music superstars by playing host to big names in Christian worship during church programmes such as anniversaries, revivals, weekly prayer meetings and Sunday's services (Bowler, & Reagan, 2014). There was also

a collaboration with the international community. American gospel superstars were invited to minister in Nigeria. The influence of a new breed of American gospel music stars such as CeCe Winans, Don Moen, Kirk Franklin, and Ron Kenoly was felt across the Atlantic (Bowler, 2014). Such impact was demonstrated with the advent of a new crops of talented artist such as Sam Okposo, Ese Agese, Broda Martyns, Frank Edwards, Sinach and others (Adedeji, 2009). With good sound system that is like a professional or worldly concert venue and with privilege of massive crowd, and enormous financial strength, Pentecostal prosperity gospel churches brought in top celebrities for worship performance where they combined singing, dancing clapping and entertainment. These top talents in Christian music utilised the opportunity to feature their popular songs to increase the spiritual vibrancy of the worship (Bowler, & Reagan, 2014).

The emergence of the indigenous prosperity gospel song brought about liturgical revolution which demonstrates that beyond the sermon of the preacher, the prosperity gospel music ministration directed by the worship leader or invited celebrity sat at the heart of the church service. Though in Pentecostal prosperity gospel churches, the pastor or general overseer mainly dominated the scene, the entry of Indigenous prosperity gospel music provided an opportunity for the gift of the music leader to be recognised. Equipped with musical talents, conducive entertainment venues, and great congregation, Pentecostal gospel churches were advantaged to leverage on the preaching skills of the pastor and the fame of the music leader to spread prosperity gospel ideology (Bowler, & Reagan, 2014).

Also, the far-reaching growth of the prosperity preaching through music also leveraged on the emergence of the digital technology, and the age of internet

and digital service providers such as iTunes, Apple Music, Amazon music, YouTube Music, Spotify Apple music, Tidal that feature digital albums. Therefore, indigenous prosperity music has always had an invaluable impact on both international and local advancement of Nigerian prosperity preaching Pentecostal churches such as the Christ Embassy, The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Winners Chapel, and Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry (MFM) that have, over time registered their presence in many cities in Nigeria and many countries around the globe especially the United kingdom and the United States of America (Adedeji, 2009).

6.8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been able to show the reader the numerous factors that aided the spread of prosperity gospel ideology in Nigeria. It is obvious that catalysing elements such as the civil war, government failures, modernity, the International Monetary Fund, the Structural Adjustment Programme, indigenous gospel music, African cosmology, and Pentecostalism, were precursors to the growth of prosperity gospel phenomenon in Nigeria.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PROSPERITY GOSPEL IDEOLOGY AND PENTECOSTAL PURITY MOVEMENT

7.1. Introduction

As indicated already, there was a rapid spread of the phenomenon of prosperity gospel in Nigeria, right from its inception in the 1970s. However, this development was not without its share of reactions from other religious traditions. Nigeria is multi-traditional in terms of theological affiliation. There exist the Mission churches, such as the Anglicans, the Roman Catholics, the Presbyterians, and the Baptists. There are the Pentecostal churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Winners Chapel, the Christ Embassy, and others. Also, the African independent Churches (AIC) are a major force. Meanwhile, the major contending classification is between Pentecostal churches and mission churches. This is the reason the researcher restricted his evaluation of how churches reacted to the development of prosperity gospel to Pentecostalism and mission churches. As the ideology of prosperity theology advanced, there was a corresponding reaction from both within the Pentecostal churches and the mission churches. As will be discovered later, the dividing line within Pentecostal churches is between the holiness movement and the prosperity gospel movement. The attempt here is to investigate the responses of the Pentecostal Purist movement to the spread of prosperity teaching within the Nigerian religious space. This is to unravel the perception of the holiness movement about prosperity doctrine.

7.2. Background

The origin of Pentecostalism has been extensively discussed in this research work; however, it is expedient to have a recap here to direct the line of

argument. The beginning of independent Christian activities in Nigeria can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. The catalyst that quickened the emergence of these activities was provided by The Revd. Henry Venn who was the secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Venn had created a policy of indigenisation of the leadership of the church in Africa. As a believer in the abilities of Indigenous Africans to assume leadership of the church, he set up machinery to ensure his policy of indigenisation was achieved. Gaiya (2002) notes that in the letter The Revd. Henry Venn sent out to missionaries titled, "The native pastorate policy", he suggested that missionaries should raise Indigenous churches that would be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-financing. Gaiya maintains that the high point of Venn's indigenisation policy saw the consecration of The Rt. Revd. Samuel Ajayi Crowther as the first African Anglican Bishop in 1864.

However, Ajayi (1959) observes that Venn's indigenisation's policy did not last long as his successors at the Church Missionary headquarters in London had different and opposite views about Africans. They were said to believe that African cultures were not synonymous with Christianity and attempts were made to reverse Venn's policies. The discarding of Venn's indigenisation policy saw the denigration of African cultures and African cultural value systems that were perceived to be uncivilised. The result of the misrepresentation of African cosmological orientation and the reversal of Venn's indigenisation policy was a leadership rift that led to the emergence of the first set of African Indigenous Churches. These churches were identified as Ethiopian Orthodox Churches. There are many suggestions as to the origin of the Ethiopian Church. The first tradition suggests that Christianity was introduced to Ethiopia immediately after the Pentecost experience. John Chrysostom, one of the church fathers, speaks of people from Ethiopian being present in Jerusalem during the Pentecost

experience and that they were able to understand the preaching of Peter (Acts 2:38). A second tradition suggests that a missionary adventure of some of Jesus' apostles in the fourth century could have led to the planting of Christianity in Ethiopia and subsequently led to the formation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. A third opinion points to the account of an Ethiopian royal official, who was converted to Christianity in the New Testament by Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, when he was going south to the road that was leading down from Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26-27). Therefore, the secessionists who identified with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church got their inspiration and motivation from the belief that the Ethiopian Church was one of the oldest Christian traditions in Christianity, most especially in Africa (Gaiya, 2002).

The second group of churches, which had elements of Pentecostalism, emerged as result of the evangelistic activities of Garrick Sokari Braide, an Anglican lay preacher who adopted African spirituality in his revivalism in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria in 1912. The resultant effects of Braide's revivalism were the emergence of the Aladura Churches (prayer people) and Christ Army Church in 1916. These churches became the foremost organised churches, with Pentecostal elements and colorations. Subsequently, some of the Aladura Churches linked with Pentecostal churches, such as Assembly of God Church, in America, and Christ Apostolic Church, from Britain for the purpose of protection and legitimacy before the European missionaries, who sought to extinguish and delegitimised the Indigenous Christian Churches (Gaiya, 2002 & Olofinjana, 2012).

The foundation for the growth of Pentecostalism having been laid, and the seed of Pentecostalism having undergone a series of revivalism, there was growth and change in the theological profession and teachings in the twentieth century.

There arose two major or distinct Pentecostal theological ideologies: prosperity gospel theology orchestrated by Bishop Idahosa of the Church of God Mission and the holiness gospel theology orchestrated by William Kumuyi of the Deeper Life Bible Church. While Bishop Idahosa originated and championed the spread of prosperity gospel ideology through the Church of God Mission Church which he founded in 1971, Pastor William Kumuyi on the other hand originated and championed the holiness gospel movement through the Deeper Life Bible Church which he founded in 1975. The focal point of Idahosa's theology was earthly possession; he believed that Christians should not be earthly useless by embracing poverty; he argued that the earth and its fullness were of God and that the same God has given the prosperity and blessings of the earth to believers. To be a Christian and to be poor was not the will of God. The high point of Kumuyi's holiness theology was heavenly riches, instead of earthly possessions. These two distinct ideologies were what gave birth to most Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Thus, the dividing line between these two ideologies is between holiness gospel and prosperity gospel. In this case, it is difficult to align with the suggestion of Gaiya (2002) that the Pentecostal phenomenon in Nigeria is divided into four distinct ideologies: miracle, prosperity, faith, and holiness ideologies. It is much more convincing to identify with the suggestion of Dora & Onah (2014) that the line of demarcation between the different Pentecostal classifications is between churches and fellowships and between prosperity groups and holiness groups. Since faith and miracle are identifiable features of prosperity gospel, faith and miracle churches are automatically subsumed under prosperity gospel group. It is in this persuasion that I will group the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria into holiness and prosperity gospel churches. Since the prosperity gospel group are responsible

for the spread of prosperity gospel, the responses of the holiness movement to the phenomenon of prosperity gospel will thus be suggested.

7.3. New birth, sanctification, and justification

The first reaction of the Pentecostal holiness preachers to prosperity gospel is the emphasis on Christian new birth. Basing this teaching of the new birth on the encounter of Jesus and Nicodemus wherein the former told the later that unless a man was born again, he could not enter the kingdom of God, holiness preachers try to differentiate between a church goer and Christian believer. (John 3:1-30 and 1 Peter 1: 23). They argue that Christian believers can say with conviction that they are born again and convincingly know when, how and where the experience took place. By “when” they mean the precise time the Christian believer got born again, whether at 10am or at 10pm. By “how” they mean the precise description of the nature of the experience. This may have to do with whether it was gentle, forceful, loud, bright, dark; or like a wind or fire, and how did the Christian believer react to it. Is it by speaking in tongues of heavenly languages, shouting, jumping, singing, or falling to one’s knees? By “where” they mean the exact place the Christian believer went through the experience, of being born again; this has to do with whether the believer was in the church, toilet, bedroom, farm, car, or gym (Ojo, 1988). This experiential theology is backed up by the experiential descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost with signs such as fire and glossolalia. The holiness movement believes that all Christians must go through a similar experience to be able to go to heaven. It is assumed that such experiential encounter with the divine helps the believer to conquer sin (Kim, 2018).

Another response of Pentecostal holiness preachers to prosperity gospel is the emphasis on Christian sanctification. According to Kumuyi (2017), one of the

leading Pentecostal holiness preachers, the Greek words “hagiasmos, aJgiasmov” are translated as ‘sanctification’, which means holiness. Kumuyi argues further that to sanctify means to make a Christian believer holy and that things are sanctified only when they are used for God’s purpose. Kumuyi’s suggestion presupposes that Christian believers are sanctified when they live according to the design and purpose of God and that their purpose is to avoid worldly possessions and to live a holy life. To Kumuyi, sanctification is “the gracious work of the Holy Spirit,” wherein the Christian believer is freed from sinful tendencies and exalted to a purity of heart and life. Kumuyi’s sanctification teaching presupposes a two-fold type of sin: actual sins that the individual Christian commits and the Adamic sin, or indwelling sins that the individual Christian is born into. Kumuyi’s description of Adamic sin and actual sin is like the terms “original sin” and “inputted sin,” which Murray (1992), Berkoff (1992) and Piper (1993) use to describe the two main effects of Adam’s sin on humanity.

Original sin as a concept was originated in the second century by Irenaeus, one of the church fathers, who was the Bishop of Lyon. Irenaeus propounded the concept while contending for the faith during his disagreement with the Gnostics (Murray, 1992 & Berkoff, 1992). Augustine another of the church fathers borrowed the idea, developed it further, and based it on the teaching of Paul in Romans 5:12–22 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–23 wherein he suggested that sin came into humanity because of one man, Adam. Such belief influenced subsequent church doctrine about the concept of original sin. Thus, the central doctrine of original sins provides that, because of the sins of Adam, human beings enter the world with a corrupted or fallen nature (Piper, 1993). This means that original sin has to do with sinful tendencies, dispositions, and desires in the hearts of human beings, with which they are all born. This is understood

as something that is inherent in human beings, it is a morally ruined state or character. According to the doctrine of original sin, this ruined state that human beings are born with, manifests itself in actual sins, such as the feelings, thoughts, and the actions that violate the moral command of God. Thus, the sinful hearts of human beings (original sin) cause human beings to make sinful choices, take sinful actions, feel sinful feelings, and think sinful thoughts (actual sins). This description assumes that human beings are not sinners because they sin; rather, they sin because they are sinners. Thus, human beings are all born totally imprisoned and enmeshed in original sin. Their humanity is not left with any island of goodness (Berkoff, 1971 & Murray, 1992).

Secondly, the doctrine of imputed sin provides that the guilt of the sins of Adam are credited not just to Adam, but to all of humanity. Humanity is regarded as sinners in Adam, and therefore deserves the same punishment. This imputed sin doctrine, provides that humanity has not only received polluted and sinful nature due to the sins of Adam (original sin), but has also been regarded as having sinned and shared in Adam's sins, such that humanity is guilty of his sins as well (imputed sin). This doctrine suggests that imputed sin ruins humanity's standing with God and is not an internal state, but an objective reckoning of humanity's guilt. Whereas original sin ruins humanity's character and internal quality. As such, it is believed that both original and imputed sins place human beings under God's judgment (Berkoff, 1971 & Murray, 1992).

Piper (1993) advances that the doctrine of original sin and imputed sin presuppose that the consequences of the sin of Adam are two-fold: original sin and imputed sin. This presupposition suggests that the remedy of Christians' salvation should also be two-fold. Piper opines that from the doctrine, two things obviously need remedy: a human's sinful nature, that enslaves to sin, and

a human's original fault and conviction, that are not because of an individual's sin, but in the individual's connection with Adam's sin. According to Piper, the doctrine of original sin and imputed sin, provides that the problem of humanity's conviction in Adam's sin or legal guilt before God is remedied through justification in Jesus Christ, or imputing into the believer the righteousness of Christ. Piper further posits that the problem of humanity's corruption and depravity or moral desecration and habitual transgressing is remedied through Holy Spirit's sanctification or the purifying work of the Holy Spirit on the Christian. To Piper, the first solution which is justification comes through imputed righteousness while sanctification which is the second remedy comes through imparted righteousness.

It is this doctrine of purification and sanctification that Kumuyi (2017) borrowed in his response to prosperity gospel. Kumuyi advances that at conversion, the Christian believer's actual sins are forgiven, the indwelling sin or adamic sins purged away, and the Christian believer's heart is purified by sanctification. According to Kumuyi, sanctification is instantaneous and, it is a sudden experiential spirituality the Christian believer goes through to live a holy life devoid of sins. He maintains that the outward visible signs of a sanctified life are obedience, love, holiness, kindness, forgiveness while the inward spiritual grace are peace of mind, inner victory, joy and freedom, right motives, and good thoughts. Thus, holiness preachers argue that sanctification is a practical theology that pervades the totality of the Christian believer's life; it impacts upon how the Christians believer should live, dress, walk, talk, behave, eat. This is to regulate the excess of the flesh. To holiness theology adherents, a flamboyant life is an aberration and can disrupt the Christian believers' mind from heavenly things and focus it on earthly ones. He believes that sanctification

is not only living a sinless life, but also a life that does not conform with the world and its beauties (Kim, 2018).

The emphasis on strict holiness has made followers holiness preaching Pentecostal churches to live ascetic lives (Kumuyi 2011). They believe that God's requirement is that every believer should live a holy life and that God in His mercy and love sent Jesus Christ to die for humanity's salvations and sanctification. The idea is that God having redeemed and cleansed Christians from pollution of sins, He wants believers to avoid every worldly temptation that can lure believers to perversion and pollution. They maintain that the purpose of Christ coming into the world is to call sinners to repentance and not those practising hypocrisy and self-righteousness (Mark 2:17). Their argument is that every sinner that repents, confesses his sins, and exercises faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, receives remission and forgiveness of sins from Jesus Christ, in that it is the will of God that no individual should have eternal condemnation (Ojo, 1988 & Kumuyi, 2017).

Puritist preachers assume that the individual Christian, having responded to Jesus' call of salvation, receives sanctification. This is believed, enables the Christian to be free from inward pollution, so that the believer's soul, heart, mind, and spirit can be accepted by God. The assumption here is that the first step to living a sanctified life is repentance. Repentance is said to be the rejection of evil and doing that which is good; it is believed to be the act of confession to receive forgiveness, when the individual Christian is guilty of various sins. This suggestion assumes that it is repentance that leads to sanctification, and that sanctification leads to living a holy life, where the individual believer avoids worldly prosperity that derails the mind of the individual Christian from heaven. This assumption identifies holiness as a

fundamental, unchangeable, and irreversible nature and attribute of God. Holiness theology teachers back up this thinking with such belief that no blasphemous infidels such as the prosperity gospel preachers will go to heaven. They believe that God is permanently, absolutely, perfectly, firmly, visibly, transcendentally, inflexibly, and eternally pure. This implies that God has always been without sin from time immemorial; He is sinless in the present and will be sinless in the future till eternity. Thus, the Pentecostal purity movement propounds that if Christians desire to be God's children and favourites, they must be holy and seek to live with Him eternally and not pursue earthly prosperity (Kumuyi 2011).

7.4. Restitution

Another distinctive doctrine emphasised by Pentecostal puritans is restitution. Restitution is the act of making amend for any wrong an individual has done against his fellowman. It is the restoration of stolen things to its rightful owner such as paying debts, defrauded money, or items, and apologising to the victim in order to have pure conscience towards God and to establish a good relationship with one's neighbour. It is also paying back the equivalent of what was damaged (Leviticus 6:1-7; Matthew 5:23,24; James 4:17).

Advocates of restitution believe that Christians receive forgiveness when they confess, forsake, and repent of their sins, but they must mend that which they have damaged. Then, they are washed by the blood of Jesus Christ (Proverbs 28:13; I John 1:9). Purity preaching Pentecostal churches assume that when people sin against God, it is obvious that other people suffer because of that sin or action. This assumption supposes that when an individual sin against a neighbour, the individual has sinned against God in the same act, in that one of the commandments of God has been broken. Though when there is repentance

God willingly forgives the sins committed against Him, yet God demands that the individual makes amend to any person who is hurt or wronged as a mark of genuine repentance. Pentecostal puritans believe this action is to make sure repented sinners bear fruits that signify to all that they have become trusted and new creatures indeed. They contend that making restitutions ensures that Christians create a right relationship with God and fellowman after they are reconciled with God (Luke 3:8-14; Acts 24:16; Romans 8:1,2).

Furthermore, drawing inspiration from the Old Testament, advocates of purity suggest that restitution was part of Israel's moral law and that most sins committed by human beings were against both God and neighbours. This presumption states that repentance towards God for the Israelites was inclusive of restoration to one's neighbour of all money and properties gained by stealing, fraud, pretence or lying of any kind (Exodus 21:18,19,22,26, Exodus 22:1-15; Le Numbers 5:6-8). Exponents of purity theology argue that rulers of Israel embraced and reflected this moral teaching so much that the prophets preached, justified, and emphasised the necessity of every backsliding individual who was returning to Yahweh in Israel to make restitution. Though the prophets prophesied about the coming Messiah and the sacrifice of atonement, and the cleansing power of the blood of the lamb, advocates of the theology of holiness believe that they did not de-emphasise the necessity of restitution (2 Samuel 16:5-8, Nehemiah 5:6-13 & I Kings 20:34). They back up their teaching with New Testament episodes, where Jesus met Zacchaeus: Zacchaeus who did not want anything to be a deterrent to his salvation especially his ill-gotten wealth, said to Jesus that he gave half of his possessions to the poor and if he cheated anybody of anything, he paid back four times the amount. Adherents of holiness gospel maintain that even though the crowd murmured about Jesus' visit to Zacchaeus' house, Jesus proclaimed that salvation has come to the house of

Zacchaeus since he was ready to right his life and obediently follow Jesus Christ (Luke 19:1-10). It is therefore in this understanding of Pentecostal holiness preachers that salvation experience can make an individual return every ill-gotten possession that rightfully belongs to another person. The emphasis on restitution by Pentecostal holiness preachers is to serve three purposes: to instil material discipline among members, to dissuade members' mind from worldly possessions, and to impact the principle of holiness among members. In this persuasion, members are inspired toward the after now, rather than the here and now and its riches (Ojo, 1988 & Kumuyi, 2011).

In the light of the foregoing, Pentecostal holiness churches, such as the Deeper Life Bible Church, are unable to identify with the theology of prosperity. The materialistic drive of prosperity gospel is perceived as a dissuader of spiritual benefits. The rapture of the saints, echoes in the minds of the puritans. This eschatological motivation, concerned with the last things and end the time, envisages a time when both the living and the dead in Christ will ascend into heaven to be with Jesus during the parousia (Jesus' second coming). To this end, Pentecostal puritans preach that material possession must be traded away in order to enter one's heavenly home. (Matthew 24:29-31 & 1Thessalonians 4:15-17).

7.5. Conclusion

The researcher has shown that while the phenomenon of prosperity gospel spread, there are corresponding responses. The theological reaction of the Pentecostal holiness movement is in form of emphasis on doctrines such as new birth, justification, sanctification, and restitution. As intimated, the reason is to enforce spiritual discipline needed to shun mammon, and all its alluring tendencies that are at variance with Jesus' coming: βασιλεία, (basileia,

kingdom). While prosperity theology emphasises influence, prestige, and materialism, the holiness theology focuses on asceticism.

CHAPTER EIGHT: PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND MISSION CHURCHES

8.1. Introduction

Christianity as a world religion is still grappling with the seeds of division and scars of dividing doctrines. It has different movements, groups, sects, and denominations with different theologies with each claiming authenticity. As the Mission churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, and the Presbyterian Church, assert their divine positioning, claiming Christological authentication and apostolic succession, other expressions, such as the prosperity theology claim, the pneumatic dynamis and the workings of the Holy Spirit (John 3: 8). As the Pentecostal prosperity preaching ecclesiological bodies are ridiculously referred to as “mushroom churches” in Nigeria, they have grown beyond mushrooms and constitute an ideology that has staggered the very foundation of the mission churches. In the light of this stark reality, this chapter discusses how mission churches reacted to the spread of the prosperity teaching.

8.2. Background

Mission churches are those churches planted in Nigeria by Europeans and American missionaries in the nineteenth century. There were two attempts to plant Christianity in Nigeria by the missionaries: the first attempt and the second attempt. The first attempt was in two phases (Erivwo, 1979). Christianity is assumed to have appeared in Nigeria in the 15th century, from 1485 to 1707, in the kingdom of Benin, in its first phase. Benin kingdom was the first to experience missionary activities in Nigeria. This earliest missionary adventure was carried out by the Portuguese Roman Catholic Mission (Kitause & Achunike, 2013). The second phase was also carried out by the Portuguese Roman Catholic

Mission, in the 16th century, precisely from 1574 to 1807, in the Kingdoms of Warri (Ukpong & 2006 & Isichie,1995). Agha (1999) contends that the arrival of missionary activities within the kingdoms of Benin and Warri was at the invitation of the kings of the Niger Delta Region. It is not convincing to Agha's position. I will align with Eriwo (1979) and Isichie (1995) that it was the King of Portugal who wanted a diplomatic relation with the kingdoms of the Niger Delta Region, hence his attempt to send mission teams wrapped in commerce. The Roman Catholic Priests of the Diocese of Lisbon in Portugal led this first attempt, during the age of explorative inquisitiveness. The interest of the King of Portugal was to establish a diplomatic relation, and a commercial links, as well as to convert the Indigenous tribes of West Africa to Christianity, in order to have strong influence over the West African Region. In AD 1493, Pope Alexander VI issued a Papal Bull, or Decree of Demarcation, wherein the world was divided into two, between Spain and Portugal. The West African Mission was dear to the heart of the king of Portugal because West Africa was allocated to him through the Papal Bull of Demarcation. The Portuguese missionary team adopted the early missionary model used in converting Europe to the Christian faith. This methodology directed its effort towards the kings with the hope that once converted, the kings would influence the conversion of their subjects to Christianity (Makozi & Afolabi, 1981).

This first attempt failed, because of many factors. Firstly, because it lacked the indigenisation of the gospel message to suit the religious aspiration of the natives. It was not a religious message interpreted via African cosmology. Elements of Indigenous religions were termed as idolatrous, barbaric, and discarded. The King of Benin and that of the Warri kingdoms remained religiously and strongly committed to their indigenous worship, while the gospel was Westernised. They were said to have reverted to their native gods for

protection against evil attacks, for victories over imminent threat during inter-tribal wars, and in times of mysterious occurrence, such as drought, unexplainable death, and incessant sicknesses. It was said that a statue of Jesus was smashed in 1733 when it could not stop a drought in Warri, and the natives reverted to their indigenous gods for a solution. Secondly, the missionary work was restricted to the king's palaces. Churches were built around the royal courts with the belief that once the kings were converted, their subjects would follow (Isichei, 1995 & Kitause & Achunike, 2013). The Oba Esigie of Benin and some of his chiefs were baptised and practised Christianity with syncretic disposition. The fact that mutilated statues of saints, the crucifixes, several Roman Catholic emblems, and rosaries, were found within the royal court of the Benin kingdom some years later, supports this narrative (Kitause, & Achunike, 2013). Thirdly, the Christian message was mixed with commerce. There was no distinction between missionary activities and commercial interests (Eriwo, 1979). The natives grappled with the horror of the slave trade. The natives could not understand why the same missionaries who preached the God of love could simultaneously engage in buying and selling them as slaves (Omavuebe, 2017). Fourthly, ill-health hampered missionary exploits. It was an era where antimalarial drugs, such as quinine, were not yet discovered. Most of the missionaries felt ill due to malaria infection. Therefore, with these factors, the Roman Catholic mission and by extension Christianity could not have strong root in Nigeria during its first attempt in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Eriwo, 1979, Isichei, 1995 & Omavuebe, 2017).

In the second attempt, the Christian message entered Nigeria through the Western Region in the 19th century. As of 1841, Lagos had become a flourishing market for the slave trade (Kitause & Achunike, 2013). The Europeans exchanged European goods for local crafts and slaves, with the latter

metamorphosing into a very lucrative business. Initially, European slave merchants raided Nigerian coastal communities to capture their victims. As demand grew, there was a reliance on local agents, such as kings and traders, backed by the military aristocrats, who provided guns, bullets, rum, and horses. As of 1490, about three thousand slaves were shipped to Portugal and Spain from Africa in a year. The European expansionism and colonialism in the West Indies and America turned what was a small business into a global trade with the Portuguese. From the 1570s to the 1850s, more than three and half million slaves were transported to America (North and South) and the Caribbean colonies from Nigeria. A smaller shipment to Europe and other regions also existed with Dutch, French and English merchants notoriously competing and greedily expanding slave trade internationally (Falola & Aderin, 2010 & Lovejoy, 2011).

So, having experienced how the wickedness associated with the slave trade was drastically exposed and its negative impacts on Christianity, the purveyors of the second attempt to plant the Christian message in Nigeria adopted abolitionist approach. The main aim of the protagonists was to end the slave trade and its associated cruelty, which was perceived as one of the hindrances to the acceptance of the Christian faith. They also made a frantic effort to separate the Christian message from colonialism, which they believed hindered the acceptability of the Christian message by the natives (Erivwo, 1979). In the British context, there was an appealing disposition and cooperation on the part of missionaries towards the Colonial Government, if its intervention was viewed as anti-slavery in nature. So, sometimes colonial intervention was considered as a suitable tool for stopping the slave trade, both within and between Africa and America. To this end, Lagos was occupied by Britain in 1851, with the intention

of shutting down the largest and most notorious slave market in West Africa (Feldtkeller, 2017).

An increasing stress on missionary activities was prominent in Protestant thought, during the period of reformation in Europe, in the 16th century, and the evangelical revivalism in Europe, in the 17th and the 18th centuries, three traditions and ecclesia bodies emerged. They were the Anglican Evangelicals, Calvinists Methodists, and Wesleyan Methodists. The Anglican Evangelical groups and the Wesleyan Methodist groups directed their missionary convictions towards Africa and India, while the Calvinist Methodist groups directed their missionary exploits towards America (Diora & Christian, 2013 & Omavuebe, 2017). To this end, various missionary societies, such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS), London Missionary Society, and Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society emerged. The revivalists often based their conviction on the Bible, which enjoins believers to spread the Gospel to all nations of the world (Feldtkeller, 2017).

So, the first missionary group to arrive in Nigeria in the second attempt were the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. Other missionary groups such as the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, and American Missionaries subsequently joined the Anglican Evangelical and the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries in Nigeria. Consequently, between 1841 and 1891, there were five mission groups fully active in Nigeria: The Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Catholic Society of Africa Mission, the Foreign Mission Committee of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States (Ajayi, 1965 & Diora & Christian, 2013). The Anglican Church Missionary Society planted the Anglican Church, the

Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society planted the Methodist Church, the Catholic Society of Africa Mission planted the Roman Catholic Church, the Foreign Mission Committee of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland planted the Presbyterian Church, and the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States planted the Baptist Church (Ajayi, 1965). Therefore, in this thesis, the term Mission Churches means those churches planted by European and American missionaries in the nineteenth century.

8.3. Different views of Prosperity theology in Nigeria

The extreme proponents: Reactions to prosperity gospel ideology in Nigerian can be generally classified into three groups – the Extreme proponents, the extreme opponents, and the middle proponents (Kitause, 2005). The extreme proponents believe that it is the will of God for all Christians to prosper in every ramification of human existence. According to this view, suffering is never an option for Christians. This materialistic usage is further advocated in relation to liberation. In this view, salvation is liberation. It is believed that the salvific work of Jesus Christ is a fundamental liberation from all social-economic challenges of humanity (Gutierrez, 1974). Most Pentecostal prosperity preaching churches in Nigeria fall within this groups. This view proposes a radical liturgy such as positive confession, seed faith, and glossolalia as mechanisms to achieve material prosperity (Bowler, 2013, Kenyon, 2004, Roberts, 1970).

The extreme opponents: This group opposes the materialistic tendencies proposed by extreme prosperity gospel advocates (Kumuyi, 2011). The theological reaction of the extreme opponents of prosperity gospel is in form of emphasis on holiness and a better life after death. This view places greater emphasis on doctrines such as new birth, justification, sanctification, and righteousness rather than material gains. This groups enforces spiritual dogma

needed to shun mammon, and all its alluring tendencies that are at variance with second Jesus' coming and kingdom of heaven. While the extreme prosperity theology emphasises influence, prestige, and materialism, the extreme opponents of prosperity theology focus on asceticism. The Pentecostal holiness group subscribes to this view (Kim, 2018).

The middle view: This group acknowledges the popularity and enormous impacts of the prosperity gospel on faith communities. This view is soft on the prosperity gospel because of the large followership it commands (Kitause, 2005). This view understands prosperity within the concept of the kingdom of God (Falarin, 2006). The phrase, “kingdom of God” is thought of as somewhat realised in the here and now in believers’ lives and not in the hereafter (Matthew 3:2, 6:10 & Mark 10:13-16). Whilst this view admits that the kingdom of God has come into humanity in the form of material prosperity, it does not recognise the form of liturgy such as extravagant seed sowing prescribed by the extreme proponents. The middle view prescribes that the prosperity of God is not transactional, but a free gift given to humanity by God out of His prerogative of mercy and not because of humanity’s effort (Asuquo, 2020).

8.4. Strong opposition to prosperity theology within the mission churches

The response of mission churches to prosperity gospel at first appears to constitute a sharp attack on the phenomenon of prosperity gospel (Falarin 2006). Authorities of mission churches initially demonised the ideology of the prosperity gospel. Prosperity gospel and its elements were vehemently repudiated and not allowed in mission churches. The mission churches operated a closed system that did not tolerate undue emphasis on wealth, miracles, demon possessions and deliverance from poverty and sickness, which the prosperity gospel seemed to have monopolised very well. Members who visited

or exhibited any traits of prosperity gospel ideology were reprimanded and even expelled. The young ones were the first to be attracted to the ideology of prosperity gospel in great numbers, because of the emphasis on material prosperity, and the charismatic and evangelistic method that had been adopted by prosperity gospel speakers. Prosperity teaching was branded as heretical, and these enthusiastic youths that were attracted to it, were not given a sound theological response, but branded as heretics and fanatics. This repulsive method adopted by the church authorities brought about a mass exodus of the youths from the mission churches to join the prosperity gospel movements that were sympathetic to their material course (Nwoka, 1996 & Falarin 2006).

A few factors which the mission churches neglected helped the teaching of material prosperity gain ground. First, the inability of mission churches to contextualise the gospel to meet the existential problems of unemployment, sicknesses, poverty, witchcraft, and demonic attacks. Second, the alluring emphasis on all-round success and individual empowerment by prosperity theology advocates. Third, the quest for upward material mobility by those who were already gainfully engaged. The consequence of this theological negligence by the mission churches was the loss of a substantial number of church members to the property gospel movement. As the trend continued and members also continued to seek a practical and meaningful theology that was suited for their circumstances outside the mission churches, the church authorities were forced to accept prosperity gospel impulse that they once abhorred and rejected (Zink, 2012). This acceptance was not by choice, or because they believed that prosperity gospel was theologically sound, but because the authorities of the church wanted to abort the movement of their members from the mission churches. This compromise relaxed the rigidity of mission churches and allowed some elements of prosperity gospel to filter into the churches that once

detested the ideology. Practices like tithing and seed faith which were prosperity driven, were emphasised. To retain members, the mission churches are said to have also incorporated some elements of prosperity gospel, such as exorcism, healing, and positive confession into their liturgy (Falarin, 2006).

Meanwhile, despite the incorporation of the elements of prosperity gospel into the liturgical life of mission churches, they tactfully avoided the term prosperity gospel so as not to be perceived as engaging in what they had once criticised. Thus, the adoption of prosperity teaching within the mission churches, can be described as unofficial. Again, it created a liturgical debate, which resulted in the emergence of what I will call, 'soft prosperity theology' advocates and 'anti-prosperity theology' proponents. While the Pentecostal prosperity theology is best described as radical or extreme, the pro-prosperity doctrine group within the mission churches, is best described as soft or moderate.

8.5. The radical prosperity gospel opponents within the mission churches

Anti-prosperity gospel campaigners within the mission churches take a radical approach in their criticism. They believe that the ideology of prosperity gospel is unbiblical, spurious, theologically damaging, and spiritually dangerous to Christians. They observe that there is an inherent danger in a teaching that entirely makes Christians believe that success in life is all about the individual's striving and cleverness (Kिताuse, 2017). These anti-prosperity gospel preachers note that spiritual warfare and soundness should not be measured solely in terms of worldly possessions and that material prosperity should not be seen as a mark of God's approval, and that life's challenges, such as poverty, sickness, and early death, should not be interpreted as signs of God's rejection or demonic curses. Anti-prosperity gospel adherents, reject those features of prosperity gospel, such as positive confession, giving to expect a hundred-fold return,

visualisation, and exorcism, that are synonymous with self-help techniques. Their belief stems from the understanding that Christians can be duped with false expectations and that when such expectations fail to materialise, Christians can give up on God or permanently lose their faith or backslide into idol worship (Kitause, 2017).

Preachers who are against prosperity gospel, maintain that the gospel of materialism absolutely negates what Jesus, and the early disciples stand for – the salvation of souls. The emphasis on material things is a tool that makes people miss heaven. Their argument is that prosperity gospel is a materialistic invention that focuses on the material world. This suggestion presumes that the preachers who engages in it do that to get rich to the detriment of their followers. The anti-prosperity group suggest that the gospel of materialism is a business religion or a gospel of commercialisation, that has been introduced into original Christian practices. They express a worry that the inordinate quest to acquire wealth is gradually eroding the ideals of perseverance, patience, morals, and social justice, that are the hall mark of religiosity. This postulation alludes to the idea that those religious tenets have been commercialised and traded for money and wealth, and that material gain is taking the place of an emphasis on heaven and God. The assumption is that while religiosity is spreading, godliness is reducing (Kitause, 2017).

The radical approach of this non-prosperity subscribers within the mission churches assume that the purveyors of prosperity gospel and their teeming sympathisers are doomed for eternal damnation for their uncontrolled and over-concentration on material pursuit, rather than a holy living, which they believe is a fundamental prerequisite for entry into God's eternal home in heaven. The reason they espouse this view is that the gospel of prosperity

appeals only to the flesh. What this means is that the prosperity gospel message capitalizes and concentrates on natural desires for wealth, health, and personal gains. Expanding this criticism, it implies there is no call of repentance from sin; there is no call of denying oneself; there is no call to pick up one's cross and follow Jesus and there is no call to die for the cause of the kingdom of God (Mk.10:34 & 35).

8.6. The soft prosperity gospel subscribers within the mission churches

The pro-prosperity gossellers within the mission churches take on a soft approach in their advocacy. The first challenge they grapple with is the issue of theodicy. Theodicy comes from the Greek words, "theos," meaning "god" and "dike," meaning "justice." It is a theological and philosophical concept used to explain why a perfectly good, all-powerful, and all-knowing God permits evil. Theodicy is an attempt to solve the problem of evil. This is the problem associated with the reconciliation of the existence of evil of the world with the belief of the existence of a perfectly good, all-knowing, and almighty God. Traditional theodicies have employed three strategies to solve the problem of evil, such as qualifying, or denying the omnipotence of God, qualifying, or denying the goodness of God, or denying the reality of evil (Sherry,2015). Prosperity gospel advocates within the mission churches navigate the three strategies in their justification of prosperity gospel. It is in their persuasion that God does not create evil, suffering, pains, and death, found in the world today. They suggest that evil and suffering come into the world because of the Adamic sin. They align with the Augustinian tradition that blames the cause of evil and suffering in the world on the fall and sin of Adam and Eve and their subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Whether the episode in the Garden of Eden is comprehended as a mythical representation of the human condition, or an

historical event, it is understood as the primary cause of human evil and suffering, whether be it moral evil, as exemplified in human wrongful actions and their resultant effects, or natural evil, as exemplified in natural disaster and disease (Falarin, 2006 & Sherry,2015).

Since prosperity gospel proponents suggest that God is all-loving, all-powerful, just, and holy, they believe that God makes provision to remove all types of evil and suffering from this material world through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. They point out that when Christ deals with sin through His atoning sacrifice on the cross, when He dies to save the world, all human suffering is taken away. Pro-prosperity gossellers maintain that the impact of the salvific work of Jesus is that sin and its consequences of poverty, failure, sickness, and death have been dealt with. Therefore, soft prosperity gospel advocates conclude that it is the right of all Christians to enjoy the fullness of God's blessing (whether physical or spiritual) in the here and now (Falarin, 2006).

The second challenges the Pro-prosperity gossellers contend with arises within the context of the Kingdom program of God. While the concept of "Kingdom of God" is not a popular one in the Old Testament, the concept of God as "king" or as "ruler" is popular at least in the prophets and Psalms. In the Old Testament, kingship of God is regarded as God's rule, over Israel (first) and over the entire world. With the progression of time, the emergence of God's Kingdom, which guarantees completeness of person, did not occur as there was the frequent triumph of evildoers over the righteous (Obadiah 21; Daniel 6:26 & Psalms 23:28; 103:19; 145:11).

God's prophets in the Old Testament envisaged a time when God's supremacy would be re-asserted over the earth through the coming Messiah. This coming Messiah would create the kingdom of God primarily for the Jews, with its

blessings extending to the gentiles. So, two views of the kingdom of God are found in the Old Testament scripture. Firstly, that God has always been in-charge of the whole earth and that even gentiles are God's instruments. Secondly, that God is the king and ruler of Israel, and that under the coming Messiah, God will make the gentiles serve Israel. The understanding is that under this time, God will put an end to all forms of evil in the world (Jeremiah 33:14-26).

During the period of inter-testament, the concept of the "Kingdom of heaven" started emerging. At this time, the term "kingdom of heaven" denoted God's decisive intervention, passionately expected by Israel to restore the nation of Israel, to bring about God's earthly rule, and to restore the fortunes of the Israelites and liberate them from their oppressors. The Jews understood the Kingdom in materialistic and nationalistic terms. They assumed a kingdom that would have no pain, misery, suffering, sickness, or poverty.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist acquainted his listeners with the theme of the "kingdom of God." In the light of this understanding, three things were highlighted during his preaching: firstly, the kingdom would come with divine judgment; secondly, the king of the kingdom would be the long-awaited Messiah (Jesus) whom he (John the Baptist) introduced; and thirdly, whoever that wants to partake of the kingdom must repent and imbibe the principles of the Kingdom. Ironically, John the Baptist was disheartened that the long-awaited Messiah (Jesus) did not match his anticipation of the coming ruler of the kingdom of God. He failed to understand that there were different spheres to the plan of the in-breaking of God's kingdom (Matthew 11:2 & John 1:29).

Although the phrase 'kingdom of God' scarcely occurred in pre-Christian Jewish writings, the understanding of God as king was fundamental to Jewish tradition,

and Jewish perception on the subject undeniably inspired, and to some extent decided, its usage in the New Testament. Within the Greek word “basileia” which means “kingdom,” lies the Aramaic term, “malkut,” used by Jesus. Malkut does not mean principally a geographical area or realm, or the inhabitants of a realm or area, but the king’s activities and his exercise of sovereign authority. In His teachings, Jesus explained and corrected certain misunderstandings associated with the kingdom concept. Firstly, that the Kingdom is typified with saving activities. Secondly, that the Kingdom began in arrival of the person and ministry of the person of Jesus, the Messiah. Thirdly, that Christ is presently reigning in his followers’ hearts. Fourthly, that the kingdom has not reached its consummation, even though it has begun. (Matthew 6:10 & 12: 28 & Luke 17:21). Jesus possibly acknowledged the signs of the imminence of the kingdom, but however had a futuristic expectation of its advent in power. He may well have acknowledged His deliverance and healing and miraculous activities as part of the kingdom activities. Or still, He may well have meant His own death, burial, and resurrection as providential conditions for full kingdom manifestation. However, His disciples seemed to have anticipated the final consummation of the kingdom in a brief period. So, Christians such as Paul were surprised that they could not experience the end of the world within a generation. Consequently, Christians soon suggested that as the result of the resurrection of Jesus, all the blessings traditionally reserved for the life to come were already packaged for the Christians of this age. Thus, the phrase “kingdom of God” was thought of as somewhat realised in the here and now in believers’ lives (Matthew 3:2, 6:10 & Mark 10:13-16).

It is in the context of the kingdom concept that prosperity gospel proponents within the mission churches support prosperity gospel. Falarin (2006) explains that it is within the context of the Kingdom of God that the prosperity gospel

makes sense. Falarin suggests that the healing campaigns of Jesus and His driving out of demons and his power to forgive sins, indicate that the long-awaited Kingdom has steadily began to be made manifest on earth. He maintains that by delegating the authority of exorcism to his followers and by enduing Christians with the gifts of casting out of devils and healing, Jesus demonstrates that the Kingdom which began in a new dimension with his advent on earth is continuing. The assumption is that the resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent release of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to empower believers, signify the continuation of God's kingdom on earth.

Exponents of prosperity gospel within the mission churches propose that the prosperity gospel has positioned God at the centre of human existence and experience and that this positioning is more than enough to meet the varied needs of Christians. They believe that prosperity gospel has drastically reduced the number of people patronising African traditionalists for solutions to the challenges of their daily lives. Again, this assertion is cemented by their advocacy that prosperity gospel has led to the rapid and numerical growth of the Christian faith in Africa (Falarin, 2006).

8.7. Conclusion

This chapter reveals the reactions of the mission churches to the phenomenal spread of prosperity teaching in Nigeria. As the hurricane of prosperity ideology hits the mission churches, they attempt to mount a defence mechanism, by reinforcing their liturgical rigidity. This closed-door approach bowed to the overbearing invasion of the material theological expression. Thus, the advancement of the prosperity gospel resulted in the emergence of two opposing perceptions about the material theological spirituality. As the anti-

prosperity campaigners take a radical approach in their criticism, the pro-prosperity advocates take a soft posture in their advocacy.

PART III: RESEARCH FINDINGS (I)

This segment contains eight chapters (chapters nine to sixteen). From this point onwards, the research focuses on the responses of prosperity gospel to social-economic challenges in Nigeria. These social-economic challenges have been extensively discussed in chapter two of the thesis. Therefore, these succeeding chapters are attempts to answer the research question: “What are the responses of prosperity gospel to social-economic challenges?” The instruments for data collection are interviews, observation, and site visits. In these chapters, the thesis investigates how prosperity gospel reacts to bad conditions. Simply put, it examines the mechanisms prosperity gospel uses to conquer material crisis. The research findings in this thesis show that prosperity gospel deploys strategies like rhematasation, pneumatic regeneration, redemptive soteriology, exorcism, provocative giving, prophetism, and spiritualised items, in combating social-economic difficulties. This part of the thesis starts with chapter nine and ends with chapter sixteen.

CHAPTER NINE: RHEMATISATION

9.1. Introduction

Rhematisation is a prosperity gospel mechanism deployed against unpleasant conditions. It is the act of positive confession, wherein the adherent uses positive declaration to change the outcome of material events. This rhematisation strategy is shown to be two-dimensional – scriptural quotation and the declaration of divine words. Thus, the centralised perception about rhematisation is that it is a determiner of the believer's success. However, I argue that while the practice of rhematisation may arouse the believer's outward attitude, it does not practically solve one's problem as it gives false hope. Hence, it becomes just a coping mechanism amid the turbulences.

9.2. Definition of term

It is of necessity to make it clear at the beginning that there are two basic Greek words that are translated as “word” in the biblical scriptures. They are “logos” and “rhema.” The former principally means the actual writings of scriptures, briefly known as the “written word,” or refers to Jesus as the word of God (Loader, 2017). The later, on the other hand, primarily refers to a word that is spoken, briefly known as the “spoken word” – an utterance (Simamora, 2019). Though there are some instances where both rhema and logos are used interchangeably, it is more expedient that in the context of this analysis, the principal distinction is upheld. To this end, logos means the written word, while rhema means the spoken word. Thus, rhematology comes from two Greek words, rhema (ῥῆμα meaning utterance or things spoken) and logos (λόγος meaning about) (Holmes, 2010). Hence, rhematology is the emphasis on the

spoken word, and rhematisation is the act of speaking the word in order to achieve desire results.

9.3. Declaring scriptures

Within the prosperity gospel community, rhematisation is applied in two ways. First, it refers to a biblical portion or verse of scriptures that the Holy Spirit is said to have put in the heart of the believer, with application to current conditions of the believer. The testimony of Mr A (not real name), a member of one the branches of Christ Embassy church is an attestation in this regard:

For example, when you are sick, there is a bible portion that says, by His stripes we are healed, why not quote it to tell yourself that this sickness is not my heritage. Such scriptural passages carry divine mandate to quell every onslaught of the devil against the redeemed people of God (Mr A, personal interview, September 10, 2019).

Secondly, rhematisation refers to words inspired by the Holy Spirit, spoken by the believer to address current life-challenges. While the former relates to biblical extracts, the later relates to inspired personal words relevant to the believer's challenges. This idea is also suggested in Mr A's statement:

As a Christian, if I can't memorise scriptures, then I can use my mouth to say good things about my life (Mr A, personal interview, September 10, 2019).

Though I shall return to the second application later, in this segment rhema as a biblical verse memorized and spoken to address one's mountains is analysed. Within prosperity gospel adherents, there is the notion that there is power in the biblical scriptures when located, memorised, and spoken. The Holy spirit is said to input certain scriptural passages in the heart of the believer in times of

trouble. Such passages are believed to have significant meaning and applicability to the believer's social-economic difficulties. Here, Mr A also gives an insight:

The bible is the word of God. The word of God is God Himself. God is the solution to our problem. The Holy spirit is there to lead us to the right scripture when in trouble. When we search the word, locate the right passage, and memorise it, to speak to our mountains, we become more than conquerors (Mr A, personal interview, September 10, 2019).

The proposal stipulates that those scriptural passages should be consistently memorized and uttered to address impregnable situations confronting the individual Christian. This advocacy is also expressed by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the founder of Christ Embassy church in his daily devotional entitled, "Rhapsody of Realities," when he observes:

Therefore, keep talking; I don't mean be loquacious; I mean keep affirming the word. Jesus said you shall have what you say. Therefore, have what I call 'talking sessions,' where all you do is get into your closest, affirming God's Word about your life, your future and destiny. Learn to talk your money up; talk your family up; talk your business up; talk your health up (Oyakhilome, 2020).

This practice of confessional application of memorised portions of scriptures espouses the notion that to succeed, Christians need both the written word and the spoken word. The written word becomes the foundation from which passages, verses or phrases are carved out, memorised, and spoken to front human challenges. Mr Mono (pseudo name), a worshipper from one of the branches of the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries clarifies this opinion:

You must speak the word to your mountain to give way (Mr Mono, personal communication, September 20, 2019).

This presupposes a notion that the written word lays the foundation upon which the believer stands as the Holy Spirit quickens and brings about a scriptural passage containing a specific word to address a specific situation.

According to prosperity gospel promoters, to overcome human hardship such as insecurity, poverty, sickness and road accidents, the believer searches for the mind of God in the written word (logos) and speak forth the word (rhema) to change a tough situation to a good one. The written word is perceived as the entire communication process, the spoken word is just a part of the communication process. The written word assumes the entire word of God, the spoken word is the searching and applying of a part of the written word to solve problems one encounters in life. Thus, this suggests that rhema can only occur when a specific written word is spoken to confront inconvenient situations.

This belief system is corroborated with confessional statement such as “It is written,” “The bible says,” “Thus says the Lord,” “Thy word is life,” “At His word thou shall prosper,” “His word is a lamp unto our path” are made either during prayers or sermons in most Prosperity preaching churches visited by the researcher. Prosperity gospel communities believe that the Christian’s inheritance of material blessing will not be achieved until the believer catches the revelation of God about it. The assumption is that the revelation of truth as revealed in the logos (written word) is the solution to all frustrations of humanity, and that the word if memorised and quoted opens the door of prosperity. Rhematisers believe that the primary step in overcoming the challenges of life is by seeing God’s blessing delivered to the Christian through the logos. So, to receive one's material blessing, the logos (written word) must be searched to locate the portion that speaks to the material challenges of the devotee. What this means among prosperity gospel adherents is that solutions

to poverty, sicknesses, insecurity, road accident and unemployment can only be found in the written word. It is alleged that information about every human condition is contained in the written word. Adherents propose that all Christian devotees must strive to locate specific information contained in the written word that addresses circumstantial difficulties. Thus, rhematisers observe that it is the responsibility of Christian devotees to search the written word to be able to grasp what is the solution to any human hardship, as revealed by God in the scriptures. To this end, to overcome sickness one must locate passages of scriptures that speak about healing. To have money, the believer must search the written word to locate passages on money. To be secured, the Christians must search the written word and identify passages that promise security.

Located passages are memorised and declared as rhema (spoken word) unto the ugly situation to turn things around for good. One of the interviewees, Mrs K, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God declares:

If Jesus overcomes the devil by the spoken word, as Christians we can overcome every material battle by speaking the word of God unto our condition (Mrs K, personal interview, September 5, 2019).

This proposed strategy of prosperity gospel followers is a suggestion that the Christian can turn things around for good in the material world by merely quoting relevant passages of scriptures. The summary of this assumption is that the sick believer should declare that he is healed, because a portion of the written word says: "...by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah, 53:3). Christians should declare that they are secured, since a portion of the scriptures reads: "A thousand may fall at your right side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you" (Psalm 91:7). To get material riches, the adherent should memorise: "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.” This rhematological spirituality is believed to bring into existence one's material entitlements (2Corinthians 8:9). Thus, rhematisation, the act of memorising, confessing, and applying of relevant scriptural portion to solve specific difficulty, becomes a weapon against all human social-economic challenges.

This rhematological strategy is both popular and important for prosperity gospel proponents. They suggest that the spoken word has creative power, and that when located, memorised, and confessed, it has the potency to influence the material world and that non-existent things come into existence through the divine force, or the divine breath contained in it (Gen. 1:31). The divine force is assumed to be the power of God. The divine breath contained in the spoken word swings into action to enforce what is visualised and declared. What is proposed here is that when the rhema (spoken word) is applied, it creates from nothing abundant blessings in a tangible form. The applied word breaks all kinds of hardships and bring good fortune.

Another attribute of the spoken word as ascribed by prosperity gospel proponents is that it carries the divine nature of God. Mrs K, an interviewee says:

The bible is the word of God. The word of God is God Himself. God is the solution to our problem... (Mrs K, personal interview, September 5, 2019).

During most of the weekly revival services attended by the researcher in some of the branches of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Winners Chapel, the Christ Embassy and the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, the popular songs that reveal this divinity depiction are: “In the word of God, there is power, in the name of Jesus every kneel must bow,” “... You sent your word and heal

my disease....,” and Everything written about You is great.” A nature defines what something is or the attributes that define it. The divine nature of God is characterised by such attributes as omnipotence, eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, and self-existence (Berkoff, 1992). Exponents of prosperity gospel argue that God is omnipotent and by nature does not fall sick and is not subjected to any form of social-economic hardship. The spoken word is seen as God's life, which if released into the believer's human system destroys every sickness and disease. Every human challenge is presumed to be subject to the spoken word, as it can consume every poverty, failure, insecurity, disease, and unemployment. Every hardship is said to bow at the presence of the spoken word of God.

Apart from the belief that quoted scriptures (spoken word) carry the divine nature of God, rhematisers also suggest that quoted scriptures carry God's spirit. Allusion is made to the incident in Cornelius' house, where the Holy spirit descended on all that were present as Peter was speaking (Acts 10:44). Prosperity gospel proponents explain that the Holy Spirit came out of God's word, as spoken by Peter, and filled the household of Cornelius. So, they teach that when the spoken word is received, God's spirit is received as well. The essence is, the spoken word is presumed to be a carrier of God's spirit, and when contacted has the potential to activate one's material endowment. The simple explanation to this is that the spirit of God contained in the spoken word is said to be God's power that turns impossibilities into possibilities. Prosperity gospel encourages the use of scriptural quotation to defeat fear and impossibility. According to Mrs K, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God:

The word of God is sharper than two-edged sword, it cuts down every unwanted enemy from your life. The word of God brings into existence what is not there (Mrs K, personal interview, September 5, 2019).

Rhematisation gives hope and reassures the believer about the supremacy of God over human misery. Therefore, it does not have a locational or time restriction on adherents. One can be engrossed in the act of scriptural quotation at any time, in any place, depending on the present challenges confronting the devotee. It can take place in the office, shop, bedroom, car, or bathroom. It is applied during personal devotion or cooperate worship, during the day or night, during morning or evening prayers, or during fasting programmes or a night vigil. It is popularly used during prayer sessions. God is said to be supreme and cannot be hampered by time or place.

9.4. Some frequently quoted scriptures

The depth of one's godliness, closeness and relationship with God is measured by the believer's scriptural knowledge. The ability to engage in extensive scriptural quotation determines spiritual potential to overcome earthly difficulties. This rhematological act prescribes that each specific prayer aimed at a specific problem, should be backed up by a specific scriptural portion. A few popular scriptures quoted by the rhematisers are analysed. These scriptures are obtained by the researcher during field trip from three sources: the prayer manual (entitled Prayer Rain) by Pastor D. O. Olukoya, the founder of the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries; the daily devotional (entitled, Rhapsody of Realities), by Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the founder of Christ Embassy; and the book (entitled, Pillars of Destiny) by Pastor David Oyedekpo, the founder of Winners' Chapel:

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12: 2-3 in Oyedokpo, 2008).

Prosperity scriptures memorisers assume that all Abrahamic blessing is extensive and should be claimed by believers of all ages to attain material prosperity. In other words, Abrahamic blessing is viewed as purely materialistic and the basic entitlements of believers. By quoting this passage, rhematisers believe that believers are like Abraham, whom God blessed with material possession. They presume that through the Abrahamic blessing, true Christians have unrestricted access to God's abundant earthly prosperity.

This view, when interrogated appears enclosed. It does not allow for other possible interpretation of the passage. It is a one-way traffic that focuses on how to backup one's material need without recourse to hermeneutics. For example, Child (1985), explains that while the Genesis 12:2-3 affirms the blessing of God and foreshadows a great nation for Israel, it does not allude to any form of material possessions. Child maintains that blessings for Christians can be spiritual viability, and an increased awareness of their place in the hereafter. In giving a deeper insight into the text, Barnes (2018), argues that Abrahamic call and God's promise of prosperity to Abram, fits into the salvific program of God for humanity, rather than material prosperity. What this means is that when God wanted to select a man through whom to demonstrate His mercy to the estranged world, He found Abram as a worthy instrument, through His prerogative of mercy. Prerogative of mercy in the sense that Abram was not the only person in existence, or the most qualified, but that he might be suited to be the channel through which God's revelation of mercy to humanity would be

deposited. Twice already humanity had strayed – in the Garden of Eden and immediately after the destructive flood, and twice had God showed up to salvage humanity. Firstly, it was during the promise of victory to the woman’s seed after the fall in the Garden of Eden and secondly, during the covenant with Noah after the great flood (Genesis 3:1-24 & 7:1-20). Barnes maintains that God, not discouraged by the continued apostasy of humankind and its debasing effects, in His unwavering determination put in motion, another great process of savaging humanity from the demoralising impacts of sin, supplying the blessing of forgiveness and calling all humankind to accept His mercy. Therefore, from this perspective, this special call of Abram can also be understood as one of the divine events by which the legal wall of partition between God and humanity is broken to usher in a new era of reconciliation. So, when God said, “In Abram shall all the family of the earth be blessed,” He was not speaking of material blessing, but a spiritual blessing of salvation (Genesis 12:2-3 & Matthew 1:1-25). What this means is that in Abraham’s seed shall spring for the Messiah through whom all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The messiah shall take on human nature, shall taste death for humanity, and His gospel of salvation shall be preached to all people. This is a point the rhematisers do not put into context while quoting, declaring, and claiming the blessings of Abraham. They solely understand the blessings of Abraham from a materialistic point.

You will also declare a thing, And it will be established for you; So, light will shine on your ways (Job22:28 in Olukoya, 1999).

Rhematisers use this portion to back up their teaching on Rhematology. This ideology is rooted in the belief that what the mind visualises and declared by the mouth, is divinely approved by God, and picked from the environment in terms

of material prosperity. What is expected in this claim is that whatever material riches a Christian desire is achievable through the power of scriptural memorisation and quotation. Scriptural rhematisation entails mentioning those good things of life the Christian desires. This notion is also visible in one practitioner's suggestion. Mr C, (anonymised name) suggests:

I say good things into my life. There is sickness, but I confess good health, there is death, but I confess life, there is unemployment, but I confess employment. Even if it not there now, I believe it will manifest by the grace of God. I confess the word of God all the time (Mr C, personal interview, September 3, 2019).

However, Child (1985) cautions that while the passage points to God's blessings, it does not reveal how and when will those blessings be received. Child argues that when a contextual evaluation of the book of Job is done, it will be understood that Job suffered some of the most excruciating human challenges of life. At this juncture, a summary of job's experience will be useful. Job was a wealthy man who lived in the land of Uz. He had a large family and very extensive flocks. He was a "blameless" and "upright" man who often avoided doing evil (Job 1:1-3). A day came and Satan, "the Adversary," appeared before God. God boasted to Satan about the righteousness of Job, but Satan contended that Job was only upright because of his material prosperity. Satan argued further that if God could give him permission to afflict Job with untold hardship, he would turn and curse God. With this, God allowed Job to be tormented by Satan to test this bold claim. God forbade Satan from taking the life of Job during the process (Job 1:6-12).

One day, Job received four different messages, each bore separate sad news of the death of his livestock, ten children and servants due to natural disasters and raiding invaders. Job ripped his clothes, shaved his head, and grieved, but still

blessed God in his prayers (Job 1:13-20). Subsequently, Satan appeared before God again, to seek another permission to test Job. With permission granted, Satan afflicted Job with horrifying skin sores. Tired of Job's harrowing condition, his wife encouraged him to curse God, give up and die, but Job refused, strived to accept his circumstances (Job 2:1-9).

It implies that if Job had forsaken God, his excruciating challenges would have stopped, but that Job maintained his uprightness and his love for God, despite his calamities, is not an encouragement for material acquisition. It proposes a different kind of God's definition of blessing opposed to that of the rhematisers' understanding. There is no encouragement for wealth accumulation in this Job's narrative, rather it should be understood as a perfect example of how human experience is approximated to suffering, rather than material prosperity (Job 2:1-9).

Therefore, while the rhematisers celebrate the phrase: "You will also declare a thing, And it will be established for you; So, light will shine on your ways," as a reality for overcoming contextual battles, one may find it difficult to establish a link between job's experience with material possession. Rather, it presupposes a commitment of one's ways, schemes to God for rectification. In this case, God has the prerogative to approve, disapprove or rectify, the believer's request. It is not an authoritarian request, where God is bound to approve the believer's desire. Thus, what this means is that the believer's purposes, counsels, and action, shall be ordered by God's light of direction and governance.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10 in Oyedekpo, 2008).

This is one of the scriptures frequently quoted by exponents of rhematisation to back up their teaching. Rhematisers claim that the devil comes into the world as a thief to destroy Christians with evils, calamities, misfortune, diseases, but that Jesus comes to put an end to the devil's machinations. Jesus' appearance on earth is assumed to have terminated all forms of human sufferings, by giving Christians abundant life. Abundant life here means living a life of prosperity in all its forms.

This interpretation is opposed to the traditional interpretation of this passage. The traditional understanding, views Jesus as a true shepherd, that owns the sheep (John 10:11 & 14). Sheep here means Christians. Jesus, the good shepherd is said to have come to care for Christians, but the devil, the thief that comes into the world, does not come out of any good intention to the church, but merely, to destroy the church. So it is, with anybody that assumes the position of authority in the church, without Jesus' authorisation (Köstenberger, 2002). It infers a leadership qualification. The understanding here is that a leader in the church must be called and authorised by Jesus. However, without any call or authorisation, any individual who thrusts himself into the conduct of the business of the church of God does that with no good will to the prosperity of people's souls, but to steal, kill and destroy the soul of the church. The traditional interpretation focuses on Christ's messianic consciousness of salvation of the human soul. The notion is that Jesus does not come to destroy, but to save the soul of Christians, so they can live a life of grace on earth and enter an eternal bliss at last, and not the promise of material gains, as advocated by proponents of rhematology. While the rhematisers' understanding is concentrated on the viability of the body, the traditional interpretation encourages the vibrancy of the soul.

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 2Corinthians 8:9. (Redeemed Christian Church of God, personal observation, September 8, 2019).

Prosperity gospel rhematisers quote this verse to suggest that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross guarantees Christians worldly entitlements. This interpretation lacks hermeneutical consideration as it is quoted from face value. Rhematisers quotes bible passages out of context to support prosperity gospel claims. For instance, when Paul the author of the epistle of 2 Corinthians, says that Jesus Christ was “rich,” he refers to His status as “the Son of God” and His becoming poor was His voluntary act of stepping into humanity (Ryken, 2005). This implies that Jesus emptied Himself of His divine glory and became incarnate of the virgin Mary and was made man. Jesus was rich in the indescribable and eternal glory of the divine attributes, which He renounced for a time to come into humanity in the mystery of the Incarnation, where He took upon Himself human nature in all its poverty (John 1:1-10). This crucial point eludes the proponents of rhematisation. John’s gospel captures the deepest motive, which is very central to the whole phenomena of Jesus’ life and advent on earth as humility and love for a lost world, and forgiveness for a transgressed humanity. It implies that it is out of love that Jesus stoops, forgives, and communicates His entire self to undeserving and transgressing recipients so that they can be rich in salvation and glory. This notion of salvation is missing from the interpretive understanding of the rhematisers who quotes 2Corinthians 8:9 to support their rhematological belief.

You do not have because you do not ask God - James 4:2 (Redeemed Christian Church of God, personal observation, September 8, 2019).

This biblical passage is used to support prosperity gospel claims, most especially the rhematisation part of it. The interpretation of prosperity gossellers is that if a believer does not have enough material possessions, it is because the believer has not made enough positive declarations using the scriptures that should attract the good things of the world, for it is believed that the bible is saturated with words promising material prosperity. And that whatever a Christian visualises and confesses, using the right scriptural verse, is automatically transformed from the spiritual realm into reality. So, to pray enough means to be engaged in rhematisation, believing that declared desire will manifest in material blessings.

Notwithstanding, if this passage is considered in wholistic terms, but not James 4:2 in isolation, it may read: *“You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God”* (James 4:2 & 3). This may not correspond with the interpretation of the rhematisers. The passage in its wholistic form, means Christians ask and do not receive, because they ask wrongfully, they ask to satisfy their worldly desires. So, an individual, who desires by strife without respecting the right of others, may pray but may not receive, since it is done out of covetousness, litigation, and quarrel. However, if this interpretation is neglected, and the rhematisers’ interpretation is upheld, it suggests that individuals who pray and engage in positive confessions and who keep a form of worship, but still involve in strife, can gain worldly possessions to satisfy human lust, instead of seeking prosperity that glorifies God. It may imply that people can seek material prosperity aimed at not relieving the poor and the destitute, or encouraging philanthropy, but aimed at living in luxury and being able to feed the human ego and lust. The rhematisers shallow interpretation of James 4:2 may mean that Christians with worldly and selfish motive will not be

checkmated – all they need to do is just quote the scripture. And if such Christians with selfish interest, engage in prayer and scriptural quotation, and do not receive answers to their prayers, and as well fail in their plans, it is will then be interpreted as a sign that God does not answer prayer, without knowing such prayer is offered with the wrong motive.

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers (3 John 2 in Oyakhilome 2020).

In a prosperity gospel theology, this scriptural portion is interpreted to mean physical health is commensurate and inseparable from spiritual viability – a faithful Christian should be experiencing bodily prosperity. Good health and material viability are automatic entitlements of the Christian who is spiritually healthy. In this interpretation, there is an undue emphasis on the syntax, which appears in the English version of 3 John 2. Prosperity gospel believes that the phrase: “just as,” means “as a result of,” or “because of,” or “as an inevitable outcome.” Putting this in a plain language, this can mean that God wants believers to be as prosperous in bodily and material things as a result of their robustness in spiritual matters. It may mean that the moment that someone becomes a Christian, he is automatically entitled to good health. However, this interpretation espoused by rhematisers may meet challenges if John the author of the letter of 3 John already knew that Gaius, his friend to whom he wrote the letter, was already flourishing spiritually, and was just wishing that the outward circumstances of his friend might match his spiritual health (Ryken, 2005). A mere wish can be granted or rejected.

If it was a mere wish, it presupposes Gaius, to whom the epistle was addressed, was highly likely in good health and that John was wishing him more good health as he triumphed in his spiritual soundness. This can imply that soul prosperity is

the greatest blessing even though grace and good health are rich acquaintances. This may mean that a rich soul is the centrality of the verse and not rich body. However, that as the souls prospers, it can be lodged in a healthy body so that the Christian can advance the kingdom of God. It may then be necessary to wish and pray for those who have flourishing soul to have healthy bodies, so that their grace may shine where there is still more room to get engaged with God's activities. To this end, it may not be out of place for Christians to pray for themselves and others for a flourishing body. Though they may pray in faith, they do not assume that God is under any obligation to send everything for which they pray.

Also, the conventional epistolary salutation of the time of John was that in which the sender wishes or prays for the well-being of the recipients, and interpreting this wish or prayer as expressed in 3 John 2 as a promise of bodily or material prosperity is not in agreement with what was known about salutation in letter writing in the New Testament era, or with the general language of New Testament theology that acknowledges suffering as a mark of true spirituality (Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:29; 1 Pet. 4:1).

9.4. Declaring divine words

As intimated earlier, the sense at which rhema is used by prosperity gospel adherents is two-dimensional, the act of scriptural quotation and the act of personal-positive declaration (declaration of divine words) to solve human challenges. The former has been extensively addressed; the analysis will now turn to the latter. Declaration of divine words depicts a religious act where the devotee refrains from saying words that are negative about his condition. This patronage is borne out of assumption that negative words uttered have the potency of translating into reality in material setting. In matters of material

prosperity, one is encouraged not to be too obsequious with words. Every little word said must be directed at saying good things about one's condition. This advocacy presupposes that there is a vital link between spoken words and the material world. This is because prosperity gospel theology speculates that positive words spoken by the individual can change his condition from bad to good. Thus, it is on this predicate, the believer is enjoined to constantly say good words that will mysteriously take away misfortune.

Declaring divine words is a rhematisation device used by prosperity proponents to confront impregnable social-economic difficulties. This act of positive declaration is immensely popular among prosperity gospel promoters. Drawing from this notion, the sick must say words pertaining to good health, the traveller must say words pertaining to safety, the barren must say words pertaining to childbirth. Insight from Mr A's interview response can help here:

As a Christian, I don't have to say bad things about my life. I must declare God's goodness upon my life. I may be going through challenges, but with my mouth, I don't have to accept them. What you accept becomes part of you. I must reject every evil that is troubling me. I must confess good things about my life. I must speak forth God's blessing (Mr A, personal interview, September 10, 2019).

These positive declarations dramatically enhance the confidence and hope of adherents amid an over-whelming allotment of human misery. This popularised tool does not take into cognizance basic realities, but assumes by mere positive confession, human challenges such as road accidents, sickness, poverty, unemployment will disappear. This presupposition espouses a denial of realities or declaring challenges as defeated or non-existent. Mrs B, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God observes:

I know there are many challenges we face in our society today, as a child of God I don't see challenges, I see grace. What you confess with your mouth becomes a reality. I can't say I have problems. The prosperity teaching has taught me to confess positive things into my life (Mrs B, personal interview, September 2, 2019).

This methodological approach to solving social-economic hardship seems to offer a momentary relief to adherents emotionally and psychologically without uprooting the basic problem.

Meanwhile, there are two basic keys to the doctrine of personal-positive declaration of divine words – say it and live it. Mr C, a member of Winners Chapel opines:

As we say it, we live it. When you confess you are rich, you must demonstrate it in the way you live. When you declare that you are healed, why not claim your healing by faith? And why not also declare good things about your today and tomorrow? (Mr C, personal interview, September 3, 2019).

The first step in becoming successful in all ramifications is to say it. Again, to say it involves two dimensions – the immediate and the futuristic. The immediate deals with the now or what is presently confronted. What is presently confronted falls within the sphere of immediate challenges faced by the believer. Myriads of present material challenges such as sickness and disease, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and road accident fall within this classification. The immediate deals with how to overcome current social-economic crisis; it has to do with how to be rich, how to be healthy, how to be secure, how to be employed and how to be successful in every area of one's material adventures. It is more to do with the confrontation of existential

threats to survival. On the other hand, the second dimension, the futuristic, entails how to take several steps ahead, rhematising away any foreseeable bad fortune that looms in the future. The futuristic dimension confronts future obstacles before they arise. Behind this strategy, is the notion that the future shines brightest when positive things are declared into it. The popular slogan among promoters of this ideology in all the churches visited by the researcher is, “a closed mouth is a closed destiny.” Consequently, this futuristic dimension calls upon the Christian to conquer his future by opening his mouth to declare beautiful things into it. Instead of confronting present issues like the immediate dimension, the Christian is advised to declare the future obstacles-free so that any danger that looms in the future will be annihilated. Popular phrases used are: “this year I shall not die,” “this new month, sickness is not my portion,” unemployment will not come near me,” “I must make it in this business,” “I shall not fail” (Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, personal observation, September 21, 2019). This prescription provides that words declared travel steps ahead and smoothens one’s adventures all the way to the end. As a result, Christians are encouraged not to be bothered about futuristic adversities of life. This dimension of rhematisation is believed to rid Christians of the powers that are responsible for human miseries.

As established ab initio, there are two parts to the doctrine of positive declaration – say it and live it. The rhematisation of “say it” has been discussed, the next assignment is to discuss that of “live it.” From a prosperity gospel perspective, to live it involves the process of living one’s dream life. To overcome earthly problems, Christians are motivated to put on false image to outwardly reject one’s realities. This notion of living it, comes from the belief that the image one puts on has the potency to influence one’s future. This injunction requires the poor to dress like the rich gorgeously and adoringly, the sick should by faith

walk like the healthy, the failed should not talk about defeat in that one's image is the reality of what one becomes. What this means is that the individual translates from positive thinking to positive acting where behaviour must reflect one's expectant reality. The individual Christian's behaviour is paramount in determining victory during time of unprecedented hardship. Positive behaviour begets positive things and negative attitude begets negative things. Sometimes it is called "The law of attraction" as suggested by Hicks & Hicks (2006). The law of attraction suggests that behaviour and attitude can influence the world of matter. In this proviso, it is perceived that when Christians have positive attitude and behave like the rich, they attract automatic riches into their lives.

Therefore, to say it and live it, is synonymous with pronouncing and acting. Like the Genesis narrative where God created the earth and its fullness by spoken words and action (Genesis 1:1-15), prosperity theology stipulates these two-dimensional positive declaration strategies for the accomplishment of life's desires and goals. The inspired words of the Christians become divine decree or pronouncement capable of thwarting social-economic failure and creating prosperity. Correspondingly, it is believed that Christians must act as conquerors to demonstrate their faith in the sacred declarations. In this specification, one's words, attitude and behaviour are intertwined and very vital in navigating over daily challenges. Thus, to overcome poverty, sickness, unemployment, insecurity, unemployment, prosperity proponents opine that Christians must declare positive words and act in positive manner.

9.5 Implications and critical evaluation

If visualisation can have impacts on the outcome of events, then there is need to appraise the power in positive thinking and confession. Researchers (Scheier, & Carver, 1993 & Naseem & Khalid, 2010) have found good amount of evidence

supporting the many merits of positive thinking. Declaring positive words in one's bad conditions creates sense of optimism. A positive mind may help to approach bad conditions more positively. The subscriber to the theology of rhematisation may be focused on the best and not the worst. This state of mind creates positive outlook and enables the believer to navigate over challenging life's situation. Thus, according to Ramesh, Sathian, Sinu, & Kiranmai (2013), positive thinking tends to reduce the rate of stress, anxiety, depression, and vulnerability to cardiovascular health challenges. The connotation is that when one has a positive approach to life, there is the possibility of a healthier lifestyle.

When one has an optimistic attitude towards life, Sathian, Sinu, & Kiranmai (2013) believe that one's overall mood will improve. One will possess a mind saturated with peace from the inner world. It is assumed that positive thinking and confession provoke happiness and smiles, however this assertion is bereft of how long does such happiness last. If positive thinking gives just momentary happiness, it suggests the root cause of the conditions that create the unhappiness in the first place is not addressed. If the circumstances that create bad conditions are still persistent, then positive confession only creates an elusive hope that tends to deny or ignore realities. The implication of such false hope when one later realises that despite denying reality his circumstances has not changed is that one may find himself in a depressive mood. And this invariably might have serious health effects.

Thus, positive confession may have some merits, but it should be practised within the acceptability of practical conditions. One's confessional statements should be viewed as mere words and not some divine embodiments capable of changing the material world in one's favour. To change bad conditions, one should be made to understand the impacts of choices that should be made on a

daily basis. Bad choices and actions amid a very robust positive confession may still lead to human problems.

Rhematisation being the act of positive confession and reliance on divine agency can result in utopian confidence, which in turn can lower the believer's potency. As attitude can control one's life, an attitude that presents a simplistic life is one that will be greeted with failure. However, if one's thought is positive, and forms an action that helps in becoming more creative, productive, and effective, it can lead to a more successful life. Thus, rhematisation when applied with understanding that practical issues need practical solution, will enable the adherent to look at issues of life in a more positive way to form better strategy or plans in dealing with them. Otherwise, any rhematic spirituality that does not accommodate practical solutions is just a coping tool while the bad condition lasts.

9.6. Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated how prosperity gospel progenitors appropriate the mechanism of rhematisation in solving mitigating circumstances. This rhematisation strategy is shown to be two-dimensional – scriptural quotation and the declaration of divine words. Thus, the centralised perception about rhematisation is that it is a determiner of the believer's success. The more the believer engages in rhematisation, the more successful he can become in life.

CHAPTER TEN: PNEUMATOLOGICAL REGENERATION

10.1. Introduction

The analysis here focuses on how prosperity gospel advocates appropriate pneumatic regeneration as a strategy for overcoming material crisis. Pneumatic regeneration is the extravagant claim to a divine union with God through the instrumentality of new birth, orchestrated by the pneuma – πνεῦμα, spiritus. The process involved in this complicated belief and how it is applied in solving one's problems is the centrality of this chapter.

10.2. Conceptual background

In the New Testament, several different words are used to depict the doctrine of regeneration. Some of the Greek vocabularies include: “anagennao,” a verb meaning to be “born again” (1Peter 1:3 & 23); “palingenesia” (Romanised version), which is a combination of two words – “palin” (from) and “genesis” (birth/origin). Palingenesia means “new beginning,” “new birth,” or “new order” (Titus 3:5). “Apokueo” is also used to indicate the new birth (James 1:18). “Gennao” also makes reference to the spiritual birth (John 1:3). The most popular passage for the concept of being born again is John 3:3-8, where the word for “again” (anothen) means “from above” (John 3:31).

Regeneration is sometimes understood as one of the necessary steps in the “ordo salutis” (order of salvation) and the “historia salutis” (history of salvation). It is perceived as the work of God in the life of Christians – it aims at how God brings believers to new birth from old state of sin, decay, death, and separation from Him. The old state is based on perishable things and the new birth is based on imperishable seed (Church Fathers, 2015). Theologically, there

are varied interpretations of the doctrine of regeneration. Some of these interpretations are worth exploring.

A heretical but very influential and popular document in the Early Church, known as “Shepherd of Hermas” (Hermas, 2012), will be the starting point in discussing the origin of the concept of regeneration. Hermas called the lackadaisical Church to repent. The document suggested that meritorious human works, martyrdom, and water baptism were indisputably needed for the salvation of human soul. Saint Augustine, whose teaching on regeneration has indisputable impacts on the debate, was the first among the Church Fathers to deal with other doctrines about from Trinitarian disputes (Augustine, ca. 400CE/2001). Augustine originated the idea of “baptismal regeneration,” which was influenced by “Shepherd of Hermas.” Augustine viewed regeneration as something that began at baptism. He argued that during baptism, the elect received an outward sign (the water wherein the person was baptised) and the spiritual reality (regeneration, new birth, and union with Christ). He advocated that regeneration was an instantaneous experience that began with water baptism. Augustine disagreed with “Shepherd of Hermans” that regeneration was the work of man. He believed that it was the unmerited gift of God's grace that brought regeneration, faith, and repentance. On the other hand, like the “Shepherd of Hermas,” the “Church Fathers,” a document that details the pre-Nicene apologies of the Church fathers, shows that Justin Martyr and Irenaeus also saw link between baptism and regeneration and upheld the indispensability of meritorious work in obtaining salvation (Church Fathers, 2015 & Anderson, 2000).

In Roman Catholicism, Aquinas (2006) taught that baptism opened the gate of salvation to the baptised. Aquinas wrote of the “baptism of desire,” where he

suggested that intending candidates who for one reason or the other could not get water or get to water for baptism, could obtain regeneration and salvation without being baptised, provided that they could have honest desire for the sacrament of baptism. While Augustine contended that regeneration was an instantaneous experience occurring at baptism, and justification was a gradual experience, the Council of Trent (1545-63) recognised regeneration as something that only began at baptism. The Council argued that regeneration and justification are product of God's grace, which were only accessed through the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist (Weed, 2018). This position was later amended to mean, the preconditions for salvation were faith and baptism during the Vatican Council of 1962. The Council adopted Aquinas' "baptism of desire" by which all people could be saved, giving access for the inclusion of both the educated and uneducated, the old and young of all races and colour, who expressed implicit faith in the sacrament of baptism on account of their honest desire into the salvation package (Anderson, 2000 & Aquinas 2006). Thus, Roman Catholic theology depicts regeneration as that which takes place at baptism. Baptism and regeneration are conceived as inseparable experience that initiates the cleansing of original sin and the infusion of renewing grace and relationship with Jesus Christ. This view adopts baptism as the starting point of regeneration. (Augustine, ca. 400CE/2001 & Aquinas, 2006).

Within protestant theology, there are divergent notions of regeneration. Lutheran theology agrees with the Roman Catholic Church that regeneration and water baptism are intertwined (Roger, 2016). In Reformed theology, John Calvin viewed regeneration as the entire process of spiritual rebirth – repentance, faith, justification, and sanctification (Calvin, 1953). Calvin maintained that regeneration did not take place in one moment, day or year, and that it was attained through continued and sometimes slow, quick, or life-

long graduation. Calvinism believes regeneration precedes faith, and the individual must be regenerated before believing and that this process is accomplished by God alone. Reformed theology teaches that, through the concept of “total depravity” the dead sinner cannot believe until regenerated and given new nature (Rogers, 2016). Armenianism believes that God's grace is resistible. Humanity is born with free will, and as such, people either accept God's salvation in faith, or reject it to their own damnation. What differentiates people is not grace, but free will to respond to grace with faith. Thus, the Armenian theological doctrine of regeneration is anchored on the notion that, the first step to regeneration experience has been taken by God in the form of “prevenient grace” which is either rejected or accepted. The Christian who makes decision under prevenient grace to accept the salvation gospel is regenerated spiritually (Dodds, 2011). This view does not support the Calvinist view which sees regeneration as God's decree. The Armenian understanding of regeneration believes that the individual must repent, and have faith in Jesus Christ, as preconditions to be regenerated.

The Anglican Church also believes in the intertwining nature of water baptism and regeneration (baptismal regeneration). The Church of England teaches that all children are made inheritors of God's kingdom during baptism. Everyone who receives baptism is believed to have been instantaneously grafted into the body of Christ. (Spurgeon, 2014). The Anglican Church of Nigeria, for instance, teaches that water baptism is an initiatory rite, wherein the believer is initiated into Christ's body, the Church. Baptism is a sign of regeneration by which the sins of the baptised are forgiven. Adopted as child of God, the baptised becomes a member of the body of Christ, and inheritor of God's kingdom (Church of Nigeria, 2007). The act of baptism is done in obedience with the instruction of Jesus Christ to propagate the gospel to all nations, baptising and teaching them

and that one must be born of water and the Holy Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Water baptism recognises two parts, the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace. The water where an individual is baptised is regarded as the outward visible sign, while the inward spiritual grace is a new life in the Holy Spirit. The outward visible sign and the inward spiritual grace are believed to have been experienced simultaneously by the believer during baptism. What this demonstrates is, as one is baptised with water, one is regenerated at the same time (Church of Nigeria, 2007 & Cross, 2017).

10.3. Divine initiation

The doctrine of pneumatic regeneration as espoused by prosperity gospel do not support water baptism as the only means to achieving regeneration. Promoters of prosperity gospel believe in a regeneration experience that is not limited to water baptism. They suggest that regeneration experience can occur at any time in any place. They maintain that it is an instantaneous and one-off encounter in the life of the Christian. Meanwhile, this may have similarity with the doctrine of “eternal security” (once saved, forever saved), or the doctrine of “perseverance of the saints” that is popular among the Calvinists, in that it is focused on one-off experience (Calvin 1953 & Stanley, 1990). While these doctrines are focused on the salvation of soul, prosperity gospel pneumatic regeneration is aimed at the prosperity of the human body. The concept of pneumatic regeneration is emphasised as a weapon against all social-economic failures by exponents of prosperity gospel. Regeneration that is defined as being “born again” and as a symbolism of a new birth in Christ, is propagated as the release of the divine life of God into the life of the worshipper through the *pneuma* (πνεῦμα). The essence of regeneration is all about the Christian becoming a child of God, and God becoming the father (John 3:3). This

prosperity gospel doctrine recognises the regeneration experience as separate from water baptism.

The pneumatic regeneration is marketed as a divine initiation that establishes God's divine nature in the followers of Christ. Mr A, One of the interviewees from one of the branches of the Christ Embassy church intimates:

Well, to be a prosperous Christian, one should put on the nature of God, that is born again. A born-again Christian is conquering Christian. Once you are renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are lifted into a new operational dimension. You are not born again to be sick or to be poor. You are born again to live a successful life. what I am saying is that the moment I am born again, I am renewed, possessed the nature of God, and seated with God in the realm of glory, where I can live a life of success (Mr A, personal interview, September 10, 2019).

According to prosperity gospel perspective, pneumatic regeneration necessitates a spiritual transfer of God's divine enablement to the individual in the spiritual realm. This is not carrying a physical new body, but connecting one's body to Jesus, the source of all abundant blessings. Once the spiritual transformation takes place, the Christian is presumed to have been enabled to walk in affluence, majesty, and authority on earth. Prosperity gospel teaching of pneumatic regeneration is presented as an all-purpose weapon against poverty, sickness, failure, road accidents and unemployment. This association, demonstrates that a regenerated life, steps out of Satan's fold of darkness into God's marvellous fold of triumph, where one is no longer subjected to unfavourable conditions.

The popularity of the doctrine of pneumatic regeneration among prosperity gospel teachers, stems from the perception that anyone, who is regenerated, identifies his place in God, and operates like God by possessing God's nature.

The sense at which divine nature is used here is not about having all the attributes that make God who He is (incommunicable attributes of God), but of being born of the spirit of God and the virtue of being in Christ. The Christian becomes partaker of the divine nature of God with new birth experience. The spirit of the believer is quickened and made alive with the presence of the spirit of God, which puts the believer in vital life-giving union with God. Like the tree and the branches, which have the same life; just as the sap in a tree trunk flows to the branches, so it is believed by adherents of pneumatic renewal that the divine nature of God flows to the believer through the new birth experience. This simile depicts God as the source of life that flows in the tree, and Christians as conjoined in union with God, and as such, they draw from the life and nature of God.

10.4. Fullness of life

Another way of demonstrating the prosperity gospel pneumatic regeneration experience is that the Christian journey is presented to depict a life full of God's joy and unspeakable glory (1 Pet. 1:8), of a strong conviction of inner peace, and of the deepest assurance of an unfailing material prosperity. Mrs D (not real name), while responding to interview questions intimates:

In His presence, there is fullness of joy. God creates us to enjoy His presence. He anoints us as His children. He blesses us with all His blessings. He is too faithful to fail. I remember where God lifted me from. He is the reason I am alive and

happy. He is the reason I have a car and a home (Mrs D, personal interview, September 4, 2019).

Pneumatic renewal often differentiates what one has previously experienced from the new sphere of life one has graciously initiated. For the prosperity gospel proponents, the term "fullness" connotes the distinction in the quantity and quality of life the Christian has experienced. It expresses continuity and discontinuity regarding the old and the new – what the Christian has experienced in the past and what the Christian has become in the present. Scriptural quotation such as "... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" are appropriated to back this claim up (Eph. 3:19). Thus, the phrase: "be filled with," for pneumatic regeneration theology, is to be positioned to receive God's material blessings. This divine enablement is said to be the investment of the devotee with good things of life. This is what Malick (2008), refers to as "Positioned in Christ." Hence, the believer is positioned in Christ to escape all forms of human battles. The tangible manifestation of this privileged position is said to be in form of buying a car, building a home, having enough money in the bank, having the most expensive wears, and living in affluence.

Therefore, being filled with the fullness of life depicts both an experiential and expressional dimension. Experiential, because it testifies to a special and personal encounter witnessed by the believer. Expressional in the sense that the personal experience has resulted in physical manifestation of material success. Thus, it is believed that a Christian who experiences pneumatic renewal expresses material prosperity. The centre of the regeneration experience is the Holy Spirit. This is the personal awareness and the experience of the inner presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a pneumacentric encounter, whereby the believer is aware of the point and nature of the experience. The pneumatic

experience focuses on the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (John 2). Thus, to be filled with God's life is to trace one's root to that singular experience that Christ followers experienced on the day of Pentecost. Tracing and backing it up with the Pentecostal experience gives it legitimacy. Prosperity theology, going beyond the Pentecost experience, also sees the regenerated Christian as the anointed. By the anointed, it means imbuing the Christian with power to live beyond human reproach. Power (empowering) without doubt is a pivotal word employed to demonstrate the content of the experience. From the pulpit to the pews, prosperity preaching churches celebrates the endowment of power in the life of the believer in overcoming personal challenges.

10.5. Christians as gods and ambassadors

Mrs C, a member of the Winners Chapel observes:

We be smaller gods, we dey represent God for this earth. We don get power to be in charge. Na so e be, God don give us authority as im children, no wicked agent go fit harm us for this earth (pidgin).

We are small gods; we represent God on this earth. We have been given power to be in charge. That is how it is, God has given us authority as His children, no wicked agent can harm us on this earth (Mr C, personal interview, September 3, 2019).

This attribution of divinity to mortals is also observed by the researcher during his visit to one of the prosperity gospels preaching churches. Adherents are often encouraged to see themselves as gods. This is occasionally backed up by a portion of biblical scriptures that reads: "I said, "You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High" (Psalm 82:6 & The Redeemed Christian Church of God, personal observation, September 7, 2019). Followers of Christ are depicted

as created in God's image, and as such, are replica of an extension of His nature. This assumption regards the regenerated Christian as human with divine capabilities. The idea of Christians being smaller gods corresponds with the concept of divinity, not in the sense that Christians shares in eternal, or incommunicable attributes of God, such as omnipotence, omnipresence, eternity, but in the sense that they share in what the divinity of God carries, which are shareable – peace, good health, wisdom, longevity, joy (communicable attributes of God). Prosperity theology believes that the divinity status places the believer in the very class of a god.

Prosperity gospel preachers believe that assuming the status of a god makes all challenges of life to bow down to the Christian. Operating like God entails the ability to exercise absolute control over the material world and all dimensions of life. It is the act of thinking, acting, talking, and living in the realm of dominion. At the realm of dominion, the Christian is poised to have whatever he wants. This assertion suggests that the realm of dominion affords the adherent of prosperity gospel the right and privileges for overcoming material hardship. Attributing divine nature to man, prosperity gospel teaches that a human being can handle every battle of life. Being a smaller god equals material prosperity. Regeneration is said to be useless without material provision. Christians are said not to have been regenerated to beg for money, but to be rich in all areas of life.

The progenitors of human divinity presume that Christians must come to the awareness that the very essence of divinity is operational in them. Possessing divine nature, the adherent is said to have been situated within the life of absolute victory and glory. God's material blessing is believed to have been made available to the believer in all human endeavours. This notion implies that as smaller gods, Christians have greater ability to accomplish great task, and

navigate over harsh conditions to achieve unimaginable prosperity. Positive confession, obtained from “Rhapsody of Realities,” a monthly devotional booklet of Christ Embassy church, supports this narrative:

Dear father, I thank you for the impacts of your divine life in my spirit, soul, and body. This divine life surges through my being, destroying and repelling sickness, disease, infirmity, death, poverty, and everything that is inconsistent with the provisions of the Gospel of Christ. I am invincible, indestructible, and impregnable, in Jesus’ name. Amen (Oyakhilome, 2020).

Thus, the possession of divine life is perceived as a licence to a life void of human calamities, whether natural or unnatural. Through the mechanism of pneumatic regeneration, the devotee is made a god, an indestructible entity. It is proposed that no earthly misery such as infirmity, death, disease, poverty, kidnapping, theft, or road accident can come near the Christian. Like a divinity, the Christian possesses some mystical powers to determine events in his life. The essence of arrogating divine nature to oneself is to be able to influence material events. This religious expression is marketed as a weapon that helps the believer to disallow terrible things from happening to him. As divinity does not get sick, and as gods are not prone to human suffering, the illusion is that the regenerated Christian is divinely immune to all social-economic hardships.

The prosperity gospel pneumatic regeneration is also likened to an ambassadorial entitlement. Promoters present the regenerated individual as an ambassador of Christ. The notion of an ambassador connotes a Christ representative. As an ambassador, the Christian is obliged to stand in for Christ on earth. Like the political ambassador, who enjoys political diplomatic immunity of his country, Christ ambassador is said to enjoy the immunity of heaven and cannot be treated carelessly. Adherents of this ideology, believe

that those who are ambassador of Christ are not expected to have any form of deformity or sickness. Christ ambassadors are said to have automatic entitlement to the protection of the kingdom of heaven they are representing. Under heavenly immunity, authority and provision, the ambassador is anticipated to have a prosperous life – enjoying longevity, good health, good houses, good cars, and abundant money.

As the diplomatic comfort an ambassador enjoys is directly proportional to the riches of the nation he represents; and as the wealth of his country follows him as he embarks on his ambassadorial duty, adherents of prosperity gospel phenomenon, advocate that heaven is a rich kingdom, and that all Christian ambassadors, likewise, have access to heaven's riches, revealed in form of tangible blessings. As there is no sickness or poverty in heaven, Christians as ambassadors are not expected to be sick or poor. This entitlement mentality creates an illusion that once an individual is regenerated, suffering, and the difficulties of life are a thing of the past. Conversely, the absence of a regenerated life is presumed to be the lack of material wellbeing and a subjugation to all buffetings and intimidation of the devil and his agents. It implies that Christians who are not regenerated will live a mediocre life dominated by fear, plagued by diseases, and overwhelmed by poverty. Thus, a non-regenerated Christian is said to lose control of his glorious destiny and operates in the realm of weakness and lives a life of poverty, failure, crisis, sickness, and uncertainties.

10.6. Implications and critical evaluation

Throughout biblical history, God has brought divinity to life (2 Timothy 1:10), and He may want such life to be manifested by Christians at some points. The experience of Paul, while in Isle of Malta, testifies to this. Paul was bitten by a

venomous viper but was not hurt. The onlookers thought he would drop dead. They were perplexed as Paul did not swell and die as a result of the venom. They perceived Paul as a god (Acts 28:6). However, this divinity depiction is too probabilistic and fallible to make as a rule for all Christians to follow. Scripture also has records of the suffering of many biblical figures, who walked and worked with God, and were thought to be super humans. Their identification with God did not exonerate them from the fallibility of mortals. Paul faced suffering, persecution, distress, and trials, as he propagated the gospel. Stephen was stoned to death. Peter and John were arrested and imprisoned. John, the apostle, was incarcerated in the Isle of Patmos (Act 4: 1-4, 7-12, 7:54-60 & Revelation 1:1-10).

Therefore, it is expedient to celebrate the prosperity gospel pneumatic renewal, as it focuses on how to overcome the challenges, faced by the Christian, in the here and now. Notwithstanding, much is left to be done in directing and reminding the Christian pilgrim of his eternal home. A regeneration experience should not only be a reality that celebrates things that are temporal but should be a spirituality that celebrate things that are eternal. Theology, when solely directed towards perishable material prosperity, the essence of Christ salvific mission on earth is defeated. While overcoming contextual difficulties is important, the Christian should not lose sight of the hereafter. It must be echoed that members of the church militant will continue to experience human upheavals as pilgrims, so long as they live in this imperfect human earth. This assertion is attested to by Saint Augustine (2003), in his classic, "The City of God," and John Buyan (2015), in his book, "The pilgrim's Progress." Both Augustine and Buyan argue that the Christian journey to the celestial city is that of falling and rising and that of evil and good. Therefore, the regeneration experience should not be seen as an escape from realities, but an introduction

to the reality of good and evil. It must be echoed that the church militant is vulnerable to the imperfections of humanity. To this end, contextual challenges are inevitable, irrespective of arrogation of super humanism to oneself.

10.7. Conclusion

The theology of pneumatic regeneration is a hypothesis anchored on overcoming contextual crisis. It is a religious reality that proposes a one-off spiritual encounter that puts the believer in a position of dominion. Seated in authority, the worshipper is depicted as a god and an ambassador. As a regenerated person, and having attained divinity, he operates like an ambassador, protected with heavenly immunity, and given access to all material success.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: REDEMPTIVE SOTERIOLOGY

11.1. Introduction

To explore the concept of redemptive soteriology, the explorer must start from the explanation as to the meaning of the phrases, “Jesus saves” and “Jesus redeems.” Soteriology comes from “sōtēria” (σωτηρία, meaning salvation), from “sōtēr” (σωτήρ, meaning preserver, saviour), and from logos (λόγος, meaning study). Thus, redemptive soteriology is the systematic evaluation of the Christological import of redemption and salvation on the Christian voyage. It connotes a belief or a doctrine regarding redemption and salvation (Vine, Unger, & White, 1985). Therefore, the task in this chapter is to examine how redemptive soteriology is utilised, in combating terrestrial hardship, by the admirers of prosperity messages

11.2. Redemption and Salvation

In the Old Testament, salvation is a deliverance from obstacles of life, most basically, collective, and individual enemies (Hab. 1:2 & 2Chr. 20:9). Salvation in Jewish thought is best understood in three key Hebrew words. The first word is “yēsha,” etymologically, it depicts salvation and deliverance. “Yēsha” has its roots in “yāsha,” which is rendered: “be saved,” “be delivered,” “give victory,” “help,” or “rescue” (Vine, Unger & White, 1985). The second Hebrew word is “gō`ēl.” It principally draws attention to Israelite legal system as it has to do with family law. It reiterates the legal obligation concerning the redemption of a family member or a property that is in danger (Lev. 25:25-27 & 29-34). Also, it suggests that an Israelite who is sold into slavery because of economic hardship, has the right of redemption, but if unable to be redeemed, has the right to be free unconditionally at the next Jubilee (Lev.25:50). Furthermore, the meaning

of the word “gō’ēl” has also been interpreted in the context of a relative, who rescues his close relative from distress or danger (Olyan, 2017). The third is the Hebrew word, “gâ’al” גאל. The Hebrew noun, “gō’ēl” גאל, can be explicitly understood in the context of the Hebrew verb, “gâ’al,” which is translated, “to redeem,” “to deliver,” “to avenge,” or “to act as kinsman.” A redeemer (gō’ēl) is thus, that person who redeems, avenges, or delivers (ga'al) (Olyan, 2017). In ancient Israelite culture, a redeemer was any family member who rescued a slave to freedom. The import conveyed here, draws attention to what a good person can do to rescue others from sufferings, pains, and difficulties that they are contending with. Thus, a “gō’ēl” is someone, who is able, to ransom, or redeem, or avenge for a relative, who is in slavery. There is, therefore, a link between the concepts of salvation (yēsha’) and redemption (gō’ēl, gâ’al). In the Old Testament, Yahweh is portrayed as a divine gō’ēl, who redeems (gâ’al) those who are in danger (Ruth 4:1-10).

In the New Testament, different Greek words: “ἀπολύτρωσις – apolytrōsis,” “ἐξαργυρώνω – exargyrōno,” are translated as the verb, “to redeem,” or as the noun, “redemption,” meaning, “to go to market,” “to buy,” “to loosen,” or “to rescue” (Vine, Unger, & White, 1985). Summarily, redemption demonstrates rescue from the state of deprivation into a state of salvation (freedom). Meanwhile, the doctrine of salvation does not operate in isolation. It enjoys companionship with doctrines of Christology (person of Jesus), eschatology (last things), atonement (sacrifice) and redemption (rescue, freedom). Salvation is impossible without the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Rae, 2016). There is a link between sacrifice and the forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness of sin is obtained when blood is shed to atone for sin. This atoning sacrifice gives salvation (deliverance), as exemplified, in the Israelite deliverance from Egypt. The beginning of the Israelite salvation was marked by the Passover lamb, where blood was smeared

on the door post to spare the Hebrews from the angel of death (Exodus 12:1–51). The New Testament view is that there is a connection between salvation and death of Jesus on the Cross, where Jesus became the sacrificial lamb, who shed His blood, to bring salvation to humanity (John 1:29, 36; 19:33, 36; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

The notion of salvation expresses the need for redeeming (rescuing) a human race in its shattered state of existence from consequences of sin and eternal damnation to an ideal state of peace, freedom, and eternity (Keathley, 2010). The doctrine of salvation (sozo- to save) deals with the impacts the person of Jesus Christ (Christology) makes on human history in terms of how humanity was rescued from its sinful state to that of cordial union with God. Christian salvation also entails eschatology (events of the last days). This details the fate of humanity and the cosmos. The second advent of Jesus Christ probably marks the consummation of the age, the end to all evils, the cosmic order, and the heaven. What is believed is that the resurrection of the dead, the last judgement will culminate into eternal beatitudes for the elect, and eternal doom for the lost (Smith, 2019).

The doctrine concerning redemption and salvation has been in existence right from the time of gnostics in early Christian development. One of the early Church fathers, Irenaeus initiated the debate through his apologetics against gnosticism (Irenaeus, & Deane, 1874). The gnostics had argued that humans by nature were spark of the divine trapped in the world of matter from which they needed to be freed. Human suffering was conceived as a consequence of a pre-profane, or pre-cosmic accident (Hybris), which quarantined the unlucky spirit in an alien world. The prerequisite for human liberation from such state of existence, was a “gnosis” (a special knowledge), needed for salvation. The

gnostics pictured humanity as aliens isolated and imprisoned in an alien world created by a wicked God from whose chains and hostility humanity needed escape to the hands of a loving God (Springer, 2017). Thus, the gnostics acknowledged the existence of two Gods in explaining the problem of theodicy. Behind this dualistic perception of deism and cosmology, lies the myth that Jesus Christ came from the good and loving father to free humanity from the grip of the hostile and angry creator. It was conceived that the Redeemer Jesus Christ, being a spiritual entity, could not have incarnated in flesh and blood, but came primarily to reveal the secret of the cosmos, and to free humanity from evil, and to unite the world with the, "All" (Young, 1977).

However, in his refutation of gnostic claim, Irenaeus apologetically proclaimed that humanity was born incapacitated in a corrupted world and that what was required was not freedom from an alien environment, but redemption from captivity of the power of evil (Irenaeus & Deane, 1874). Irenaeus and Dean maintained that it was not the world that was alienated, but the rebellion of its creatures, exemplified by Lucifer's rebellion in heaven, and that of Adam and Eve, who misused their free will. This background has links with the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, which asserts that humanity is corrupted due to an original sin which has affected every part of humanity, making it difficult for people to know and obey God (Petraakis, 2019). The perception is that humanity has been deprived, corrupted, and doomed by the virtue of the inheritance of the Adamic nature. Once the entire human race through the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden sinned and swayed away from God, that singular offence brought condemnation upon humankind (Roman 5:12). It is assumed, in order for God to buy humanity back (rescue from the damnable consequences of sin), God gave His only begotten son, Jesus Christ to die on the cross to atone for humanity's rebellion. Jesus Christ became the redeemer who redeemed,

ransomed, and bought the lost world back to God. The ransomed price by which humanity was rescued is the blood of Jesus Christ that was shared; His life that was laid down, in substitution for humanity – atonement (1Cor. 6: 20). Thus, redemption is a metaphor for that which is accomplished through atonement – the forgiving of sin through the agony, suffering, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thus, redemptive soteriology connects itself with the relationship between redemption and salvation. Redemption is a concept closely intertwined with the doctrine of salvation. Both salvation (sozo- to save) and redemption (gâ'al - to redeem), seek to emphasise the deliverance of humanity from its corrupted state to an ideal one. Though, technically, salvation is the entire process involved in the rescue mission, while redemption is the indispensable step or action taken by Jesus to exchange His life on the cross to bring salvation to humanity. Both redemption and salvation have one mission, the freedom of humanity (Rae, 2016 & Rzepecki, 2018). It is in this sense, that both redemption and salvation are used interchangeably. It is in this sense that redemptive soteriology finds its bearing within prosperity theology. Emphasis on this soteriological redemption is unavoidable, as it is the lens with which to understand the analysis. The task is to evaluate how the salvation wrought by the redemptive act of Jesus Christ is appropriated to fight social-economic failures.

11.3. Redeemed to Succeed.

There are three stages in the widespread application of the doctrine of redemption. The first stage is applied in the past tense – Christians are depicted as already saved from the penalty of sin; human redemption is understood as wholly past, fulfilled, and finished for those who believe in the soteriological efficacy of the work of redemption. In this persuasion, believers see themselves

as permanently delivered once and for all from the shackles and effects of sin, and from spiritual damnation (John 5:24, Luke 7:50, 2 Corinthians 2: 15 & Roman 8:1). The second stage presents redemption in the present tense. This has to do with one's present victory over power of sin and its auxiliary impacts, and over the carnal nature, and how to live a victorious life amid human struggles. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit (regeneration) is a vehicle that drives the activeness of this stage of redemption. Thus, the redeemed Christian is said to live a victorious life through the power of the Holy Spirit. This point has been dealt with extensively while dealing with doctrine of pneumatic regeneration (Rom 6:1, Phil 1: 19, Gal 2: 19-20). The third stage of redemption's applicability is in the future tense. This refers to future deliverance all Christians will receive during the "Parousia," Jesus' second advent. This espouses the notion that though believers are saved once and for all, from the grips of the penalties of rebellion, while now being redeemed from sin's grip, believers are not yet redeemed into complete conformity to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:5 and 1 John 3:2). So, Christians are looking towards complete redemption during the "parousia." This idea of eternity concentrates on the human soul, rather than the perishable material things.

Prosperity gospel devotees, appropriate redemption within the second stage. Not within the understanding of redemption as a tool to overcome present sin and live a life of righteousness, but that redemption should be applied within the horizon of contemporary world marked by present poverty. Prosperity preachers opine that the saving power of redemption is not something for the past, or for the "Parousia," but for the Here and Now, and should take place in any human condition that is characterised by social-economic challenges, and in any society whose future is engulfed with muted possibilities. In this light, prosperity gossellers contend that Christianity has been concentrated on the

soul of man for too long. They believe that such Christian message that excludes the Here and Now has failed to address the social- economic plight of man. What is clear from prosperity gospel advocacy is that redemption is not entirely about deliverance from the Adamic sin or atonement for the inability of the believer to meet the standard of God as advocated by the church, but it is more about everyday realities of life. It is more about how the believer could succeed in business, how to overcome insecurity, how to be healed of any ailment, how to bear children, how to live a long life, how to have enough money to solve basic issues of life, and how to be happy in life. To this end, Mrs B (not real name), a member of one of the branches of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, affirms that:

I cannot be earthly useless because I am Christian. I cannot be a redeemed Christian and still beg for food. I cannot be a member of this church and still be in the same level with the unbelievers. Tell me, what is my gain of being a Christian? Tell me the gains of Christ's death? The reason redemption is important is because the death of Jesus has given us victory over all principalities, over all sickness, over all problems. We are redeemed to succeed. Gone are the days they tell us to leave the wealth of the world to the unbelievers. In fact, Christians ought to be richer. Don't we need money to spread the gospel? Don't we need money to take care of ourselves? Of Course we do" (Mrs B, personal interview, September 2, 2019).

Prosperity gospel theology sees redemptive salvation as a liberation of the poor from oppressive power of social-economic difficulties. Liberation theology developed in Latin America within Roman Catholicism in the 1950s and the 1960s (Rowland, 1999). It emerged primarily as a moral reaction to oppression, poverty, and injustice. The principal aim was to see theology from the eyes of

the poor and the oppressed with the strategy of aiding the poor and the oppressed through engagement in political activism and civil matters. It exposed the evils embedded in social-economic structures that created social disparities and injustice, by encouraging active and meaningful involvement in changing those systems, or structures (Rowland, 1999). Conversely, unlike the liberation theology that seeks collective political and civil engagement, prosperity gospel understands its liberation ideology from a divine perspective, through the instrument of redemption. The assignment for a better life is left within the confine of a religious redemption. Having been redeemed, the adherent looks upon God as the Ultimate Provider, the Supreme Healer, and the Divine Protector. It is relevant to quote Mr A, a member of Christ Embassy in this context:

Christians should have faith in the work of our redemption. You see, some of the challenges we face today have been conquered on the cross by our Jesus. It just that many Christians do not know their right in Jesus. When Jesus shouted it is finished on the cross, what do you think He was saying? He was only telling us that the battle is over. He conquered every problem of our lives (Mr A, personal interview, September 10, 2019).

To prosperity gospel's redemptive soteriology, a Christian must identify with the work of redemption by faith in order to overcome all the struggles of life. In other words, redemption must be personalised. It is in the light of this understanding that subscribers hamper on personal salvation. One Mrs Bottle (Anonymised name), clarifies:

My salvation is personal, I am redeemed so I can have total freedom and blessings on earth before I go to heaven" (Mrs Bottle, personal communication, September 15, 2019).

Personalisation of redemption identifies the believer with Jesus' incarnation. Through the incarnation Jesus came into humanity to bring salvation to a troubled world. A world that was plagued with suffering in that a paradise was lost. Prosperity gospel proponents believe that the loss of paradise ushered in a reign of suffering, poverty, failure, and sickness. To restore the lost paradise and to usher in once again, material prosperity, the incarnation took place (God entered humanity through His son). Prosperity gospel advocates claim that the primary purpose of God, entering humanity through the incarnation, was to put an end to all forms of social-economic downturn. This salvific mission was said to have been accomplished, when Jesus exchanged His life on the cross to redeem humanity from poverty, insecurity, sickness, sudden death, and infertility. Prosperity gospel supporters presume that this prerogative of mercy toward a suffering world by a loving God, should be appropriated in combating human misery. What is being suggested by agents of prosperity gospel is that, in appropriating the excellence and the power of redemption, one must identify, believe, and confess that Jesus is the Almighty Redeemer. To reflect this belief system that is why one of the churches investigated by the researcher, adopted the name, "Redeemed Christian Church of God."



Fig 1. (Redeemed Christian church of God, personal image, September 19, 2019)

They believe that they are the redeemed ones. They celebrate God as the Almighty Redeemer in the sense that He brought heaven to earth to rescue the human race from all forms of evil, such as poverty, road accident, insecurity, and unemployment. Within this belief, it is assumed that clothing, shelter, food, and drinkable water are automatic entitlement of the redeemed Christian. Thus, redemption is believed to have brought sufficiency of all things.

Prosperity gospel adherents equates redemption to material success. There is general trend in the sermons witnessed by the researcher: “The redeemed cannot experience lack,” “You can't be a child of God and beg for food,” “The wealth of the unbeliever is yours,” “You are redeemed to rule your world,” “As a child of God, everything must turn around for your good” (Personal observation, September 12, 2019). To corroborate this, Mrs C, in her interview posits:

Redemption brings bright light into our world. It gives us authority over the devil, opening opportunity of success to all nations of the world who believe in Him. Through salvation we have access to the father's blessings (Mr C, personal interview, September 3, 2019).

To this end, redemption is said to be incomplete without all-inclusive victory over all forms of material challenges. This is predicated on the notion that God whose nature is always to do good is not interested in the adversity of His subjects, that was why He sent His only begotten son to take on the suffering of believers. Hence, Jesus is believed to have been stripped naked, so Christians will not walk naked; Jesus is believed to have been thirsty, so Christians can have water to drink; Jesus is believed to have died young, so Christians can live long; Jesus is believed to have been poor, so Christians can be abundantly rich; the blood of Jesus is believed to have been spilled, so Christians' blood will not be

spilled by road accident, or insecurity (Gal 3:13-14). Material blessings is viewed by prosperity gospel teachers as part of their redemptive heritage. To claim to have been redeemed and still live-in poverty, brings to doubt one's Christian affiliation. The redeemed are believed to have been salvaged from the menace of poverty. This ideology is supported with passages such as, "Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country" and "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things..." (Deut. 28: 3 & 3 John 2).

Within prosperity gospel redemptive soteriology, Christian salvation is focused on the redemption of humanity from diseases, sicknesses, and poverty. Mr D, a member of Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministry, gives insight into this belief:

Our Lord Jesus knows that the devil is in the world to steal and kill and cause pains to us. Christ decided to come to earth to redeem us from the hands of the enemy. I can now boldly confess that Christ redemption has redeemed me from sickness. I can say that Christ redemption is the reason I should not be poor (Mrs D, personal interview, September 4, 2019).

Jesus is believed to have taken upon Himself all of humanity's pains, ushering in the reign of sound mind, healthy relationship, prosperous society, and healthy body. There is seems to be no provision for sickness within the work of redemption – all sicknesses are presumed to have been conquered on the Cross at Calvary. Thus, to bear sickness in one's body is a declaration of faithlessness in the redemptive potency of salvation. Whatever is contrary to the purpose of God is the work of the devil that must be discarded. To activate and claim this healing heritage, one must demonstrate unflinching faith on the redemptive Soteria of his body from physical illnesses.

The blood of Jesus that is shared on the cross in Calvary, becomes what rescued humanity from insecurity. Jesus was believed to have been captured so that Christian could be secured. To be secured while driving, one must plead the blood of Jesus on the road, one's vehicle, and oneself to ward-off road disaster. This personalised spirituality is captured in these phrases supplied by members 'Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry' during church prayers: "I cover myself with the blood of Jesus," I cover the road with the blood of Jesus," my journey is secured with the blood of Jesus" (Personal observation, September 12, 2019). Rather than focus on how to have good roads network, good traffic rules, and sound vehicles, one's safety is hinged on divine protection, using the blood of Jesus. In this vein, Mrs B, one of the interviewees confesses:

Yes, redemption is the conquest of all problems. By the shedding of the blood of Jesus on the cross, we are redeemed from whatever problem you can think of, whether be it spiritual or physical. We are redeemed from sickness, poverty, premature death, barrenness, and others (Mrs B, personal interview, September 2, 2019).

Prosperity gospel promoters presume that God, the Supreme Guardian, orders the feet of believers, so they do not become victim of any road mischief, even amid an overwhelming porous security architecture, or bad road network. Adherents of prosperity gospel ideology explain that no matter how right a particular path may seem, it is not totally safe, in that no one knows the future, even amid the most sophisticated scientific apparatus. They believe that only God knows the end from the beginning, and that human life is safest in His hands. Thus, to be divinely guided is to be protected from armed-robbery, assassination, road-accident, air mischief, or maritime disaster. The argument most prosperity gospel teachers put forward is that human inventions, no

matter how good they are, can fail and that God, whose responsibility it is to protect, is there to protect His own from disaster.

11.4. Implications and critical evaluation

The reliance on divine protection by prosperity Christians elaborates the greatness of God above human affairs. It proposes a guardian angel, assigned to every redeemed Christian, whose duty it is, to protect the redeemed believer from physical calamities. The angels are spiritual beings that take peremptory action to stop evil from happening during one's journey. Every human misery is attributed to the devil; the devil is presented as the progenitor of all human sufferings. The devil is mirrored, as a fierce attacker, seeking whom to devour. God is mirrored, as a divine protector, shielding Christians, and side-tracking all of the plans of the devil. Thus, it is believed that to shield Christians from any form of accident, God makes use of the angels, whom He sends as His auxiliaries to minister to the needs of Christians. This notion of the guardian angel must have been copied from the early church that claimed to have the reality of angelic covering. For instance, Peter was acclaimed to have been set free from Roman prison, mysteriously by an angel, despite a sophisticated gate and heavily fortified soldier. Paul and Silas were acclaimed to have also been set free from a Roman incarceration when they sang to praised God in the night. On this basis, the purveyors of prosperity gospel, lay emphasis on the Importance of a divine protection and Christians' entitlement for a maximum protection of an angelic being.

As intimated already, redemptive soteriological ideology is best captured in terms of a liberation theology. Both the Latin American and the prosperity gospel models have the primary principle of a liberation theology that understands Christianity from the experience of the poor, and the oppressed.

Both emerged basically as a theological response to contextual challenges. The strategy of the Latin American liberation theology was to aid the poor and the marginalised, through political engagement in political activism, and civic responsibility, in order to expose the evils embedded in social-economic structures, responsible for social injustice. Simultaneously, it was to encourage meaningful and active involvement in bringing about needed change in those structures. On the other hand, the Nigerian liberation theology model shifts human responsibility to divinity who is expected to intervene in any suffocating human condition. It is on this basis, I suggest that the Nigerian model, is a religious rhetorical theology that only provides a momentary hope as a tool to cope in the face of a daring and a frustrating condition. If the claim of prosperity gospel about redemption, as an express ticket to material prosperity is true, then, without doubt, the millions of adherents who subscribe to the prosperity gospel, will automatically become millionaires overnight. So far, the main beneficiaries of the prosperity gospel are the promoters who are gaining from the donations of the adherents.

However, the implication of the above spirituality is a new way of thinking about God. For the victims of social-economic failure, there is a new understanding of God. They reject the traditional mind-set that focuses on eschatological things. Thus, they opt for a new way by which adherents can perceive God from the standpoint of hope, in their present anxieties. Like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who hoped for a Jesus that would save the Israelites from Roman political oppression, they hope for a loving and a caring Jesus that will liberate them from social-economic difficulties. The teaching of salvific liberation points the hearers to a hope, which society do not offer them. Therefore, the prosperity gospel seeks to saturate the minds of adherents with the dreams of a better life, amid the chaos.

11.5. Conclusion

This chapter has espoused the mechanism of redemptive soteriology as orchestrated by exponents of the gospel of prosperity in conquering human crises that they experienced within the society. The unimpeachable belief is that the redeemed in Christ have been rescued from poverty, sickness, infirmity, failure, unemployment, misery, and death, into a glorious realm of existence, through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Within this glorious realm of existence, it is proposed that the believer must enjoy human prosperity, such as peace, security, wealth, employment, business success, good health, longevity, and childbearing.

CHAPTER TWELVE: EXORCISM

12.1. Introduction

Exorcism is the casting out of demons. The assumption that demons are real, and that they can possess, molest, harass, smite, and cause mysterious occurrences to their victims is the foundation for exorcism. In prosperity gospel, where a person is said to have been possessed of demons, exorcism becomes a mechanism through which such demonic entity is evicted. Exorcism is prescribed by prosperity theology, as a powerful armoury, against misery causing demonic entities. How this spirituality plays out is the focal point of this chapter.

12.2. Conceptual framework

Exorcism is an element of many religious worldviews, and it dates to humanity's knowledge of sacred agents. Exorcism is best understood within the context of a belief system that is saturated with the reality of demons. So, the first task is to define the word, "demon." The word is derived from the Greek word, "daimon," meaning to portion out, or to tear, or to divide (Koch, 1973). In Greek cosmology, there was the reality of demonic activity. This could be identified in Greek Philosophy. The notion that immaterial entities could protect one from calamity, was extensively popular among the Greeks. As time progressed, the potency and the varied duties of spirits were clearly defined, resulting in the hierarchy and classification of demons. Simultaneously, the evil nature of demon, became more recognised, as it was observed that Empedocles and Plato, and subsequently Plutarch, all blamed demons for possession and natural catastrophes (Koch, 1973 & Coddington, 2016). Similarly, among the stoics, the idea of magic, demon, and mantic, were intertwined. The existence of the ghost was also linked with the spirit of the dead. In the middle of the second century,

Pliny, described a ghost house in Athens, where a skeleton was not properly buried, and a ghost with white image, regularly appeared at night. After the skeleton was removed and properly buried the haunting stopped. Haunting were often attributed to supernatural encounters (Koch, 1973).

In the Ancient Near East, the society was dominated with documents containing magical talisman, amulets, and incantations, aimed at protecting people from evil spirits – charms for defence against demonic attacks (Abusch, 2020). For instance, the lion-headed female god, Lamashtu, one of the most dreaded gods of the Assyrians was believed to attack babies and pregnant women (First, 2016). A charm woven like necklace, inspired by the Babylonian god, Pazuzu, was worn by women for protection. During the time of the Babylonians, there was a great number of spells-employing magical incantations and rituals, involving sacred animals, birds, plants, and objects. Even today, it is common practice in Eastern Mediterranean to see amulets made to ward off evil (Niederreiter, 2017 & DeGrado, & Richey, 2019).

In the Old Testament, the focus will be on two passages, where there is a reference to the term, “demon.” In Deuteronomy 32:17, the Hebrew word that is translated, "demons" (דַּשׁ seed), is in the plural form, having the preposition "to," and the definite article, "the," so that it reads: "to the demons" (לַשְּׂדִיִּים, lashedim (Vine, Unger, & White, 1985). There are other terms with similar meaning that can help to understand the usage of the term, “seed” (דַּשׁ). In Deuteronomy 32:16-17, there are four other similar terms or phrases that can give insight into the meaning of the word that is translated as "demons.” “Strange” or “foreign gods” – זָרִים zariym; “abhorrent things” or “abominations” – תּוֹעֵבֹת, to’eybot; “demons” – לַשְּׂדִיִּים, lashshediym; “gods they did not know” – אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ, elohiym; “new gods” or “new arrivals that your fathers did not fear” –

,חדשים chadashim. Psalm 106:36-38 also gives us a good insight into the meaning of “seed”. The terms, “Idol or graven image” - עצבים, ‘atsabim, and “gods or Idols of Canaan” – עצבי כנען, ‘atsabey kená’an, explicitly indicate “seed” is used in reference to the gods of the Canaanites (Exodus 20:4). In other cases, other Hebrew words are translated as “demons.” Where this happened, it is in the context of an attack on the worship of Baah or the Canaanite religious practices (2Chronicles 11:15). In the Septuagint, “שדים” (sedim) is translated “τοις δαίμονις” (tois daimoniois) to indicate these Canaanite false gods (Fernández Marcos, 2000). In actual sense, the Hebrew usage of the word, “seed,” does not correspond with the English word, “demon,” in meaning. However, there does exist within the Old Testament understanding, a fundamental animistic mythology and cosmology with which the Israelites interacted. The Israelites used and interacted with such ideology not because it dominated their perception, but basically to refute the validity of such cosmological orientation. In the same vein, the writers of the Old Testament did not employ the usage of such terms to accept what they represented, but to refute it. Undoubtedly, among the Israelites, there was a common belief in the existence of ghosts and the gods of the Canaanite religion. The Old Testament tradition as it is, transcends such popular orientation to a version of a Yahweh, a creator, a supreme God, who is mighty, and who controls the affairs of the universe, and who does not share His glory with any other god (Exodus 20:4 & 2Chronicles 11:15).

In non-biblical Jewish Literature, there was the reality of demonic entities as well. In ancient Jewish literature, magic was a popular means of dealing with demonic machinations (Kock, 1973). The story of Sarah, the daughter of Raguel in the apocryphal book of Tobit is a typical example. Sarah was said to have been widowed seven times on the night of her wedding by machinations of a demon,

Asmodeus. Tobias (the son of the blind Tobit) went to Media, where Sarah was living, journeying with a man who happened to be the angel, Raphael. While Tobias was seated by the bank of the Tigris River, a fish attempted to eat his foot. The Angel Raphael directed Tobias to catch the fish, extract its heart, liver, and gall, and precisely burn the heart and the liver in the presence of any victim of demonic attacks, in order to exorcise the demon out of the victim. Upon arrival at Media, the angel Raphael told Tobias that he would take Sarah as wife, but that he would have to burn the fish's heart and liver when he went in with her to thwart the malicious attacks of the demon, Asmodeus. Tobias succeeded in taking Sarah as wife after which he cured his father's blindness with the gall of the fish (Tobit 6:2-18, 7:1-18 & 8:1-21).

Similarly, in the pseudepigraphic work, "The key of Solomon the King," the angel Michael gave a powerful ring to Solomon with which he could capture, control, or imprison demons, and deliver people from demonic spells. For instance, it was said, Solomon compelled the demon, Lix Terax to join in building the temple by throwing stones up to the workers. This goes to show the popular belief about apotropaic magic in non-biblical literature (Solomon, 2000 & Jurgens, 2020).

In the New Testament, there are also the reality about demons. Jesus alone had absolute dominion over demons, but this was not an issue of magic, or sorcery, but of divine authority (Luke 4:41). The New Testament ridicules the helplessness and inability of magicians to drive out devils. The failed attempt of Simon the sorcerer to obtain apostolic authority to drive out demons, and the inability of demons to recognise the authority of the seven sons of Sceva, are testimonies to the existence of evil spirits. On several occasions, Jesus cast out devils. Though the New Testament recognises the existence and influence of

demonic activity, the focus was more on the absolute authority of Jesus over demonic entities (Mark 5:1-20; Acts 8:9-24 & 19:14-16).

12.3. Enthroning a theocratic worldview

Like the reality of demons in the worldviews mentioned earlier, the Nigerian Prosperity gospel exorcism is best understood within the people's acknowledgement of an African worldview saturated with the reality of demonic agents. Demon ideology is strongly linked with concept of animism in African belief system. Edward Tylor was the first to put forward the idea of animism or the theory of souls as a basic religious concept in 1871 (Tylor, 1871). Animism is derived from the Latin word, "anima," meaning "soul" or "life." Tylor suggested that objects in nature possessed or were possessed by soul or spirit. Thus, animism is the belief in spiritual beings or souls. By this, it means the sun, stars, rivers, lakes, mountains, trees, wind, and rocks seem to have life and personality ascribed to them. This postulation has been widely criticised as too academic, and as not applicable to the context of devotees who believe in gods, or deified men that do not have clear link to ghost or spirits (Arinze, 2005). In 1899, R.R. Marett, invented the term, "animatism," as a refinement of animism. Animatism is therefore, that belief in an impersonal spiritual power, or life-force that pervades all things (Arinze, 2001). Also, there has been rising emphasis on "psychic power" in recent years. Psychic power is the belief in the existence of mysterious forces, or powers pervading the earth (Laughlin, 2018). What must be noted is that, whether personal power as suggested by Tylor, or impersonal force as opined by Marett, there is an underlying belief in the existence of spiritual powers that determine the responses of devotees. In Africa, the spiritual power is used for war, protection, conveying justice, hatred, vengeance, and blessings. The spiritual powers appear in different forms, sometimes, in

grades, or hierarchy. This explains why some powers are more powerful and effective than others. Within this complex interaction of powers, comes the spirits the African people believe in. Quite often, these spirits are personified gods in animistic fashion, while still expressing their potency in human vessels (Arinze, 2005 & Laughlin, 2018).

Furthermore, Africans embrace the idea of pantheism, the belief in pantheon of gods that are complex as the gods of Ancient Babylonians, the Canaanites, the Greeks, or the Hindus (Omosule, & Adeleye, 2019). Many of these gods are feared and propitiated. These gods are worshipped generally in temples and cults, by having a priest who stands between them and their worshippers. They are not limited to one environment but are ubiquitous and are able to possess more than one shrine. The gods (divinities) are divine beings believed to have derived their essence from the "Supreme Being." Their task is to do the will of the Supreme Being and help him with the theocratic control of the universe, either as personifications, or as a spiritual force in charge of natural phenomena. Close to the divinities are the ancestors. The African people believe in worship of ancestors, and they see them as ever living and watchful (Ekpatt, 2021). It should be recognised however, that there is a great controversy as to whether the practices of the African people should be regarded as "ancestral worship," or mere reverence as would have been offered to a living chief. Notwithstanding, there is unanimity about the African practices in the idea of ancestral powers that are useful to human beings. The ancestors are dead relatives that have acquired spiritual powers, and devotees seek to obtain their blessings, or escape their wrath by a propitiation, or an offering (Arinze, 2001).

Other features in the African belief system are spirits, magic, and divination. Africans believe there are good and evil powers. Some are said to be the spirits

of the dead who could not reincarnate, or were not given a befitting burial, and are unable to find a suitable resting place (Ugwu, 2019). Spirits are forces, which can be mastered for effective performance by a good understanding of spiritual processes, and the use of the right invocations by whoever that controls them. This is where the magicians and diviners, who are gifted in the invocations of spirits, can either use it for the good, or for the bad of the community. Magical powers are approached according to one's struggles. Magical charms are offered for healing, land disputes, and childbearing. Diviners are approached to carry out spiritual diagnostic survey to ascertain the cause of mysterious happenings in one's life, or in one's community, such as lack of personal progress, or ill-health, or calamities. The diviners and magicians are mediators between susceptible individuals, and the spiritual powers that are capable of truncating their success. They are deep-rooted in knowledge of mystical arts and can subdue their client's imagined, or real enemies, to dismiss their fears. Material success is sought through traditional modes of spirituality. The African belief system sees everything from the eyes of the spirit. Social-economic challenges are often link with the actions of evil powers (Ada, 2018).

It is from this perspective of a belief system engulfed with the realities of spiritual entities that the Nigerian prosperity gospel finds its interpretation. Prosperity gospel theology has not only come into the system but has taken control of the system. It has de-marketed the African worldview and has enthroned a theocratic worldview that popularises the supremacy of God over evil powers. One Mrs D, from a branch of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, expresses her belief in a superior God:

If not God, is it juju that will solve our problem? I take it that the answer is capital NO. All juju powers are useless. Going to consult a juju is like visiting a fraudster.

The scriptures forbid that. Jesus' power is supper power. The devil does not have free gifts. Our Jehovah God is the king of the universe. In His blessings there is no sorrow (Mrs D, personal interview, September 4, 2019).

Advocates of prosperity gospel contend that scriptures persistently and consistently condemn any form of divination, magic, and ancestral worship, because it is based on the idea that there is an intangible force controlling the fate of all things. They maintain that the scriptures, expressly forbid consulting mediums, sorcerers, or spirit of the dead, and forbid any practices, which are linked with deities(gods). The basis for this advocacy is to exert the omnipotence and omniscience of God, as the Supreme creator and controller of events (Deuteronomy 18:9-12; Leviticus 19:28).

So, like the Israelites, who merely acknowledged the reality of the Canaanite gods, but did not accept their supremacy, the promoters of prosperity gospel exorcism refute the validity of African deities, or divinities. The dominant belief in the existence of divinities and their auxiliaries, and the need to refute their potency, aid the practice of exorcism, within prosperity theology faith communities. The practice of exorcism, as it is, transcends a common belief in deities, to a version of a God, a Creator, a Protector, and a Deliverer, who is mightier than the gods of the African worldview. Mrs B, an interviewee attests to this, when she says:

If you want to capture Nigeria from them, it cannot be by arms of flesh. You can only use spiritual powers of God to dethrone the powers of Darkness (Mrs B, personal interview, September 2, 2019).

To this end, the prosperity gospel preachers are vehemently against any form of traditional spirituality and are uncompromisingly hostile to any form of succour

it provides. They present the Christian God as the authentic, ultimate, and only means of obtaining supernatural endowment. Every good thing, which the traditional spirituality fails to provide is said to be available in Christ Jesus. In Jesus, everyone's kneel is said to bow; He is perceived as the ultimate, matchless, powerful, and incomparable One. Therefore, He is presumably considered and popularised as a superior God to the deities, ancestors, diviners, magicians, charms, amulets, and every form of traditional powers. The Christian God is not considered as One among many, but One above all. While the Christian practice is painted as a light, and as a source of progress, the traditional pantheon, and its associated practices, are painted as sources of darkness and backwardness. To this end, all the misfortune of the Christian is blamed on ancestral worship and engagement with deities. Any engagement with African Traditional Religion has been tagged as demonic and the cause of underdevelopment and retrogression. To progress, it is presumed that the believer must be delivered from the grip of demons (gods) that have held him down. Thus, prosperity gospel advocates propose exorcism as a tool to overcome all forms of social-economic difficulties.

12.4. Sources of demonic strongholds

There are two sources of demonic strongholds, the generational (hereditary) and the personal (acquired). This belief system is best understood in the language of the practitioner. Mr F, a practitioner of prosperity gospel and a member of Christ Embassy church opines:

Let me tell you. There are generational curses that we inherit from our ancestors who engaged in fetish practices, there are also curses we bring upon ourselves by engaging in juju practices... (Mr F, personal interview, September 7, 2019).

This observation is also corroborated by Mrs B (not real name), another interviewee from the Redeemed Christian Church of God:

The little I know is that someone can get it by following the footsteps of his forefathers. You can inherit demonic forces through family foundation if any of your ancestral parents served idol before. Someone can also invite demons into his life by visiting a shrine (Mrs B, personal interview, September 2, 2019).

The Africans believe that spiritual forces control events. If misfortune piles up, the Christian is made to believe that he is a victim of ancestral or generational curses, resulting from the actions of ancestors, or divinities. Before now, when misfortune strikes, members would seek a diviner, or a Juju (deity) priest, who would do a spiritual consultation to diagnose the root cause of the curse, and proffer solution through some religious rituals, sacrifice, or propitiation. With the popularity of prosperity gospel ideology, Christians are persuaded to go for deliverance, because the Christian omnipotent God has the ultimate power to diffuse the satanic grip of demons to give Christians freedom to live a successful life. The Christian God is also presented as a jealous God, who visits the iniquity of the fathers, upon the children, unto the third, and the fourth generations. Prosperity gospel proponents contend that the ancestral worship, practised by the forefathers, in many generations past, has resulted in present adversities. Many Prosperity gospel preachers now offer religious services, like the old rituals, with the Pastor, replacing the magician, or the diviner, and Jesus Christ, replacing the divinities. This way, the Pastor carries out a spiritual diagnostic evaluation and proffers a solution. The solution can be in form of religious ritual of exorcism involving seed sowing, prayer, fasting, casting, and binding. This idea of generational curses and exorcism is made manifest in the words of Mr F (not real name), when he argues that:

I will do spiritual examination to find out the source of my problem. I will find out if ancestral or family altar and powers are involved. You see, I believe ancestral powers and curses are real. The power of family evil altars erected by our forefathers through idol worship are still fighting our progress till today. Thank God, we can overcome them through deliverance carried out by a proper deliverance minister in the church (Mr F, personal interview, September 7, 2019).

To explain this further, reference is drawn from one of the churches' flyers, obtained by the researcher, as shown below:



Fig 2. (Warri Town, personal image, September 30, 2019)

From the data, it shows that family evil altars and curses are often diagnosed as the source of one's predicament. In the past, families often have shrines, sacred places, containing big trees, or pile of stones, or old pots, or skulls of animals in their compound. Here, the forefathers of the family, have stood at dawn, and muttered prayers to the ancestors, or the gods. The forefather might have turned to the rising sun and saluted the gods, offered sacrifices, and worshiped

in spirit. These sacred places, suddenly, turn out to be the abode of demons that must be destroyed to live a successful life. Certain forms of diseases, especially epilepsy and madness, are attributed to the subject of evil, or a demon. Generational powers are said to be foundational in nature. They are presented as evil powers resident in a person's foundation (linage). The understanding is that ancestral powers, through family bloodline, carry over family chaos, from one generation to another. Several sources, such as the sins of the forefathers, continuing in the sins of the forefathers, and broken dedication to the family covenant, are said to be responsible for demonic generational grip on families, or individuals. The negative covenants are believed to keep ancestral power and its associated problem in place. A covenant has sanctions attached to it that kicks in when it is violated. When any covenant is broken, the sanctions kick in as curses to thwart the peace of the individual involved. What this means is that, if one's forefathers had a covenant of worship with a deity, such covenant has to be maintained, and the deity worshipped, by subsequent generations, but in the event the deity is discarded, or the elements of the covenant are not maintained, the sanctions are always devastating, and can manifest in the form of untold miseries.

As mentioned earlier, apart from generational or inherited links to idolatry, there is a personal or acquired link with idolatrous practices. The acquired link falls within a person's involvement in demonic activities on a personal basis, which does not have direct link with one's ancestral cults or divinities. Prosperity gospel believes performance of demonic rituals and involvement with divinity worship are taboos before God and brings one under the influence of a demonic manipulation. Instead of the individual getting entangled in demonic spirituality, while trying to overcome the hurdles of life, prosperity theology presents itself as a better alternative with a firm assurance that one's success is only in God

Almighty. Insight from one of the interviewees' words, Mr D (anonymised name), a member of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, can explain this further:

The magicians and diviners are evil people, they can destroy your destiny when you visit them. The devil does not have free gifts. His business is to steal, kill and destroy. Anybody that consults him is finished (Mrs D, personal interview, September 4, 2019).

Prosperity gospel preachers argue that no matter how hard people try to succeed in life, so long they are still attached to any form of idolatrous practices, they will not experience any apparent success in their endeavours. Demonic engagements are said to hold people from achieving material prosperity. The emphasis is on the spiritual cause of events, rather than the physical. Strange illness, such as dementia, madness, and psychotic disorder, are believed to have direct link with the activities of demons. Natural disaster, such as famine, thunderstorms, flooding, strange death, and volcanoes, are interpreted from a spiritual standpoint. Scientific explanations to events are often played down, and social-economic challenges, such poverty, hunger, unemployment, insecurity, sicknesses, high mortality rate, are perceived as the effects of angry and ravaging deities. According to prosperity gospel promoters, these wicked deities can only be stopped when they are bound and cast out of their host, environment, or altars.

12.5. The process of casting out devils

The process of demon elimination is fluid, depending on the inspiration of the exorcist. However, there are basic and general elements of exorcism that are worth exploring. It must be noted that the method of exorcism, varies from one

individual exorcist to another, but the basics are the same. Insight from a deliverance pamphlet, obtained from one of the churches, visited by the researcher is necessary here. The relevant points will be discussed:

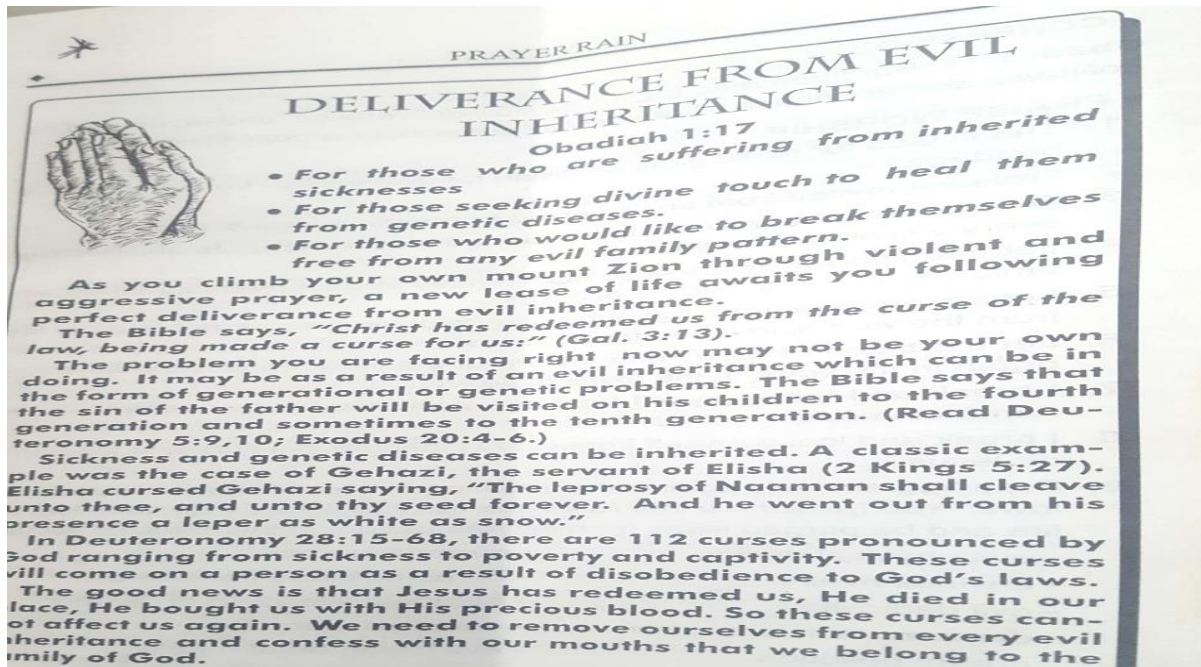


Fig 3. (Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, personal image, September 12, 2019)

Spiritual diagnosis: This is an act of diagnosing and putting problems of life in perspective to properly deal with them. Pastor Free (not real name), while responding to interview questions states:

I will do spiritual examination to find out the source of my problem. I will find out if ancestral or family altar and powers are involved (Pastor Free, personal interview, September 7, 2019).

To accurately diagnose any prevailing problem, the exorcist employs among others, two basic tools, counselling, and revelation. To get at the root of one's predicament, a family historical survey is carried out, whereby vital information

is extracted from the victim, to determine if the family had been involved in idolatrous practices in the past.

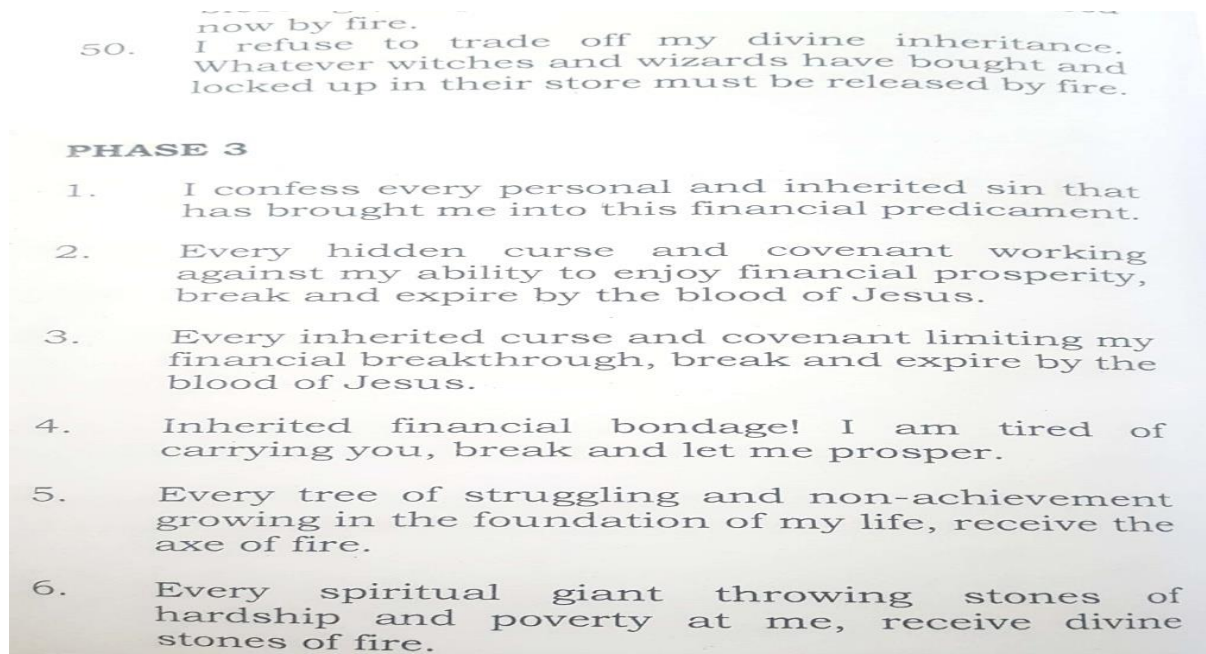


Fig 4. (Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, personal image, September 7, 2019).

Here, the name of the deity, mode of worship, covenant initiated, and the nature of the deity are unveiled. The name of the deity helps to direct prayer to the right entity. The mode of worship helps in understanding the religious rituals and the terms of the covenants that have been initiated between the deity and the family in the past. The nature of the deity helps to determine the character and possibly the sex of the deity. Deities usually manifest in form of either masculine or feminine gods. Feminine gods are likely to be more aggressive. The second tool, the exorcist depends on, in extracting hidden mystery, is: 'divine revelation.' Prosperity gospel exorcist believe in divine revelation, where God reveals hidden mysteries about people to them. Thus, personal counselling and divine revelation are key in spiritual diagnosis of one's material crisis, and the right diagnosis helps in prescribing the right religious ritual.

Confession of sins: The individual is meant to confess the sin that has attracted the demons, this can be ancestral sins, or personal sins. Responding to questions, Mrs D (anonymised name), observes:

I believe if we can humble ourselves, seek the face of God, confess our sins and that of our forefathers, God will heal the land of Nigeria (Mrs D, personal interview, September 4, 2019).

This religious engagement goes with repentance. Repentance is perceived as the turning away from sin of disobedience and rebellion and turning back to God. In generic sense, it means a change of mind, or a sign of remorse, towards past ungodliness. This ritual is done to initiate a new relationship with God. Thus, when prosperity adherent is asked to repent and confess his sins, it is a move to disassociate oneself from any direct and indirect involvement with idol worship. It is a dissolution of oneself from the past that has brought nothing, but hardship.

Renunciation and surrender: In the Roman Catholic Church, and the Anglican Church, the public renunciation of evil, or the devil, and all his works, during baptism, is a popular liturgical feature (Church of Nigeria, 2007 & Spurgeon, 2014). Renunciation in the context of the exorcist is the rejection of all forms of religious activities that have links with idolatrous practices, whether present, or past. The emphasis here is on full submission to God as a prerequisite for engaging in resisting and fighting the devil.

Militarised prayer: The devotee engages in frontal confrontation with the ancestral demon. To this end, Mrs B, maintains that:

The devil is stubborn, so you must pray stubborn prayer to defeat him and his agents (Mrs B, personal interview, September 2, 2019).

Adherents of prosperity gospel believe that the struggle is ultimately against spiritual evil entities – between forces of darkness and forces of light. It is proposed that the effects of demonic manipulation going on in the spiritual realm manifests in form of poverty, accident, sickness, broken relationships, sudden death, insecurity, unemployment, and business failure. To this end, prosperity gospel exorcist speaks aloud, taking authority over the presumed enemy, using the name of Jesus, the word, and the blood of Jesus. The name of Jesus is believed to command authority, and when mentioned, every evil power is said to bow down to the superior authority of God. Quoting the word occurs in the sense that there is legal ground in backing one's command with biblical evidence. The blood becomes the sign of victory, sealed for Christians, when Christ shed His precious blood on the cross. Armed with these three weapons, the exorcist commands all demon spirits associated with his predicament to leave immediately. As observed by the researcher, during one of the deliverance sessions, various combative prayers are offered – “by the power in blood of Jesus, I command you household demon to leave,” “In the name of Jesus, you, ancestral powers stopping my progress, I command you to expire,” “By the word of God, you demon of sickness, I bind and cast you into the abyss” (Christ Embassy, personal observations, September 25, 2019).

Breaking of curses: In the past, many African societies were engrossed in idolatrous practices. Though there has been a paradigm shift with the advent of Christianity, there is still a persistent belief in the influence of ancestral powers on human daily routines. In this vein, the exorcist blames whatever misfortune experienced on evil curses and presents himself as the curse breaker. To break a curse, the individual is taken through a series of militarised prayer points, either said aloud violently, or said silently. The curse breaker leads the victim in prayer as the presumed curses are mentioned one after another. Here are a few

examples: “Every curse of poverty I have inherited, break by fire,” and “Every evil curse I have brought upon myself, break into pieces.” If led, the curse breaker lays his hand on the victims, or anoint him with oil as a sign of victory.

Therefore, a delivered believer is a Christian that has undergone a session of exorcism and is believed to have been captured from the hand of all the generational and personal curses that are responsible for all the setbacks in his endeavours. The devil is said to have been defeated, and the demonic strongholds that are believed to have been blocking the believer from advancing in material prosperity, is said to have been destroyed. Henceforth, the problems associated with idolatry, curses, and yokes, can no longer remain. Materials difficulties are estimated to have been annihilated by the conquering power of God.

12.6. Implications and critical analysis

There is no doubt, there has been the persistent belief in the reality of demonic entities. In the Old Testament, demons are commonly referred to as “foreign gods” (Exodus 20: 4 & 2Chronicles 11:15). Yahweh warned the Israelites not to have anything to do with them if they must succeed. Any time the Israelites severed relationship with Yahweh to follow foreign gods, there was always a catastrophic outcome in form of disease, death, defeat in battle, or exile. In the New Testament, Jesus often cast out demons from people's bodies. Demons were responsible for many infirmities during the time of Jesus, hence He cast them out of their host to bring about healing. Jesus enjoined His disciples that He has given them authority to cast out demons (Mark 5:1-20; & Luke 4:41). Paul enjoined the Ephesians that they were not fighting with flesh and blood, but with principalities, powers, and the rulers of a dark world (Ephesians 6:12). Thus,

there is the reality of the force of evil against the force of good, and this is a pointer to the probability of evil agency causing certain human disaster.

This proposal is corroborated by research finding published by Mariani (2018). Mariani proposed that a belief in exorcism is gaining popularity in the US. He maintains that people with demonic entanglement are requesting help more than before from the church. This goes to show that exorcism as an age-long practice is finding new expression in the modern space. In 2017, a document detailing the liturgy of exorcism (translated into English), was resuscitated by the Conference of Catholic Bishops, in the United States of America (Church Herald, 2017). This was the first time the said rite was adopted in English, since its first adoption by the Roman Catholic Church, in 1614. Thus, there is a reassertion of a theology, the Church had once neglected. While many in the modern Church, view the devil metaphorically as a symbol of temptation, sin, and complicated evil, others understand the devil as a satanic agent, and a pantheon of demons. Pope Francis apologetically refutes such allegorical interpretations that arrogate non-personality status to the devil. In his Apostolic Exhortation, he argues that Satan, the Devil, should be understood as a being - a Beelzebub, a Deceiver, a Seducer, a Killer, and a Great Dragon. He argues further that this Satanic being is engaged in fighting, harassing, and tormenting humans (Church Herald, 2018).

What in this modern world will make many Christians to subscribe to the idea of the reality of demons? And why is the theology of exorcism is reverberating and making meaning to many amidst tangible advancement in science? In scientific procedures, since spirits are not subjected to scientific evaluation, they are often played down upon, and discarded as non-existent. Does non-subjectivity of an entity disprove its existence? This is the vacuum created by science. If a physical

evaluation does not turn up as the explanation for an individual's affliction, the theology of exorcism may likely find meaning.

However, theology of exorcism must not be skewed against scientific evaluation. As any religious spirituality, skewed against science and modern realities, becomes a debatable theology. Any religious expression, skewed against empiricism, espouses the urge for instant gratification. In the world of instant gratification and instant solution, the message of easy access to prosperity, becomes a marketable commodity. Therefore, the theology of exorcism as a mechanism for overcoming contextual challenges, should only be applied, where all scientific procedures have failed, and all basic indexes underpinning development have been explored.

The obvious reason behind this concept of exorcism, within the Nigerian religious space, is the reluctance of people to take responsibility for their actions, or the inability of people to explore proven procedure, in achieving material success. In this regard, demons become victims of accusatory theology. Consequent upon this spirituality, Christians portray themselves as incapacitated and blame the devil for social tragedies. Each time this happens, it increases the sense of victimhood. This perception of victimhood unwittingly fosters a feeling of helplessness and pessimism, which has the susceptibility of increasing proneness to greater social-economic difficulties. Physical events have a series of circumstances and choices. Those choices are informed by myriads of experiences, events, and people. Focusing on spiritual realities only, without evaluating scientific, social, or political factors, in determining the cause of one's physical condition, may amount to religious utopianism and authoritarianism.

12.7. Conclusion

This chapter has detailed how adherents of prosperity gospel respond to human suffering, using the tool of exorcism. As intimated, exorcism is the driving out of those demons that are perceived as the cause of calamities. The doctrine of deliverance is appropriated to checkmate the negative effects of demonic entities. Once delivered, the prosperity gospel hypothesis is that the Christian is set free from forces that are thwarting his material blossoming.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: DIE BY FIRE

13.1. Introduction

The main factor here is the African primal cosmological view of life. As intimated before now, the primal African worldview, recognises powerful external and wicked human agents, that are waging constant battle, against their fellow human beings. Human beings are said to be constantly vulnerable to the influence of evil powers within the society. This cosmological supernaturalism presupposes a spiritual realm of operation, where individuals, who possess mystic powers, manipulate it to do evil. It is believed that the supernatural powers of witches, wizards, charmers, poisoners, enchanters, and sorcerers are directed against fellow human beings to pre-empt them from living a successful life. It is from this background, the prosperity gospel prayer of “die by fire” finds its meaning. However, the concepts of witchcraft, wizardry, sorcery, and magic need some clarifications. Mukoro (2013) opines that a witch (female), or wizard (male), is someone believed to possess supernatural powers that can be sent out of the body with assignment to wreak havoc on other people's mind, spirit, body, or material possessions, through invincible means, or, through lower creatures, like rats, birds, or dog. Witchcraft is believed to be part of the individual's innermost self. Mukoro believes that a witch's modus operandi can be achieved by projecting evil thought directly from the mind without invocation. This depiction assumes that a witch possesses an inner intangible evil nature, which harnesses supernatural powers for malevolent activities.

Sorcerer and magicians are individuals who use charms, incantation, and magic, to cast a spell on their victims, with premeditated intent (Redding, 2019). This means, sorcery and magic are carried out consciously, deliberately, and voluntarily. A sorcerer, or a magician is vexed and vast in the business of

manipulating tangible materials to carry out their malevolent activities. Meanwhile, witchcraft is the most popular and most emphasised, because of its secretive nature. Also, witchcraft, or wizardry, is often presented as personification of evil, and generally feared as source of wickedness. Through their possession of mystical potencies, unknown, and inaccessible to ordinary people, witches are believed to perpetuate notorious evil, against their perceived enemy (Bauer, 2017). To this end, greater attention will be given to witchcraft as attention is shifted to how prosperity gospel agents, apply the strategy of “die by fire,” in conquering social-economic challenges.

13.2. Conceptual framework

It is difficult to pinpoint categorically when the concept of witchcraft emerged (Mukoro,2013). Evidence can only be deduced from the Old Testament, even though, assumption has been made that witchcraft existed in ancient pagan cultures and predates the arrivals of the Hebrews in Palestine. The Hebrew expression, “‘ba' alath ob,” which means, mistress of talisman (familiar spirit), is used to describe the witch of Endor, to whom Saul went to seek spiritual guidance. This depiction embraces the power to control medium and to receive message from the dead (1Samuel, 28:7). In the New Testament, the origin of witchcraft, is sometimes, traced to Satan, who was driven from heaven, because of rebellion. With his followers, Satan was believed to have been cast down to the earth, where he formed his demonic kingdoms (Revelation, 12:7-9).

Witchcraft has been linked with church practices since the medieval period. The medieval church retained powers to mete out punishment on magicians, witches, and sorcerers. Church priests were involved in exorcising people believed to have been possessed by evil spirits. During the 16th century, the general notion was that witchcraft was a better explanation for human misery –

sudden ill-health, unexpected death, and unexplainable loss of harvest (Cawthorne, 2004). Witch-hunting became a popular phenomenon. In 1542, the Witchcraft Act was passed by the English parliament to punish those who were possessed of witchcraft spirits. This Act prescribed death penalty for witches. Though the Witchcraft Act was repealed 1649, it was replaced with a different Act, which took away the power to punish a witch from the church to the secular courts. Witchcraft allegations were popularly directed against poor elderly women. About five hundred were estimated to have been executed in Britain (Parliament, 2019).

Also, during the inquisition, many who were accused of witchcraft were executed. Historically, the inquisition is a period in the Roman Catholic Church when courts were set up to thwart heretical endeavours. The inquisition was also known as the “Holy Office,” and it was popular during the 15th and 16th centuries. In Europe, many of the victims of witchcraft allegations were tried and executed. Similarly, the Protestants were also very laud in their attempt to suppress demons and witchcraft. In 1692, this zeal was climaxed with the famous American witch trials. An extreme measure of checking witchcraft was toughened by the emergence of the “Malleus Maleficarum,” a manual used for witch-hunting by the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th century. This infamous document outlines the features of a witch, how to punish a witch, and why a woman is more likely to be a witch. The manual defines witchcraft as evil and identifies a witch as a typical female, but this does not mean few men were not accused of wizardry (Cawthorne, 2004 & Mukoro, 2013).

13.3. Dealing with witchcraft in Nigeria

From the analysis so far, it is clear that throughout the ages, the church has been involved at one time or the other in matters of witchcraft (Cawthorne, 2004). In

the present church age in Africa, witchcraft has become a popular and dreaded issue. It is presented as one of the most wicked and powerful forces of darkness. Consequently, it has become a daily conversation on the pews, weekly sermon from the pulpit, and constant prayer points of worshippers. The concept of witchcraft is not a controversy within the Nigerian Christian practices. This belief about witchcraft's existence, is entrenched in the fabric of the Nigerian society. Regular stories of accusations and persons being branded witches abound within local communities. Most victims of witchcraft are often lynched, brutalised, or stigmatised, and some on rare cases are socially ostracised. There is an enormity of evil often culturally associated with witchcraft (Bauer, 2017). It is within this cultural circumference, that the concept of "die by fire" finds its relevance. It is a concocted prosperity gospel mechanism to wage spiritual war against the power of wicked human agents. Through the Holy Spirit that descended on the day of Pentecost in form of fire, through the God that answered Elijah by fire on mount camel, the Christian God is marketed as a consuming fire ready to consume all works of darkness.

Generally, there are two approaches to the dealing with the mystical powers of witchcraft within the Christian community in Nigeria. There are those who believe in the notoriety of witchcraft spirits but believe that the finished work of Jesus Christ has put the believer in place of authority above all principalities and powers. They celebrate redemption in the past. In the past, in that Jesus has redeemed Christian from the grip of all evil powers. Pastor Come (anonymous), a Pastor of one of the Christ Embassy churches, during the interview says:

If you receive attack from witchcraft spirit. The moment you realised they have been conquered for you by the death and resurrection of Jesus, you just have to cover yourself with the blood of Jesus and relax. You do not have to disturb

yourself over those little things (Pastor Come, personal interview, September 15, 2019).

The notion espoused here is that the individual Christian does not need any other or further action than faith in the soteriological victory enshrined in the redemption of humanity. Thus, under this assumption, all witchcraft powers have been decimated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the past. The second approach is to see the act of redemption in the present. In the present in the sense that though the Christian has been redeemed in the past, the battle against evil is still raging and must be fought. Thus, Jesus is still redeeming and must deliver the Christian from the perils and dangers of witchcraft. This is where the “die by fire” approach is employed. The believer is advised to ‘put on the whole armour of God’ in order to withstand the notoriety of witches and wizards. Dr Olukoya, the founder of the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, in his book, entitled, “The Cauldron of Darkness,” notes that witches use cauldron as an instrument of destruction:

The cauldron of darkness is a major instrument that is used by witchcraft squad in covens. Witches and wizards love using this instrument with passion. All they do is to spend time to gather people's virtues, blessings, prospects, goals, and ventures together, cut them into pieces, throw them into the cauldron and cook wickedly (Olukoya, 2019).

The power of witchcraft is perceived as an evil force working to stop the material progress of Christians. Meanwhile, to overcome the notorious machinations of witches and wizards, the Christian is summoned to orchestrate the mechanism of “die by fire” to defeat all kinds of human battles. This format of aggressive prayer liturgy, originated from the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, between the late 1980s and the early 1990s (Olukoya, 2019). During the

researcher's visit to one of the branches of the church, "die by fire" saturated all prayer sessions. The Church has a prayer document entitled, "The Prayer Rain." The Prayer Rain is a collection of aggressive prayers, written by Dr D.K. Okukoya, which outlines different prayer points targeted at certain needs of members (Olukoya, 1999). The target is usually the spiritual cause of events. The root cause of event is suspiciously traced to a human vessel. Human beings are the primary suspects. This can be inferred from the language of the prayers: "Every spirit of death operating in my life die by fire." "I release my business from every cage of household witchcraft by fire." "Let every evil eye monitoring my breakthrough die by fire." "Let every sickness in my life receive termination now by fire." "I paralyze every spiritual wolf working against my life by fire. Mr H, a member of Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, collaborates this point, when he suggests:

You have to kill them before they kill you. You have to destroy them before they destroy you. The kingdom of God suffers violence and the violent must take it by force. We are taking it by force whether they like it or not. Every spiritual goliath in our life must die by fire (Mr H, personal interview, September 12, 2019).

While other Prosperity gospel churches have copied this model, it does not saturate their prayer theology. To a varying degree, members admit they love using it when they feel they are going through unexplainable occurrences in their lives and need to loosen themselves from the grip of the evil oppressor. Pastor Tank (anonymised name) of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, admits that:

I nor dey pray this dey by fire prayer oo. Hemmm, but if the matter don tire me so tey I come dey reason nam say person hand dey inside, I go pray for the person make im die (Nigerian pidgin English).

I don't pray die by fire prayer all the time. But when things are really bad, and I am fed up. If I think there is an evil personality behind my travail, I do pray that the person should die. (Pastor Tank, personal communication, September 30, 2019).

The essence of this militarised form of prayer (die by fire) is the disarmament of evil individuals believed to be one's source of social-economic difficulties, such as poverty, failure, sickness, unemployment, barrenness, and premature death. This religious spirituality is thus directed towards the utility of God's spiritual powers inherent in the believer to his own advantage. Mrs G, a member of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, attests to this:

If my sickness is the handwork of an enemy, I will kill him before he kills me. I will release the fire of God on him. He should die by fire. I will shout fire seven times on his head. Operation back to sender. As I pray this prayer, I read some psalms, quite them and confess the healing of God (Mrs G, personal interview, September 16, 2019).

Appeal is made to the consuming fire of the Holy Spirit to kill one's enemies. When one sets fire on the activities of witchcraft, the evil machinations of the enemies are said to have been shattered into pieces, and one is believed to have escaped to live a glorious destiny. Prosperity gospel believes that when the activity of witchcraft is activated against their victims, healthy people can retire to bed, get attacked, and wake up with sickness. They assume that witches and wizards carry out their evil deeds and attack their victims, mostly during the night hours. If one goes to bed and wakes up with headache, severe fever, mysterious stomach-ache, or any kind of sudden and terrible sickness, it is assumed the Christian has carelessly allow witches to send evil arrows of sicknesses into his body over the night.

Therefore, behind the application of this model of die by fire prayer is the mindset filled with a belief in the existence of a human enemy. When one's career is torn apart without tangible explanation, finger is pointed at the instrumentality of witches. To overcome, the Christian is called to pray fervently to tear down the kingdom of darkness. The pattern of die by fire prayer does not have a fixed form, but it is identifiable with the monopoly of the phrase, "die by fire," or the consistency of the words, "fire" and "die." A pamphlet obtained by the researcher gives clues to typical examples of some of the formats: "My Father! Arise! Jam the transport route of witchcraft forces in my neighbourhood with unquenchable fire." "Every spiritual robber stealing my blessing tonight, be arrested by fire." "Every battle to capture my sleep and rest, backfire." "Every power that has chosen the hours of the night to spoil and turn my day upside down, die." "Every power using the night hours to cause unrest in my marriage and capture my bed from me, die."

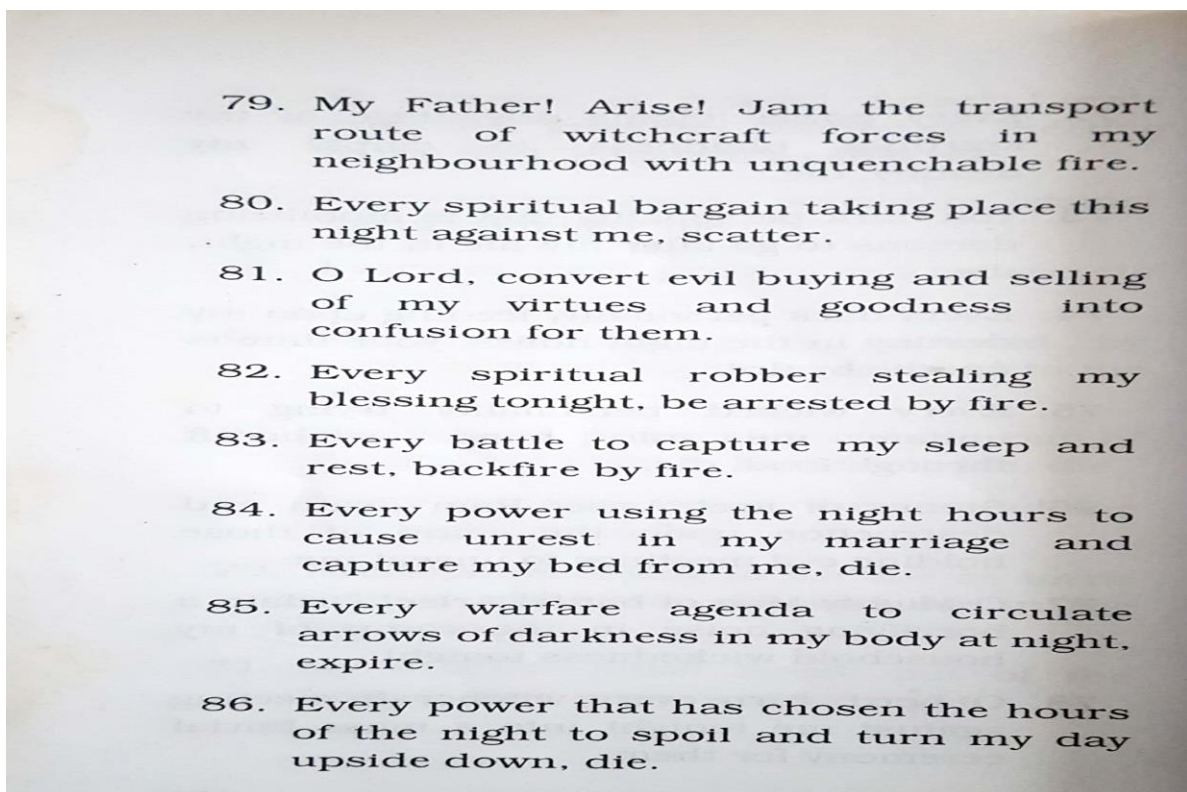


Fig 4. (Winners Chapel, Personal image, September 20, 2019).

This prayer model entails two things. First, it means asking God to kill one's enemies so that personal success can be achieved in all areas of life. It is in the perception of prosperity gospel adherents that the more the believer is protected from the evil plotting of the enemies, the more the believer has access to all-round material success. Secondly, prayer is perceived as the ability to destroy or cast out the powers of failure from one's life. Prayer is conceived as a warfare where the believer is in constant battle with spiritual forces that impede his success. Prayer is the weapon with which to fight evil forces as it concerns the believer's daily life and struggles. In this belief, the demons, witches, wizards, and evil powers that are ready to thwart the Christian's dreams of a prosperous life are defeated. The prosperity preacher claims that spiritual warfare is real, and that the believer has an enemy in evil human forces. Adherents are encouraged to put on the whole armour of God to defeat the devil and his agents who cause the Christian's social economic challenges. It is the believer that must be bold, take control, and pray faithfully and aggressively to kill the enemy. During prayer of die by fire, some prosperity gospel adherents go as far as speaking to the enemy directly. In this case, phrases such as, "I bind you," "I smash you," "I rebuke you," "I command you," "I overrule you," and "I conquer you" are employed to defeat the power of the imagined enemy.

13.4. Implications and critical evaluation

What this ideology implies is that human vessels are suspected as the cause of one's calamities. What makes it complicated is that, in this form of prosperity gospel spirituality, there is no physical mark by which witches are identified apart from claims to divine revelation or testimonies of a witch who is alleged to have confessed to being a witch. This opens the process up for the possibility of deliberately or wrongfully accusing someone of being a witch. Demon

exorcists often warn Christians to beware of their close allies suspected to be witch or wizards - often, village relations, most especially children, the poor and elderly ones become victims of suspicion. Thus, suspicion takes the place of love. It gives rise to division, hatred, fights, fears, and shattered human relationships. The grave effect is that the spirit of love and unity is weakened as people live in suspicion and fear of one another to avoid being harmed. Thus, there is a concrete link between fear and the die by fire prayer. It is the fear of unproven or imagined human enemies that drives people to indulge in this militarised form of spirituality.

The target of the die by fire prayer is a human enemy. Evaluating the actions of Jesus in the face of persecution, does He call down fire to consume His enemies? Amid an overwhelming persecution, scriptures reveal that even while on the cross, Jesus prayed that God would forgive His enemies (Luke 23:34). Stephen imitated Jesus. While being stoned to death by the religious mobs, he asked that God should forgive them for they knew not what they were doing (Acts 7:59-60). Juxtaposing the approach of Jesus and Stephen with that of the die by fire approach, an element of forgiveness appears to be missing. It is tailored towards revenge on once perceived enemies. This, however, negates the core value of Jesus' reconciliation ministry. If humanity is littered with imperfection, and offences become inevitable, then there is the probability that human beings will offend one another. And if human beings are to offend one another, then enmity is expected. If every enemy is to die by fire, then the orchestrator of the prayer of die by fire will also die because there is every possibility that he will also become an enemy to someone else.

Furthermore, the essence of prayer if seen as a tool to kill enemies rather than a channel of communication, the call to build a good relationship with God

becomes a mirage for communication is the bedrock of a good relationship. If the aim of a Christian living is to relate to God, prayer should become a channel through which the Christian communicates with God. The Bible is saturated with stories revealing the desire of God to establish a cordial union with humanity, and any intimate union, entails communication (Matthew 27:46). If two parties do not have a good channel of communication with each other, there will be conflicts in the union. Since prayer is basically a means of communicating with God, it should be understood as means of building a healthy relationship with God. A healthy relationship with God will certainly not go without some material benefits. The bible summons Christians to seek first the things of the kingdom of God and every other material need will be added (Matthew 6:33). And of course, the believer's needs are supplied according to 'His riches in glory.' in this persuasion, the believer will not lack in material needs; his necessities will be provided through Christ, the controller of all the earth (Philippians 4:19). Thus, it may be better for the believer to concentrate on building an intimate relationship with God, rather than concentrate on human enemies.

However, while the approach of Jesus in forgiving rather than killing His enemies has been applauded, it should be noted that there are two sides to a coin. Such is the temperament of human beings under distinct circumstances. Same Jesus who did not call for the death of His enemies on the cross, is seen cursing a fig tree to die when He was hungry and could not get fruits to eat from it (Mark 11:20-25). Faced with hunger and thirst, He wanted the fig tree dead. A contextual challenge may have triggered His reaction, He expected much from the tree, but got nothing. The urge to kill one's enemies is also triggered by the quest to satisfy human material thirst. When much is expected from a society, but one gets little or nothing from it, human vessel can become victims of accusations.

Therefore, it is not out of place to align with Omavuebe (2021) that when human enemies such as witchcraft or magic, whether real or imagined, are used to explain the cause of predicament such as illness, poverty, unemployment, accident, and natural disasters, it extremely becomes a wrong theology and a horrifying reality that seems to excuse the impacts of moral human choice in missing or attaining prosperity. Such theology might give bad governance the nexus to sprout as it will be used to explain away the Nigerian leadership failures, diverting attention from one of the obvious causes of social-economic crisis in the society. Citizens will be encouraged to pay attention to spiritual agencies, rather than physical structures, policies, behaviours, choices, that may be responsible for social-economic misery. Die by fire spirituality closes the door against exploring the possibility of a failed system being responsible for social tragedies, such as poverty, high mortality rate, sickness, unemployment, incessant road accidents, but blame it on imagined spiritual agencies.

13.5. Conclusion

Die by fire is a radical prayer coined by prosperity proponents. It is born out of the belief that human beings can possess witchcraft power, which can be used against their victims. Witchcraft power is said to be very stubborn, hence needs a very radical approach to overcome. When the die by fire prayer is invoked, it is expected that God will arise through fire and consume one's human enemies. Once consumed by the ravaging fire of God, witchcraft spirit is believed to have lost its grip on one's material blessings. Thus, the adherent can now enjoy wealth, peace, security, good health in abundance.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: CHARISMATIC PROPHETISM

14.1. Introduction

The concept of prophecy is usually popular in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and most popular religious practices of the world, be it old or new (Sarró, 2018). A prophet (prophētēs – forth teller) is an individual who claims to have received inspiration and sent by a deity to deliver a message. A prophet receives messages from celestial beings and delivers same to terrestrial beings. In that sense, a prophet is the mouthpiece of the gods (Green, 2019). Thus, A prophet is someone who proclaims the mind and will of the celestial agents. He often receives his messages through dreams, trance, vision, and casting of lots. A prophet may operate within a liturgical confine; thus, linking him with the concept of “Priest” as in Judaism and Christianity, with the concept of “Juju Priest” as in African Traditional Religion, with the concept of “Imam” as in Islam, and with the concept of “Shaman” as in Shamanism. Therefore, a prophet is a religious figure who assumes the role of an intermediary, a healer, a diviner or an expert in mystical powers and knowledge. (Sperling, 2017 & Omosor, 2019)

The Hebrew words, “navi” נָבִי, “Nevi'im” and “nevi'āh” are translated as prophet, prophets, and prophetess respectively; they are considered to have been borrowed from the Akkadian words, “nūbū,” “nabā'um,” meaning “to proclaim, call, summon or mention” (Vine, Unger, & White, 1985). Also, the Hebrew words, *hoze* and *ro'e* are translated as *seer*. One of the functions of the Hebrew prophets is to foretell the future depending on the prevailing ethical and religious context (Lumi & Lumi, 2017 & Mohases, 2019). Thus, in this thesis, the concept of charismatic prophetism will mean the prophetic activities carried out to investigate the past in order to foretell the future in a charismatic setting. The prosperity gospel theology finds its greatest followership within the modern

Pentecostal charismaticism. It employs the mechanism of prophecy in responding to social-economic challenges in Nigeria.

14.2. Prosperity gospel prophetic calling

The fundamental obligation of prosperity gospel prophetic calling is the awareness of a divine duty. One Pastor E (not real name), during interview, admonishes:

As a pastor, I am a prophet called by God. I am called to bring liberty to the captives. I speak the mind of God concerning my people (Pastor E, personal interview, September 17, 2019).

The prophetic legitimacy is hinged on three pillars – a divine call, a mandate, and the combination of both divine call and mandate. By a divine call, it means a divine summoning, or invitation from God by means of a vision, trance, dream, or audition. The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah was said to have been called by Yahweh in form of a vision. Yahweh intimated to Jeremiah that he had been called to be a prophet even before he was conceived in his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:15). Like Jeremiah, the prosperity gospel prophets make claim to certain divine authentication to legitimise their sacred activities. By a mandate, it means it was through the mediation of a senior prophet. When a prophetic call is mediated, it is said to be mandated, symbolising the transfer of a divine authority to the protégé. The transfer of authority is usually through ordination or laying on of hands (impartation). The prophet's call in this sense is like the cult prophets of Yahweh or Baal in ancient Canaan, or the juju prophets in African traditional religion, where a prophet's call is regarded as a divine mandate from the gods and mediated by an expert prophet under whose tutelage the trainee prophet is groomed. However, prosperity gospel prophets

are not distinguishable from one another and from non-participants by such things as baldness, physical marks, but a few of them are distinguishable through special staff, apparel, or mantle like the cult prophets of the ancient Canaan religions. Most prosperity gospel prophets will prefer to dress in suits to appear modern. While many of them do not go with the name, prophet, and while a large number of them go by the names, “General Overseer” and “Senior Pastor,” they arrogate to themselves the office of the prophet. They project themselves as the mouthpiece of God sent to deliver a message to their generation.

Prosperity gospel prophets can also be raised through the combination of a divine call and a divine mandate. In this regard, the self-made prophet makes claim to divine revelation, but seeks legitimisation from already established prophets. Pastor E, a prosperity gospel practitioner, states:

A true prophet of God does not call himself neither is he called by the people. He is called by God. Though he is ordained by a fellow minister, that does not mean it is the fellow minister that called him. For me, I can tell you categorically that it is God that called me (Pastor E, personal interview, September 17, 2019).

The typology of Prosperity gospel charismatic prophetism is in two folds – revelatory (vision) and acquisitive (mastery of certain religious techniques such as fasting, speaking in tongues, meditation, and prayers). Pastor E also suggests:

Ordinarily, I receive revelations from God concerning issues through dreams or vision, but anytime I want to go deeper in the prophetic, I just have to go to the mountain or lock up myself for some days. During my moment of fasting, meditation and praying, the heavens get opened up and I start speaking in tongues and seeing visions (Pastor E, personal interview, September 17, 2019).

However, in most cases, prosperity gospel prophets employ the two prophetic techniques as they are spiritually intertwined. Usually, there is no special pattern, one may precede the other. The aim of mastering certain prophecy mechanisms is to invoke a state of spiritual ecstasy, whereupon divine revelation can be received. There is a sense at which this is done, it is for the prophet to use certain religious techniques such as meditation, fasting, biblical incantation, visit to sacred mountains, and isolation to seek and grow his revelatory prowess. Unlike the Hebrew prophet, Ezekiel who was presented as employing ecstatic techniques to transmigrate from the terrestrial to the celestial realm, and lost control over himself when possessed with the spirit of Yahweh, the prosperity gospel prophets are very much conscious of the message they deliver and hardly lose control of themselves during their prophetic ministrations.

The prosperity gospel prophets when juxtaposed with the African traditional diviners, share solid similarities. Both are engaged in the act of foretelling. Foretelling is the forecasting of the future by means of hidden spiritual knowledge. The diviner and prosperity gospel prophets, both claim special closeness to the divine; both market themselves as receivers of divine message from the divine realm. The difference is that the prosperity gospel prophet claims to receive his message from a higher realm of authority, the only true God, a superior God who he believes is the head of the universe. This superiority complex is employed to undermine the efficacy of traditional prophetism. Such tactics emphasise rejection of all religious practices directed at other gods other than the Christian God.

14.3. Patterns and contents of prophetic messages

Under the spiritual authority of the Christian God, the prosperity gospel prophet pronounces a divine oracular message to his audience to tackle material

challenges. The prophetic pattern may look to the past and the future. Looking to the past to unveil secrets events that transpired, believed to be responsible for one's economic woes. Pastor E maintains that:

When heaven gives a message, it must be obeyed on earth. When heaven sends a message of victory to a trying Christian, believe you me, the Christian will succeed (Pastor E, personal interview, September 17, 2019).

This may mean revealing the cause of one's predicament. This can mean tracing a generational curse, a demonic covenant, or witchcraft activities down to generations past. It can mean revealing the demon that has bewitched the individual or diagnosing the witch that has held down the financial breakthrough of a family or revealing the evil agents behind one's illness. Looking to the future entails unpacking the mind of God concerning the future of the worshipper. It may mean pointing the worshipper to a bright or gloomy future. Gloomy predictions often depict the future as full of calamities, suggesting the occurrence of death, terrible sickness, evil attacks, or loss of fortune. When the future is predicted to be prosperous, it envisages a future full of material gains such as employment, childbirth, victory over satanic attacks, good health, and business boom. The worshipper is enjoined to sow a provocative seed of faith to motivate God to avert the foretold evil or to hasten the actualisation of the foretold fortune. The seed acts as a transactional element. The Christian God in return is believed to act on behalf of His subjects once they give to Him the right offerings.

In times of hardship, prophetic predictions are always made to point worshippers to a prosperous future. Prosperity prophets often interject their opinions and predictions into the political circles. They tend to interpret the will of God within prevailing circumstances of the society. The political prediction

attempts to reveal the outcome of a political election and what the future holds for the electorate. In this context, the prosperity gospel prophets preach joy and extremely prosperous future. Thus, amidst chaos, they bring hope; amidst doom, they sow joy. Though the hope they bring may be illusive, it gives momentary relief to the populace. The contents of such prophetic insight emphasise God as a judge and a destroyer of all suffering, and as such, He will create the long-awaited and ideal future.

This insight echoes from the different prophecies released by prominent prosperity gospel purveyors on the eve of 2021, during their various New Year's Eve services, popularly called "cross over nights." Bishop Oyedepo, the General Overseer of the Winners Chapel, in his Twitter handle, says:

This year will be full of surprises. From 2021, you shall not wander in life again. You shall not know disappointments in 2021. Your dramatic change of story shall come in 2021. Those afflictions you are used to will not follow you to the year 2021. The year will birth all your aspirations and desires as you flourish and increase in steadfastness to the cause of Our God. It shall be a stress-free year for you and all your loved ones (Oyedekpo, 2021).

Pastor Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, through his Twitter handle, released the following prophecies for 2021:

Some of the things that happened in the year 2020 will spill over into 2021. For every COVID-19 vaccine discovered, there is already a variant (of the virus) in the making. This will continue until the high and the mighty admit that safety is of the Lord. God says He will begin to deal with nations on an individual basis and heal the nations where the people are humble and prayerful Those who put their

trust in God will see the end of the siege Individuals' survival and restoration will be in their own hands (Adeboye, 2021).

This prophetic narrative is also visible in the words of an interviewee, Mrs G (not real name), who intimates:

Our Pastor has told us that this year is going to be a year of divine restoration for all of us in this church. And I believe it. Whatever we have lost in the past will be restored (Mrs G, personal interview, September 16, 2019).

The prosperity gospel prophetic prediction is like that of the classical Hebrew Prophet (Isaiah) whose expectation of a Messiah (the anointed one) was based on the Old Testament monarchical ideology, and who believed that the Messiah was not an eschatological figure, but a materialistic one who would restore the earthly kingdom (Βασιλεία, basileia) of Israel with headquarters in Jerusalem. That sound of hope and pessimism was prominent also in the prophetic predictions of Haggai and Zechariah. They announced that Yahweh would inevitably restore Israel as a kingdom and that their messianic expectation would come to pass. Haggai and Zechariah maintained that the precondition of the advent of the messianic era and rule was the rebuilding of the temple of Yahweh which they assumed was heaven on earth (Haggai 1:3-11 & Zachariah 5:1-2). Meanwhile, when the temple was completed and long years had gone without the expected messianic kingdom, prophecy in Israel declined and the people lost hope. For about four thousand years of the intertestamental period, a voice of a prophet was not heard.

14.4. Implication and critical evaluation

Like the classical Hebrew prophets, the prosperity gospel prophets paint a future of a bright tomorrow – a booming economy, a good government, a healthy

society, an era of business success and an age of peace and prosperity. They contend that the prerequisites for the fulfilment of their prophetic predictions are prayer, faith, and seed sowing. It is in their belief that where the people have faith, pray and sow seeds of faith, the Christian God brings His purpose spoken through His prophets to pass. To this end, an escape route is created. Should the prophetic predictions come to pass, it will be applauded that the prophet is a genuine one, but should it not come to pass, the people are blamed for not praying enough. With this, the prophet is exonerated from being blamed as a fake prophet, and thus retains his prominence in the minds of his followers.

Therefore, there is a susceptibility in prophetic ministry to give spiritual coloration to those aspect of unfulfilled prophecy. Here, lies the problem of religious belief, as there is no measurement mechanism to ascertain one's level of faith required to bring a prophecy to fulfilment. Similarly, if faith is required for the fulfilment of what God has spoken through His prophets, it creates the possibility of assuming that He is unstable with His plans and only requires some level of faith, prayer, or giving before He can fulfil His plans. Why there was dearth of prophecy in Israel during the intertestamental period is hard to determine. Insight can only be drawn from the book of Zechariah, which opines that in those days the prophets lied (Zachariah 13:1-6). So, the future of prophetic ministry in Nigeria is predictably dim if the prophet's message is often unfulfilled.

Furthermore, the Nigerian prosperity prophecy must be understood as having links with African traditional prophetism. In the African traditional system, diviners and juju priest act as prophets and prophetesses. Prophetic diviners are consulted to proffer solutions to problems of bareness, sudden death, mysterious sickness, and loss of fortune. The traditional prophet acts as a link

between the gods and humans; between the ordinary and the divine; between the spiritual and the physical; and between the sacred and the profane. The contents of such prophetic pronouncements cover all areas of life, ranging from social, political to economic adventures. Within this religious ideology, lies the importance of prophetic practices as means of solving social-economic difficulties. A gap is often created when worshipper switch from African traditional worship to Christianity. To fill the lacuna, there arise the need to show that the Christian God is more powerful – making Charismatic prophetism within the prosperity gospel ideology inevitable. To this end, the new worshiper instead of approaching the juju priest, diviners, soothsayers, traditional prophets, or magicians, finds succour in consulting the prosperity gospel prophet for spiritual diagnosis and treatment. Thus, the prosperity gospel prophet replaces the traditional African prophet. The prosperity prophet acting as the oracle of the Christian God, discards the African prophetic mechanism of divination, soothsaying, throwing of cowries, manipulation of mystical powers, using of calabash, mixing of mystical herbs, and drawing of lines with white-native chalk. He engages in meditation, reading and memorisation of scriptures, fasting and praying, and special visit to mountains and sacred places for a special encounter with the all-powerful God, who reveals mysteries behind predicaments. Over the time, there seems to be innovative prophetic practices among prosperity prophets. Worshippers' ancestry can be traced with names of each member of each generation mentioned and their connection to one's predicament diagnosed. Most often, worshippers' names, phone numbers, car registration numbers and house addresses and certain events in their lives known to nobody are mentioned to prove the authenticity of prophetic message. These data are said to have been revealed by God to solve the worshipper's material challenges.

To support this mechanism, Mrs G, an interviewee, claims:

My marriage is product of prophecy. One guest preacher who does not know me called me out by name during one of our revival programmes, described my family composition, and the problem of delayed marriage the girls in the family have been going through. He prayed and broke the curse. That same month I met my husband (Mrs G, personal interview, September 16, 2019).

Families and individuals who are facing difficult times invite special prophets to their homes for family deliverance, and all-night and breakthrough prayers. The prosperity gospel prophet marketing himself as the doorway to success, enjoins adherents to have a prophet in their lives who they should regularly consult for matters of destiny and success. Daily issues such as business trips, business adventure, medical treatment, choice of spouse, job interviews are basically brought before a prophet for spiritual certification. The certification of a prophet is passionately sought after as it signifies divine stamp of approval.

During church service, prosperity gospel prophetism is usually in some cases influenced by music, dance, and clapping. The edifying worship session, the powerful dance movement, the adorable clapping and lifting of hands during the liturgy creates an atmosphere of ecstasy, ushering in the presence of the divine wherein the prophetic susceptibility is provoked. The prophet being entirely enmeshed into the celestial realm, receives divine revelation from God to the congregants. This may have similarity with the African Traditional Religion where music plays a very important role in rendering praises and appeals to the gods. Drumming, singing, clapping, and dancing create an appeasing setting for invocation and activation of mystical powers during ritual, festivals, and worship. Thus, music generates a sense of awe and connects the devotee with the sacred in a spiritual state. This pattern of worship, where drumming, singing,

clapping, and dancing are popularly utilised to invoke the presence of the gods and attain a celestial realm, has been popularly replicated to achieve prosperity gospel prophetism. This explains the reason for the explosion of indigenous Christian music. Contextualised songs, garnished with Christian message, and coloured in indigenous languages, are rendered to create the atmosphere for the manifestation of the all-powerful Christian God. The Christian gospel is then contextualised in the persistent African traditional religious elements. Within this setting, the prosperity preacher ministers hope to the adherents in their own cultural orientation. The message of the bible, is thus, made relevant in the adherent's context.

Contextualized prophecies, weaved in the Christian message are espoused in biblical context with the circumstances of the adherent in order to make theology active in a contemporary world. Prosperity theology reflects the philosophy, culture, experience, and worldview of the proponents. This assertion is in line with Bevans (1985), who suggests that in the Third World, indigenisation of theology should not arise from theoretical background, but from experiential one. This implies that in the process of interpreting the gospel message, the listener must be a partaker. It provides that the listener should be a participant in the process of relating the message of the bible into his context. When the listener is involved in investigating the meaning of any gospel as it relates to his situation, he becomes the co-author of the message. To this end, one can say, contextual theology is dialogical. Though the picking of a particular subject from the bible during ministration may be the task of the preacher, however, integration of the gospel into indigenised context is the responsibility of both the sermoniser and the listener. To achieve this, the preacher must intentionally pick cultural elements that the listener is familiar with. This

dialogical theology is what the prosperity gospel prophets have mastered very well.

14.5. Conclusion

Many people gravitate towards the theology of prophetism. The prosperity gospel prophets project themselves as persons who have extraordinary power to discern hidden things. They are valued as people who have ‘spiritual eyes’ and “who can see” by their patronisers. It is believed that they can see into the past, the present, and the future. People who can see through the spiritual aspect of events as they relate to present challenges are believed to be capable of achieving fantastic feats. Therefore, they are popularly patronised in an attempt to overcome inconvenient social occurrences.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: SPIRITUALISED ITEMS

15.1. Introduction

Prosperity gospel adherents deploys spiritualised items in combating social-economic challenges such as road accident, insecurity, material poverty, ill-health, unemployment, and unexpected death. They proposed that an ordinary item blessed by a religious minister possesses some divine power to act on behalf of the conveyor in thwarting human woes. This belief system is borne out an ideology that material items can serve as a medium of contact between the divine and the mortal. And that when blessed, material item becomes all-purpose weaponry against material hardship. Thus, in this chapter, an attempt is made to discuss spiritualised items such as anointing water, oil, wristband, sticker, and handkerchief.

15.2. Anointing water

Ancient civilisations as well as different religions have long held water as sacred. The ancient Mesopotamians held the abyssal zone (abyssopelagic zone), a layer of the pelagic zone of the ocean as a symbol of mystery and wisdom. The word, "abyss" is derived from the Greek word, "ἄβυσσος," meaning, 'bottomless.' To the ancient Egyptians, water was the primordial substance from which all creation emanated (Huggens, 2009).

In Vedic Religion (Vedism), the Rig Veda (a large body of text in ancient India), gods, such as Apas, Indra, Varuna Parjanya and others are said to be connected to water. (Issaradhammo, 2018). Water is said to be divine and is thought to bring peace, prosperity, happiness, and good health. The Indians consider the Granges as one of their holiest rivers. The Granges (Ganga) is a trans-boundary Asian river, flowing through Indian and Bangladesh. The river is believed to be

the embodiment of the goddess, 'Ganga,' depicting the female force of the universe, intertwined with both life and death. The Ganges is considered as the daughter of Himachala and Menavati, and at the same time, the beloved sister of Parvati (consort of Lord Shiva). Hinduism considers the water of the Ganges as a purifier (Huggens, 2009). Hinduism places emphasis on spiritual and physical wellbeing by achieving purity. The Shinto religion of Japan also applauds the cleansing power of water during rituals. "Mesogi" is one form of ritual of purification by washing the entire body performed in Japanese Shinto practice. It is believed that the soul (tama) of the devotee is purified by standing under a waterfall (Huggens, 2009).

In Buddhism, the path of the Buddhist to achieving enlightenment involves dedicated cleansing of body, mind, and spirit. Buddhist practices encapsulates the serenity and calmness of water, and the offering of water sacrifices at Buddhist shrine (Issaradhammo, 2018). In Islam, water signifies wisdom. It acknowledges the importance of water to life; that every living thing is created from water. It is presumed that human beings are created from, live with, consume, and breathe water. Knowing this is said to be self-awareness (Aminov, et al 2018).

In Celtic mythology, the Celts, assumed that watering places was a doorway to the underworld, probably, because of the natural, imaginative, and reflective nature of water. Its reflective landscape in relation to the sky, made the Celts to think it was a doorway to another world. Christian Britain took over sacred wells of the Celts and gave them Christian coloration. Once declared holy, the wells were said to cure various diseases. Saint Keynes' well in Cornwall was said to aid success in marriage. Saint Oswald's well in Winwick in Cheshire and Oswestry in Shropshire were believed to have healing and wishing well potency.

Thus, as at the sixteenth century, the idea of the holy well became central to yearly religious rite (Goeddes & Grosset, 2006). Similarly, Greek mythology has also associated deities with water. Hence, there were Greek gods such as Achelous, Zeus, and Meander (Håland, 2020).

In Christianity, the concept of water, vividly featured in both Old Testament and New Testament. Before the commencement of creation, God functioned with water. Genesis 1:1-2 records that the earth was without form and was void, and that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. After the water was charged and stirred by the Spirit of God, creation commenced. Exodus 7:14-25 records that God turned the water of the Nile River into blood in Egypt. Moses parted the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds) with his rod (Exodus 14:21). Numbers 20:11 records that water gushed out of a rock in a wilderness. There was a basin (laver) made of brass in the outer court of Moses' tabernacle that was full of water for ceremonial and religious washing of hands by the Levites before entering the Holy of Holies. Furthermore, it is understood from 2 Kings 5:14 that Naaman, the Syrian army general, by instruction of Elisha, the prophet, dipped himself seven times into River Jordan to be cleansed of his leprosy.

In the New Testament, water is essentially linked with baptism, where the Christian receives a new birth through immersion, pouring, or sprinkling with water. John the Baptist, baptised people in River Jordan; Jesus was baptised in River Jordan (Mathew 3: 13). John 5:2-3 records the existence of a pool known as, "The Pool of Bethesda," which when troubled by a mysterious angel had healing power. In the same vein, John 9:1-7 reveals an incident, where Jesus Christ asked a man born blind to wash himself in the Pool of Siloam in order to perfect his healing.

Both Old and New Testaments are full of instances where water featured prominently. However, holy water is mentioned in Old Testament in relation to purificatory rites; there seems to be no instance, where “holiness,” or “anointing,” is attributed to water in the New Testament. In the earliest Christian practices, water featured during rites of expiation and purification in line with its application in Jewish tradition (Numbers 5:17). Suffice it to say that before the idea of prosperity gospel anointing water in Christian practices, there has been the concept of “holy water” in Roman Catholicism for over 1,600 years (Oestigaard, 2017 & Panou, 2018). It is recognisable that sometimes, the intended religious purpose for water might be for purification, sanctification, or consecration, but there has not been adjectival qualification of water as holy or anointed. The first time, water was declared as holy in Christianity, was during the Council of Nicea, in 325AD (Panou, 2018). Consequently, both the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, have held the idea of holy water sacred. The usage of holy water was reported in the Eastern Orthodox Church, among the St Anna’s cult, in Byzantium, from the 6th to the 15th centuries. For instance, in Constantinople, there was the existence of sacred fountains of holy water (haghiasmata) in the city for religious practices (Oestigaard, 2017). So, the usage of spiritualised water is not new, even though the concept of “anointed water” is relatively new with the advent of Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism. Certainly, it is important to acknowledge that a prominent figure, like Saint Theresa of Avila (a doctor of the church), who reportedly gave visions about Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, was an ardent supporter of the efficacy of the Roman Catholic holy water, in driving away evil spirits. Based on this premise, it may not be out of place to suggest that before the invention and use of anointed water by prosperity gospel exorcists to repel or banish evil, the Roman Catholic Church had long been using holy water as a repellent of evil (Giordan &

Possamai, 2018). Giordan and Possamai further hinted that the Roman Catholic Church uses a prayer in Latin to consecrate water for exorcism:

Exorcizo te, creatura aquæ, in nomine Dei Patris omnipotentis, et in nomine Jesu Christi, Filii ejus Domini nostri, et in virtute Spiritus Sancti...

I exorcise thee in the name of God the Father almighty, and in the name of Jesus Christ His Son, our Lord, and in the power of the Holy Ghost...

After saying those words, the ordinary water is said to have automatically become holy, and it is believed, Satan is now scared of the water. Thus, the prosperity gospel anointed water is best understood in a context of ancient religious practices, Christian scriptures and Christian religious practices that preceded the current status it enjoys. Water has occupied a prominent position of expression of spiritual beliefs and had profound effects on how prosperity gospel adherents use it.

It is often clear that the religious efficacy of water is intuitively known by adherents of prosperity gospel and such beliefs are instigated by successive religious beliefs; acquiring embellishment and innovation, while often retaining links to acknowledged origins. The belief that miracle will happen is enough to ensure a boom for the prosperity gospel anointed water patronage. Mr L, a member Winner Chapel, but a regular attendee of Prophet T.B. Joshua's Synagogue Church of all Nations reveals:

I was attracted to the use of anointed water because of the miracles that accompanied the use of the anointed water. Women with fibroid were healed, the demon possessed were delivered, women who were to undergo caesarean session gave birth safely, those who were struggling in business had

breakthrough. And I said, I need to be part of this (Mr L, personal interview, September 9, 2019).

The demon defeating water becomes popular and people flock to buy or have it. The belief is that the anointed water does the work of miracle. The water is said to have been anointed when the prophet prays over normal water. Just like the Roman Catholic Church, who prays over normal water, turning and consecrating it to be holy and fit for spiritual works, the prosperity gospel prophet prays over normal water to turn it into special anointing water that can turn people's fortune around for good. Based on this premise, it may not be an exaggeration to opine that it is the same Roman Catholic Church's holy water ideology that may have inspired anointed water spirituality that has been redesigned under a new name. While the holy water is extremely popular within Nigerian Roman Catholicism, the anointed water is extremely celebrated in prosperity preaching Churches.

Prosperity gospel anointed water is sought after for safe baby delivery; for businesses that are not flourishing to attract favour; for the jobless to be employed; for broken marriages to be restored; for poverty to miraculously disappear; for divine immunity against diseases; for protection against road accidents, or for accident victims to escape unharmed. Adherents believe that by receiving anointed water, they can access the unlimited blessings of God. Through the medium of the anointed water, they believe that God expresses His grace and love for them by ending their frustrations and bringing in divine restoration of all that they have lost. To this end, the believer is encouraged to have spiritualised water at home, in his car or office. During special service or prayer days, it is common to see individuals with sachet water, bottled water, or canned water. The "man of God," standing at the altar, invokes the supernatural

presence of God into the water, declaring it as point of contact between the spiritual and the physical. The Christian, whose hope has been raised, takes the miracle water home to fight battles of life.

Usually, the anointed water is popularly used in three ways – sprinkling, drinking, and bathing. When sick or for divine immunity, the adherent is enjoined to sprinkle, bathe with, or drink of the water. It is said that anointed water brings good health. Sickness is recognised as the seed of the devil, to uproot it, the Christian must employ a higher power, and that power can be expressed through anointed water. As the blessed water goes into the body, it is said to purify it, and rids it of any evil that must be eliminated. For business success, people are told to sprinkle spiritualised water on their shops or goods to attract the favour of God. One of the popular stickers that accompanies one of the anointing waters, obtained from an adherent by the researcher consolidates the anointing water spirituality:

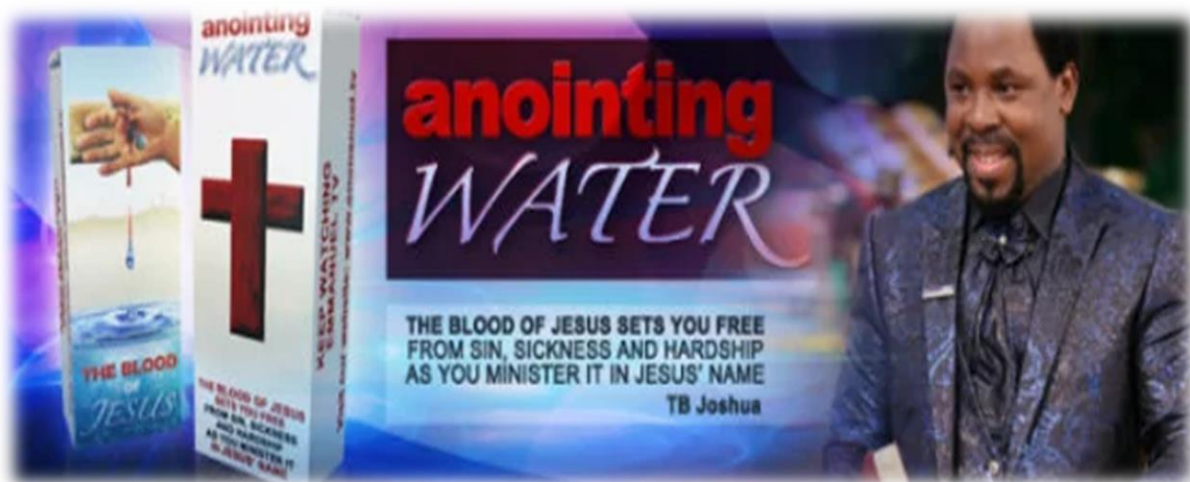


Fig 5. (Synagogue Church of All Nations, personal image, September 11, 2019)

A Christian may also seek the repelling of demons said to be the cause of his many failures by sprinkling anointed water on evil shrines where evil spirits are said to reside. The anointed water is reputed to be an excellent purifier that purifies spaces, lift evil curses, and thwarts demonic spells. In the view of

prosperity gossellers, anointed water is a vehicle, which takes away the bad and brings in the good. This practice promotes a sense of spirituality that spiritualised items can lead to rebalance in one's life, and as a result, begins the process of aborting all supernatural powers responsible for social-economic challenges. One of the churches visited by the researcher, members are seen lifting their cans, gallons, and bottles of water up for spiritual blessings.



Fig 6. (Anglican Church, Personal image, September 18, 2019)

The anointed water is considered the outward visible sign of the power of God. The Holy Spirit is said to brood on it, making it to be a yoke breaker, a demon destroyer, and a lifter of men. The total essence of the prayer water is the ability to overcome terrestrial challenges. The implication is that anointed water fast becomes an idol for many. What happens is that many followers are encouraged to use spiritualised water whenever they need miracles of prosperity of any kind. Like the Africans who are adherents of Traditional Religion, who rely on charms and amulets for their daily battles of life, prosperity gospel adherents go about with their daily routines with the confidence of anointed water. The result is that

adherents are tempted to build up stocks of water instead of building up faith in God, thinking that Satan is scared of their waters more than their God.

15.3. Anointing oil



Fig 7. (Mrs Goo, personal image, September 14, 2019)

Generally, anointing is defined as “smearing or rubbing with oil,” especially as a part of a religious ritual (Lopes, 2014, Nyske, 2020 & Mullins, 2017). In prehistoric times and in animistic religions, magic was a common practice. The fat of dangerous or sacrificial animals or individuals was considered as a great charm against evil. Traditionally, African warriors often anointed themselves with the fat of a lion to be bold in order to instil fear in animals during hunting. Australian Aborigines used dead warrior's fats to anoint themselves so that they could gain his powers. This was a practice of using human fat in making black magic oil (Tapio, 2018). Indian Vedic religion had a ritual that involved the anointing of worshippers, shrines, idols, and functionaries of government. In Hinduism and Jainism, anointing is also popular even though water or milk from holy cow is used instead of oil. Devotees may undergo anointing as an act of initiation, consecration, or dedication (Nyske, 2020).

In ancient Near East, most especially among the Jews, anointing the head or body with oil was a popular practice (Ruth 3:3 & Micah 6:15). Head anointing with oil or ointment was also practised as a symbol of hospitality by a host towards a visitor. (Psalm 23: 1-6 & Luke 7:46). The Hebrew word, "Messiah" (Christos), signifies "the anointed one," and it is best understood in relation to anyone consecrated or dedicated to God. In this sense, the person anointed might be a prophet, a king, or a priest. Thus, anointing with oil was a rite of ordination or inauguration for Prophets, Priests, and Kings (the three typical Jewish commonwealth offices). Occasionally, one must be anointed into the office of a Prophet, and a Prophet was called, "the anointed one," or "Messiah" (1 Kings 19:16, 1 Chronicles 16:22 & Psalm 105:15). At first, all Levitical Priests were anointed into their offices, but subsequently, anointing was a strict reservation for the High Priests (Exodus 40:15, Numbers 3:3 & Leviticus 16:32). Anointing was also significant in the inaugural ceremony of Jewish Kings. Sometimes, the rite was performed more than once – David was anointed three times (1 Samuel 9:16 & 1 Kings 1:34). Anointing with oil was also used on inanimate objects in order to consecrate them for religious purposes. At Bethel, a pillar was anointed by Jacob. Oil was used in the altar of Yahweh and as well used to light up the candle sticks in the temple (Genesis 31:13 & Exodus 30:26-28).

In early Christian tradition, anointing with oil was a common way of welcoming or honouring guest as an act of hospitality. Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with alabaster oil. Done out of hospitality, the anointing was acknowledged by Jesus as preparation for His burial (John 12:1-3). The central reason the Jews anointed dead bodies with spices was to reduce bad smell from the decomposing bodies. Embalming was not practised, to stop offensive smell, the funeral anointing was very important in smell eradication. The spicy oil, Mary

Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought to the tomb of Jesus was meant to eradicate offensive smell and honour His body (Mark 16:1, Matthew 28:1 & Luke 24:1). Oil was also used as energising substance on the body to receive healing. Hence, it was used for the sick and rubbed on injuries. It was believed that high-quality oils, made from pure ingredients had soothing and therapeutic value, courtesy of the extracted natural plant, containing medicinal properties. The common practice was to anoint the sick and pray for healing. James enjoined the sick to meet the elders for anointing and prayer (James 5:14-15).

Emanating from this tradition, the use of olive oil for sacramental rituals was adopted by the early Church. In A.D 215, in his Apostolic Tradition, St. Hippolytus propagated the idea of oil of exorcism, which was basically used for the anointing of baptismal candidates, and oil of thanksgiving, which was usually initiated after the actual baptism (Hippolytus, 2020). Subsequently, the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglicans used olive oil in different dimensions. Olive oil was used in the sacrament of baptism, especially as oil of Catechumens to anoint enquirers (intending candidates for baptism) to strengthen and bless them (Church of Nigeria, 2007 & Church Fathers, 2015). This anointing was a symbol of the enquirer's need for divine help to overcome the devil, sin, and the alluring things of the world. The oil of the sick, simultaneously known as, 'oil of infirm,' was primarily used during the sacramental conferment of the anointing of the sick. Sacred 'Chrism,' a mixture of olive oil and balsam, a sweet-smelling resin, consecrated by a bishop, was applied for the conferment of the sacrament of Confirmation, symbolising the strengthening of the Holy Spirit. The practice of the Sacred Chrism also featured during the 'Rite of Holy Orders' - the Rites of Ordination of a Bishop, a Priest, and a Deacon. Oil is often used in the dedication or consecration of churches and altars, and subsequently, the anointing of kings

or queens during their coronation (Church of Nigeria, 2007, Lopes, 2014 & Mullins, 2017).

So, when I write about prosperity gospel anointed oil, its theoretical background is found in an age-long Christian tradition. However, what is different and striking is how prosperity gospel Christians tend to apply the anointed oil mechanism to overcome contextual challenges. In the Old Testament, it is believed that under the title of the “Anointed” or the “Messiah,” a deliverer is promised. The nature of the Messiah’s anointing is depicted as a spiritualised one, with the Holy Spirit playing an important role. (Psalms 2:2; Daniel 9:25-26 and Isaiah 61:1). The New Testament Jesus Christ of Nazareth is manifested to be the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah concealed in the Old Testament, and historical evidence abound of His being anointed with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18; John 1:32-41; Acts 9:22 and 17:2-3). Prosperity gospel preachers assume that there is a spiritualised anointing conferred on Christians by Jesus, the Anointed One, through the Holy Spirit. And that this anointing is capable of expressing itself through the medium of the anointed oil.

Owing to prosperity gospel promoters’ particular focus upon the power of the Holy Spirit, some prosperity preaching Pentecostal churches employ anointing with oil during their consecration and ordination of Bishops, Pastors, Prophets, General Overseers, and Elders. The anointing with oil marks the seal of approval and authority from God. Once approved, the anointed preacher is believed to have been positioned to anoint others for maximum impacts. The anointed oil, which is an ordinary oil, can now be blessed by the anointed Pastor, General Overseer, Prophet, or Papa (a popular name for a powerful Pentecostal Christian leader). Once blessed, the anointed oil becomes a spiritual commodity that can fight off all evils. The usage of blessed oil may be continuous or one-off

depending on the instruction of the “Man of God” as to how the oil should be used and depending on the duration and severity of one's predicament. Mrs G (not real name) expressed this hypothesis:

I believe in anointing oil, when I was sick, my papa blessed olive oil for me to use to rub my body. By faith it worked, and I was well (Mrs G, personal interview, September 16, 2019).

Some prosperity gospel prophets go as far as putting a sharp distinction between prayer oils. There is prayer oil for the sick, for financial breakthrough, for employment, for safe travel, for business success, and for favour. Where emphasis is not laid on the particularity of the oil, worshippers are free to use it generically.

In one of the services attended by the researcher, during announcement, the Senior Pastor drew the attention of the members to the various categories of anointed oil available:

Please for those of you who have not got your anointed oil, meet the ushers to get the one you want. We have oil for breakthrough, oil for fruitfulness, and oil for healing and that of breakthrough (Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry, personal observation, September 6, 2019).

Basically, anointed oil has multiple applications within the believers of anointing spirituality. Anointing oil is said to cure all manners of sicknesses. This informs why adherents use it to anoint the sick, most times, on the forehead, or directly on the spot, where one feels pains. Others go as far licking it, believing it can miraculously flush out any strange disease from one's body system. It is also used to consecrate shops and business premises or used for the dedication of new business adventures with the hope that the oil will invoke the supernatural

favour of God on the market venture. New items such cars and completed building are usually set apart for God's presence with anointing with oil. The essence of dedicating a car is for divine protection for both the car and its occupants, any time it is on the road. It is a mechanism to escape car theft or road accident. Thus, anointed oil is likely understood as the symbol of protection. Once deposited in one's home, building, doorway, such environment, or object is said to have been protected from invaders, and one can go to sleep without any fear of burglary, armed-robbery, kidnapping, theft, or attacks of any kind. The information supplied by Mr H, one of the adherents is important here:

There is power in anointing. The bible says every yoke shall be broken because of the anointing. I always anoint my head with oil for favour regularly. You see that my car outside, I have anointed it this morning before coming here. I anoint my home and my shop so God's presence and protection can be with me (Mr H, personal interview, September 13, 2019).

The spiritual function of depositing anointed oil on objects perhaps reminds the adherent of the pervading presence of the Christian God. The Christian God is said to be omnipresent and can use any medium to carry out His mission on earth. It further illustrates that good things come from the Christian God when activated by the medium of the anointed oil. The anointed oil often symbolises the penetrating power of the Christian God; like Linseed oil that has penetrating capability and superb in rust removal, the anointed oil is said to soften the believer's life by removing economic hardship such as poverty, unemployment, sudden death, and insecurity.

Consequently, one of the widely held beliefs about the anointed oil is that it attracts unprecedented favour into one's life. This is interpreted as the “law of

attraction” by Capps (1987), Esther and Hicks (2005), and Prince (2010). The law of attraction is popular in the philosophy of the New Thought Movement. (Bowler, 2013). It is based on the belief that positive thought attracts positive experience, and negative thought attracts negative event into one's life. It is the idea that to achieve effective success, one must also engage in visualisation (a belief that one's thoughts have already been seen) to create the desired results. The prosperity gospel follower is encouraged to anoint his feet to be attracted to good location, or his hands to attract good things into his reach, or his forehead to attract favour from people, or his eyes to attract good things into his sight. The sense for which it is done is to allow for infinite possibilities, infinite success, and infinite joy. Here, the adherent develops a persistent belief that the anointed life knows no difficulties and only attracts prosperity, favour, good health, employment, divine, safety, peace, joy, longevity, and divine breakthrough.

Furthermore, anointed oil is prescribed as a weapon against bad dreams as well. The foundation of this belief is that bad dream is a sign of bad things to come. This is clearly registered in Olukoya (2019), one of the prominent purveyors of prosperity gospel, when he writes:

Many people go suffer nightmares and terrible dream life; they experience violent attacks in their dreams. Such people dream about masquerades, strange creatures pursuing them, and they find themselves involved in ugly actions in the realm of the dream. Of course, such dreams will definitely affect the real life of the victims.

When someone dreams of death, it is assumed that it may be a bad omen that someone close may die; if someone dreams of accident, it may be a sign that someone is about to be involved in road accident if no action is taken. In

moment of public testimony witnessed by the researcher in one of the prosperity preaching churches, the testifier submits:

Few days ago, I had a dream where someone was giving me a casket and I rejected it and rebuked the person. When I woke up, I knew the spirit of death was hovering over my family. I fasted for three days and anointed all members of my home with anointed oil, and I declared that there shall be no loss. On 27th of July at exactly 2pm, my wife was involved in a very fatal accident, while coming from the market, three people died. It is not that I am happy that people died, but I am happy that there was no scratch on the body of my wife. God delivered my wife from the spirit of death. Praise thy Lord! (Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, personal observation, September 6, 2019).

This implies that to thwart bad omen from happening in one's life, the prosperity gospel subscriber is advised to anoint himself with blessed oil. For amazingly rewarding result, this action is backed by scriptural reading, meditation, positive declaration, fasting, or prayer. The anointed oil is presumed can serve as a seal or a mark of identity that identifies the believer with the all-powerful God. Thus, no matter the bad omen, with the anointing oil, the bad dream is shattered and cannot come to fruition in the material realm.

Similarly, the anointing oil is deployed during exorcism. During exorcism, anointed oil plays very important role. To banish evil spirit out of the individual's life, anointed oil is poured on the believer's head or rubbed on the forehead, feet, hands, or eyes as a sign of sanctification. During this special deliverance ritual, the victim is sometimes seen making some uncontrollable movement, signifying the spiritual war between evil spirit and Holy Spirit. Occasionally, this strange movement such as rolling, twisting, clamping is accompanied by screaming as evidence that the demon is in trouble. The final departure of the

demon ends with the victim occasionally falling on the floor depicting the defeat of the devil. This gives credence to the popular Pentecostal phrase: "And the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil." Carved from Isaiah 10: 27, it amplifies the power of the Holy Spirit on Hezekiah over the tyranny of Sennacherib. The underlying belief is that anointing oil wards-off demons that are capable of stopping one's progress in life. These demons that are suspected to have possessed power to use human vessels are popularly referred to as "goliath," "Herod," "Jezebel," or "Pharaoh." This personification is conceived out of the bad role these personalities have played in biblical history. Goliath wanted to exterminate the Israelites, Herod wanted to kill the baby Jesus, Jezebel killed the prophets of Yahweh, and Pharaoh enslaved the Hebrews in Egypt.

This belief system, where anointed oil is deployed to cushion the effects of demonic activities, implies a worldview that reflects the reality of militant spirits. It also highlights a people's hope in divine interventionism, rather than human capabilities. The divine is given far more attention than the physical; the utopian is prioritised far above the empirical, as the spiritual is believed to shape events, rather than the physical. Thus, this informs why extreme attention is given to how one can manipulate celestial forces in his favour so that material prosperity can be achieved.

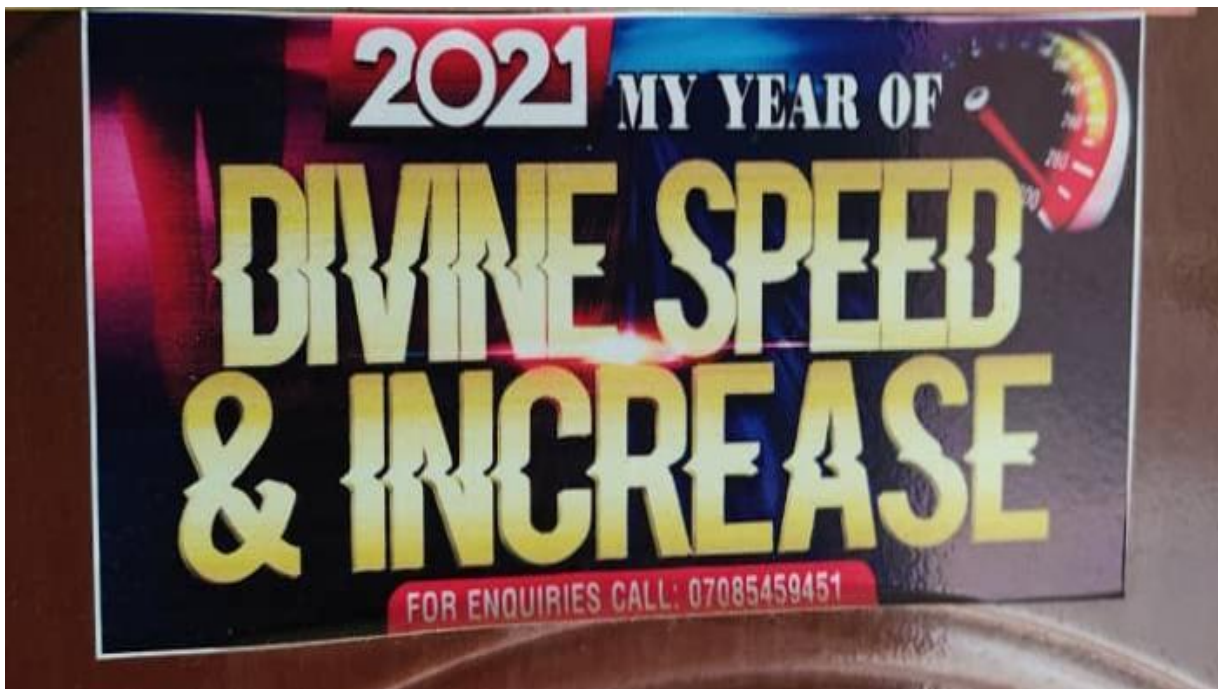
15.4. Anointed sticker, handkerchief, and wristband.

A sticker is a printed decoration with an adhesive back, capable of sticking to surfaces. A wrist band is an encircling strip, or bracelet-like band, or decorative band people wear on the wrist for varied reasons. A handkerchief is a tiny piece of linen people carry around for hygienic reasons such as the wiping of the face.

Thus, by anointed sticker, wristband, and handkerchief, I mean a stickers, wristband and handkerchief that are blessed by a Pastor, Preacher, Prophet, or General Overseer through prayer for the purpose of defeating contextual challenges. Prosperity stickers and wristbands usually carry short positive declarative statement or phrase, and sometimes have image of a hero prophet or preacher ingrained on them. They are often printed and sold to church members during church programmes as tools for securing God's blessings, banishing of witchcraft, demons as well as protection from disaster such as road accident, theft, and invasion. There seems to be no formal way of blessing these anointed items. The process of blessing depends on the leading of the Holy Spirit. Extemporal prayers are adopted rather than much controlled or rigid liturgical prayers. This may not be unconnected with the Pentecostal churches' emphasis on pneumatics, the power of the Holy Spirit. The idea is that extemporal prayers are celebrated as much more spirit-filled than written liturgies.

There appears to be no specification as to where anointed stickers, wristband and handkerchief should be blessed; most prosperity preachers either bless these prayer items at home or during church programmes. Once blessed, ordinary items are said to have been spiritually transformed and possessed the power to change lives and turn things around for good. Strikingly, members buy stickers and wristbands depending on the confessional statement written on them. A few of such spiritual stickers obtained by the researcher shows that such declarative phrases are coined to address contextual issues affecting church members. Declarative phrases are lifted from scriptures or personal confessions of faith. This practice is intertwined with the concept of rhematisation. The concept of rhematisation has already been extensively discussed ab initio. The faith behind the short declarative statement is that it has the ability of altering

any present or future misfortune. Prosperity gospel preachers have represented this idea in diverse form such as ‘the law of attraction,’ ‘the law of positive declaration,’ or ‘the law of positive thinking.’ The centrifugal belief is that one's consistent thought and confession attract positive events into one's life. This underscores why phrases like “I am a winner,” “I am redeemed,” “I am covered with the blood of Jesus,” “when I see the blood, I will pass over,” “anointed to succeed,” “I am the head and not the tail,” “I am born to succeed,” “created to rule,” “my blood is not for sale,” “my year of divine fruitfulness,” this household is for exploits,” or “this evil red card must expire,” are typical examples of anointed sticker wordings. A few samples obtained by the researcher support this claim:



(Revd. Too, not real name, personal image, April 10, 2021)



(Revd Mee, not real name, personal image, April 15, 2021).



(Miss Doo, not real name, personal image, October 2, 2019)



(Redeemed Christian Church of God, personal image, October 3, 2019)

The confessional statement on anointed sticker and wristbands tend to reveal their spiritual dimensions and their aim in addressing prevailing social-economic difficulties. It is perceived that these anointed items carry divine essence of God and provokes enduring miracles in one's life. It is a spirituality that applauds the grace of God to guide the traveller from road accident and death traps laid by the enemy. Subscribers to this ideological strategy argues that any environment that accommodates the anointed items eliminates common life-hardships. One of the wearers of a sticker whom the researcher approached explains that:

My sticker is not ordinary because it carries the power of God. I feel the power of God any time I put it on. It eliminates bad luck and attracts the favour of God (Mr Uchu – not real name, personal conversation, September 20, 2019).

The anointing in the stickers, wristband and handkerchief is said to smoothen the believer's engagement and compels it to succeed. The believer is thus positioned consistently to win all battles, whether health related, social, or economic. The idea portrayed in this perception is, with the aid of the anointed items, no adherent is vulnerable to defeat; and that it must be all round success.

According to proponents of prosperity gospel, there is mainly one outcome to every bad human condition – triumph and conquest on the side of the Christian. In this assumption, this winning formula relies solely on spiritualised items. Thus, having a blessed sticker pasted on one's door, or a wristband worn on one's wrist, means more comfort, more food, more safety, more money, more opportunities, more security, more prosperity, and more fulfilment.

From Newton's second law of motion documented by Lemmer (2018), it is understood that every object continues in its natural state unless there is an engagement with certain external forces. The best explanation given to the mechanism of the anointed sticker, wristband and handkerchief is that the condition of the Christian remains in its bad state unless some spiritual operations take place. To this end, it is suggested by adherents of prosperity gospel that the supernatural power of God contained in these anointed items carry out operations of lifting people from poverty, by releasing wealth; of lifting people from sickness, by releasing divine healing; of lifting people from insecurity, by releasing God's guardian angel for maximum security.

The mechanism of an anointed sticker and a wristband is hard to situate within a historic timeline within the church practices. The biblical evidence to support it is also extremely hard to find. The practices seem to have been invented within Nigerian Pentecostalism in the last decade of the twenty first century. However, the use of handkerchief to heal the sick was reported in the church. To situate the practice of using anointed stickers, wristbands and handkerchiefs within a biblical background, prosperity gospel purveyors often cite a few incidents. The sick who touched Jesus' clothes received healing. Peter's shadow healed the sick. Handkerchiefs and aprons, blessed by Paul, healed the sick, and drove demons out of people (Matthew 9:14 & Acts 5:12-16). It is within this theological

foundation that prosperity gospel adherents popularised anointed items. Thus, they argued that this must be a logical reason as to why God manifest His power through the medium of prayer items. In this persuasion, they must create the practice to contextualise the gospel to fit into persistent cultural belief that has been held so dear over the ages. Thus, to replace traditional belief, with a Christianised concept, anointed sticker, wristband, and handkerchief become very fascinating. When people in Africa visit a pagan shrine or temple, it is not unusual for them to take home some powers by purchasing fetish items. They believe objects carry power and can serve as a point of contact with the deities. These objects are used for personal or community challenges. A deity may be invited to fight a war, to kill an enemy, to protect people from diseases, to harm, to provide succour, to bless the harvest, to end a drought, or to bring prosperity. Therefore, it seems God meets prosperity gospel adherents at the point of their prevailing African traditional beliefs. They believe objects are capable of transmitting power; hence, they assume that if they can take home a piece of their Pastor's anointed sticker, wristband, and handkerchief, they are taking home a piece of the extraordinary power operating in his ministry, which can thrust them into all round success.

15.5. Implications and critical evaluation

The implication of this theology that emphasise reliance on spiritual items is that it creates a god that can be seen. It is the urge to experience what is practical. The God, an adherent cannot see, is made visible in material items. And this reality has the capability of drawing the devotee towards the divine. This is comparable to the “*ḥēṭ' ha'ēggel*” (חַטָּאת הַעֲגֹל) or “the Sin of the Calf” incident (Exodus 32:4). When Moses was on mountain Sinai to commune with Yahweh for forty days and forty nights, the Israelites transgressed by worshipping a

golden calf. The Israelites transgressed, because a lacuna was created, the Hebrew tribes lost hope in Yahweh, and they wanted a god they could see practically like their neighbouring pagan tribes. They asked Aaron to make a golden calf for them as Moses tarried for too long on the mountain. Like the Hebrew tribes, there is the urge to see what can be touched and felt within the ideology of spiritualised items. The sense of a remote God who needs to be felt through sacred items propels the reliance on spiritual items. It increases the faith of the believer and raises the sense of hope that a withdrawn God has been practically felt within the human abode. So, when adherents drive their cars with a sticker saying, “The Lord is my shepherd” glued on the windscreen, it arouses and invokes the sense of the sacred. Such sense of the sacred gives a reassuring confidence to the devotee that his journey is secured.

On the other hand, too much reliance on spiritualised items diverts the attention of the devotee from the real source of worship. The danger is that the items can turn to mini gods as they take central space in the mind of the worshipper like the golden calf that took a central stage in sacred activities of the Hebrew tribes. And this can lead to the violation of the second commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Again, the worship of a bull was a common practice among surrounding cultures. For instance, in Egypt, from where the Hebrew tribes had recently migrated, the bull was a popular object of worship. The Canaanite religious practices also had the bull as one of the objects of worship. When the Hebrew tribes set up the golden calf, it might have been triggered from their contacts with these persistent religious value systems. They seemed to have been reviving an age-long religious practices they were familiar with. Thus, when the prosperity gospel proponents emphasise the importance of spiritualised items, they seem to have found it difficult to alienate themselves from an enduring African traditional religious practice, where sacred

items play vital role. Also, the use of spiritualised items can as well be an attempt to modify, or redefine, or re-exert the vitality of the use of sacred items practised in three dimensions in the past: The Israelite temple worship, where oil and water, featured prominently; the Apostles' use of apron (handkerchief) to heal the sick in the New Testament; and the Roman Catholic church's use of holy water to drive away demons.

Furthermore, while the mind of the adherent is flooded with the idea of relying on divine bodies for practical problems, a lacuna is created for a continued existence of material challenges. This is because, to create a viable society, promoting practical ideology is very important. For instance, security and economic prosperity are products of good policies. They do not operate in the spiritual realm. Emphasis on ideology such as good leadership, development road map, and good security architecture is capable of motivating stakeholders in designing policies that will address specific contextual problems. Rather than address social deficits such as group inequality, political failure, lack of innovative policies, poor health care system, bad road network, prosperity gospel theology anointed items focus the attention of the adherents on a God who is all powerful, and who is expected to resolve all entangling and emergent social-economic crisis that buffets the Christian.

15.6. Conclusion

What this chapter has been able to show is that within prosperity theology, when combating social-economic challenges, there is a reliance on items connected to the divine. This reliance on prayer items is an extension of age-long religious practices. Within prosperity gospel community, the reliance on spiritualised items is a divine weapon against all setbacks in life. To progress in all human endeavours, one must deploy the mechanism of sacred item as a

guard against failure and as a tool that thrusts the believers into their expected destination. While being used to wipe the face, in order to wipe away sorrow, or while being worn as wristband for protection, or while being stocked to a doorway or a car as a sticker to ward off theft or accident, spiritual items are said to invoke the presence of the supernatural to stop misery.

CHAPTER SIXTEN: PROVOCATIVE GIVING

16.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses the doctrine of provocative giving as espoused by prosperity gospel proponents. Provocative giving is that giving that is believed can invoke God's material blessings. This doctrine is disguised in different forms such as the principles of sowing and reaping, seed time and harvest time, giving and receiving, and a hundredfold harvest. The focal point of this chapter is the investigation of how the doctrine of provocative giving is deployed in combating bad conditions by prosperity gospel proponents. To get at the heart of the debate, the chapter navigates through the following theme: the conceptual framework, the principle of a hundredfold harvest, the Nicomachean ethics, and the sales of indulgence.

16.2. Conceptual framework

The tradition of giving is a firmly rooted practice in many religions. As a spiritual rite in Buddhism, giving is one of the six perfect qualities or viciousness the devotee cultivates to attain spiritual viability. As such, both material and spiritual resources are offered by the devotee out of generosity and compassion for the wellbeing of others (Berlin, 2018). In Sikhism, one of the youngest world faiths, established in South Asia in the early sixteenth century by Guru Nanak, provides that people who are eligible to work are obliged not to engage in fraudulent means, and are required to share their income with the destitute (Singh, 2018).

The importance of giving is also a popular and a resonating idea within the three Abrahamic faiths (Frenkel & Lev, 2009). In Judaism, most specifically, in the Hebrew Scriptures, “tzedakah, צדקה” is the Hebrew word denoting

philanthropic and charitable works. Literally, it is a form of social justice which echoes giving to the poor. Tzedakah goes beyond financial services, it includes contribution of time, insight, effort, and emotional, or moral support. As such, it builds trusting relationships. The doctrine of tzedakah is viewed as morally obligatory and involving on all Jews. The necessity for justice propels the Jewish practice of giving to the poor (Jacobs, 2010).

Apart from tzedakah, which emphasises generous disposition towards the less privileged, there is also the Jewish practice of “gemilut chasadim” (גְּמִילוּת ,חֲסֵדִים) which echoes the act of “Chesed, חֶסֶד” Chesed means “loving-kindness.” In its positive sense, it used to depict love or kindness among people; virtuous devotion of people towards God; and the mercy or the loving-kindness of God towards humankind. Thus, gemilut chasadim celebrates mutual interaction among people propelled by love within a community as a foundation of religious giving (Roehlkepartain, Naftali & Musegades, 2000 & Madsen, 2012).

“Tikkun olam, תִּיקוּן עוֹלָם,” is an ancient Jewish phrase, which literally means “repair the world” or “heal the world.” In Jewish doctrines, it means any activity aimed at improving the world in order to bring it closer to the ideal, harmonious, and peaceful state for which it was created. The implication is that tikkun olam envisages a perfect world punctured by sin, and its creator intentionally left room for humanity to improve upon His good work and mend the broken parts. The act of healing the world, has been extensively highlighted and adopted for humanitarian, religious and secular agenda. President Bill Clinton, President George W. Bush, and President Barack Obama of United States of America, have all often referred to “tikkun olam” in one time or the other during their presidency (Roehlkepartain, Naftali & Musegades, 2000 & Levenson, 2018).

Similarly, in Christianity, giving is also considered as a key religious ritual. The payment of tithe (giving one-tenth of one's income), as enshrined in the Old Testament, is passionately echoed as God's commandment by some Christian denominations. In the New Testament, the injunction to give beyond tithes is evidently demonstrated when Jesus enjoined a rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and give to the poor if he wanted to be perfect and have treasure in heaven (Matthew 19:16-30). Inspired by such value, the religious practice of monastery has seen people taking vow of chastity and poverty as a sign of dedication to their faith. Today, while the monastic practices may not be too popular, most Christians understand the injunction to give as a central part of their worship (Rose, 2018).

In Islam, one of the five pillars of the Muslim belief is giving. The doctrine of "Zakat," which literally means, "to grow in purity," or "to cleanse" is a yearly giving of 2.5 percent of one's wealth by Muslims. It is considered by many as the minimum form of obligatory charity done to ease the suffering of the poor. It was a practice well institutionalised during the era of Islamic empires. Like a tax system, everyone was under obligation to pay a fraction of his income for community needs. In the modern times, it is much more a personal duty. Many Muslims hold the doctrine of zakat as a central element of their faith. They believe that practising zakat cleanses, blesses, and multiplies the rest of their wealth (Hafidhuddin, 2019). Beyond the obligatory zakat, Muslims engage in additional giving, broadly known as, "sadaqah." Sadaqah is a voluntary charity given in order to please God. Sadaqah also depicts wilful act of humanitarianism geared towards others, whether through material items such as money, clothes, food, or non-material generosity such as love, compassion, or faith. Sadaqah is thus, that act of kindness given without expecting anything in return. (El Ayyubi, & Saputri, 2018). In Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Jainism, the practice of

“dāna” is associated with generosity. Dāna is that giving which seeks no material reward on the part of devotee. The devotee only expects a spiritual benefit in return. What is implied is that it deflates the egoistic tendency of humanity that creates continued suffering. Dāna, or charity can be expressed in physical or non-material forms. It can adopt the form of helping those in need, or the form of public humanitarian services channelled towards the need of the poor (Thongputtamon, 2018). Therefore, religious giving is not new to many religions. Giving is at the heart of many spiritualities.

16.3. The principle of a hundredfold return

Prosperity gospel spirituality celebrates giving as one of its cardinal doctrines. Material prosperity is attributed to how much money the believer gives in church. Monetary giving is echoed as one of the tools for overcoming hard conditions. The giver is projected as having unrestricted access to the throne room of God's mercy and favour. In one of the sermons witnessed by the researcher, the preacher suggested, “If you want a miracle blessing, you must give a provocative offering.” This point is also supported by an interviewee:

Yes, I believe giving can open doors for a Christian. By giving we receive God's abundant blessings in hundredfold return (Mr H, personal interview, September 13, 2019)

What is implied by this sacred call is that there is a giving that provokes God into action. Though there is no standard to measure such giving, it is believed that it must be hurting to the believer. It could mean emptying one's bank account; it could mean giving half of one's earnings; it could mean giving substantial amount of one's salary; it could mean paying one tenth of one's income; it could mean supporting a church building projects.

The idea of provocative giving hangs on the assumption that the Kingdom of God functions in accordance with the principles of planting (seedtime) and harvest echoed by Robert (1970). In expatiation, Oyedekpo (1986) contends that the principle of seedtime and harvest time operates within the principle of a hundredfold return. Olukoya (2019) believes that the theology of a hundredfold return is the principle guiding God's return on one's giving. The believer is summoned to expect a hundredfold return on whatever amount of money he donates to God. When evaluating the theology of the hundredfold return, one often thinks of multiplying the original seed sown by one hundred, but the expectation is that it can be exceedingly greater than that. Put more correctly, a hundredfold return teaching is literally based on the highest possible return on any specific money given. For instance, to get a hundredfold return on a mango tree would mean the harvest of a fruitful mango tree with abundance of seeds. The perception is that when Christians give in expectation of the hundredfold return, they believe that God will return the highest possible harvest on every amount of money they give.

The theology of a hundredfold harvest is backed up with Genesis 8:22, wherein the Christian Bible opines, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). Prosperity gospel preachers think that by engaging in provocative giving, sowing great seeds, they will have abundant harvest that will manifest in material forms in terms of all-round blessings. They are assured that in the divine plan of God, their giving to the church is accounted as a loan that will be rewarded in full by the ultimate God. In this theology, giving is a means to overcoming one's problems in life. What is intended is that once the giver fulfils his part of the giving, God is under obligation to bless, and divinely solve all contextual difficulties such as sickness, barrenness, unemployment,

insecurity, road accident, and poverty. Mr C (anonymised name), expresses this spirituality, when he asserts:

Whenever I give to God, I expect Him to bless me in hundredfold return. I usually sow seed to God for specific reasons. If am trusting God for a car, I sow a seed towards it, if am trusting God for a job, I sow a seed towards it, and it has worked for me (Mr C, personal interview, September 3, 2019).

Thus, one can sow a seed to fight poverty; one can sow a seed for healing or safety and one can sow a seed of prosperity. The bottom line is that the Christian should expect a multiplied turnover of material dividends from his act of charity. The implication of this sacred duty is that giving is perceived as transactional. In a transactional relationship, the parties involved exchange money, goods, and services. The exchange is based on business venture and mutual benefits. In a transactional relationship, parties are bonded because of what they stand to benefit from the union. Thus, the hundredfold return doctrine presupposes a context where God is under obligation to act on behalf of the devotee once the devotee fulfils the transactional elements of giving. Referencing the actual words of Mr Shoulder (not real name) in one of the interviews to conclude this section is important here:

You may be asking for may be good health; you may be asking for good education, wisdom, so sowing of a seed can easily provoke God to impact these things on you (Mr Shoulder, personal interview, September 30, 2019).

16.4. The Nicomachean ethics

The transactional undertone in prosperity provocative giving can be likened to the idea expressed in Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics" (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E./2019). Aristotle acknowledges three variants of relationships that

individuals engage in under different circumstances. He outlines three types of friendships – utility friendship, pleasure friendship, and perfect friendship. There are those who get engaged in a relationship for utility reasons, courtesy of the virtue of some benefits each party gets from the union. Take away that benefit, the union collapses. It is the same with those who cherish a union for the sake of pleasure. It may not be in their nature to love, but they get entangled based on what they stand to derive. When the pleasure each derives is taken away, the union collapses. Aristotle opines that a union of utility and pleasure are intertwined in that they are short-lived. They expire at the disappearance or withdrawal of the benefits.

Aristotle also recognises the third form of friendship – the perfect relationship. He contends that in this kind of union, people involved, and their qualities provide the driving force for the sustainability of the interaction. In other words, this kind of relationship is not based on benefits, or what one party can do for the other. It simply exists based on value both parties placed on each other. This type of union is likened to a relational relationship where the interaction between the Christian and his God is purely on virtues and character. The Christian may decide to give not because of material benefits, but because of who God is in terms of His omnipotence, omnipresence, incorruptibility, eternity, loving-kindness, or unfailing love. God in return loves the believer not based on what the believer can offer in terms of monetary giving. This perfect union was demonstrated when God whose character is love showed to humanity that He could love a rebellious world by coming into humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. God's action of love was not based on what He could gain, but it was based on His character of love.

In this narrative, it is not out of place to liken the prosperity gospel provocative giving ideology to Aristotle's utility and pleasure relationships as they show concrete similarities. The believer's giving is propelled by the material blessings he stands to derive from God. And God having benefited from the believer's gifts is expected to bless the giver. Mr Shoulder (not real name) expresses this belief:

Now if you read your Bible and you find out that sowing a seed is good and you make up your mind and you follow that step, there is a blessing attached to that one, and you will receive that blessing (Mr Shoulder, personal interview, September 30, 2019).

Thus, the Christian's money is traded for material prosperity. This implies a few things: that God's blessings are purely materialistic; that God's blessings are for the rich who can give a bountiful offering; that God's material prosperity can be bought with money. It also reduces God to a level of a puppet that can be manipulated by the believer's material giving.

In prosperity gospel provocative giving, it is obvious that the measure of one's material success is tied to how much one gives. This means, the goal of giving is about what the individual can give to God, and what God can give in return. From this standpoint, it is obvious that the prosperity gospel provocative giving practice negates Aristotle's idea of a perfect relationship that celebrates sacrificial giving, virtue, and character. This is because, a perfect relationship is sacrificial – no mutual gains are attached, as it operates on the wheels of virtue and character. In this vein, the Christian's attachment to God becomes stronger in the absence of material gains. However, in transactional relationship, or utility and pleasure relationships, the Christian attachment to God is entirely dependent on what he stands to gain. It then becomes a commercialised relationship. Responding to questions asked by the researcher, Venerable Cat

(not real name), a prominent minister of one of the Anglican churches in Nigeria, agrees with this opinion, when he says:

We should relate well with God and not based on transactional relation, because if you approach God based of wealth; you are not a true worshipper (Ven Cat, personal interview, September 15, 2019).

16.5. The sales of indulgences

This is not the first time a commercial theology is espoused by the church. The commercialisation of the doctrine of indulgence by the Western Medieval Church was a typical example. Due to prevailing differences in the theology of salvation espoused by the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Medieval Church, the doctrine of indulgence did not surface in the Eastern Orthodox teachings. However, a few Eastern Orthodox churches had a comparable practice wherein an absolution certificates were issued to Christians to absolve sins (Ekelund, et al 1996).

On the other hand, the Medieval Western Roman Catholic Church propagated the concept of indulgence. There were factors that allowed the practice of indulgence to emerge. Firstly, Christians were made to understand that after death, they would be subjected to eternal damnation for their accumulated sins while on earth (eternal punishment). Secondly, the concept of purgatory emerged as a sacred system that could help reduce the effects of one's mortal sins. Instead of being condemned to eternal damnation in hell, the individual had the option of going to purgatory, a place of temporal punishment and suffering, to mitigate the effects of sin, until freedom is attained (Ekelund, et al 1996).

Punishment was said to be temporal or eternal. Temporal punishment was believed to be that which affected Christian while in purgatory, and eternal punishment on the other hand, was believed to be everlasting. The doctrine of purgatory presupposes that even though in the sacrament of reconciliation, Christians were forgiven of their mortal sins (sins committed through free choice) and released from eternal damnation, their temporal punishment was still not displaceable (Ekelund, Hebert, & Tollison, 1992). This system created a celestial platform by which sinners had the choice of reducing their punishments. As the idea of purgatory flourished, the Pope authorised Bishops to reduce the penance of sinners based on the good work they had performed while alive. It was upon this background of mortal sin, and purgatory, that the doctrine of indulgence from the Latin word, “*indulgentia*,” which comes from *indulgeō*, meaning “permit,” was formulated as mechanism for reducing the amount of temporal punishment one has to undergo in purgatory (Walls, 2011 & Hershenov, & Hershenov, 2017).

Thus, the doctrine of indulgences rested on three notions. Firstly, that in the sacrament of penance, absolution alone could not remove the culpa (guilt) of sin; and that the adherent would need to undergo some form of temporal punishment, or penance (*poena*, *poenitentia*), in that the adherent had sinned against God. Secondly, the practice of indulgences was based on the doctrine of purgatory, a place in the hereafter, where accumulated sins are cancelled. Thirdly, that one's punishment could be cancelled through engaging in good works, such as material donations, pilgrimage, or prayers. The doctrine of indulgence created a belief system, where God, the believer, and sin, were at the centre of Roman Catholic theology. (Hershenov, & Hershenov, 2017).

In 1095, Pope Urban II, formally endorsed the practice of indulgence in the Council of Clermont (Oswald, 1950). Christians were urged to perform adequate good works to acquire a full or partial indulgence from the Pope, or his subordinates to erase their wrongdoings and punishments. Partial indulgences covered a smaller amount, and the church developed complicated systems, wherein it claimed to have been able to calculate daily sins and how much have been cancelled (Oswald, 1950). During the Crusades, Pope Urban II, used the doctrine of indulgence to woo people, promising that people could join the war in return for the cancellation of their sins. People who could not join the crusades, wondered if there was any avenue that could allow them to buy their indulgence. So, the sale of indulgence began (Housley, 1980). In 1476, a decree was made by Pope Sixtus IV that people who were alive could buy indulgences for their dead ones in purgatory. In 1517, indulgences were sold by Pope Leo X for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica, Rome. As the doctrine of the sale of indulgence became so popular and successful, both church and governments got involved and took a fraction of the income for their own use. As the practice of selling forgiveness became widespread, the rich were able to buy indulgences for their dead ones such as family members and friends. Thus, the gospel was commercialised (Ekelund, Hebert, & Tollison, 1992 & Ekelund, et al 1996).

It is this commercialisation of the gospel through the doctrine of indulgence that has similarity with the prosperity gospel provocative giving practices. To have access to the abundant blessings of God, the worshipper is summoned to a union where he must commit his material income for material gains. This reality is echoed by Mr A during an interview session:

When I pay my tithes, the window of heaven is opened for me, and my business start growing with many customers buying from me (Mr A, personal interview, September 10, 2019).

Supporting this claim, Mr shoulder (not real name) says:

Now if I need to sow a seed and I make up my mind and it pains me, as I sow that seed, I believe that whatever thing I am looking for, I will get it (Mr Shoulder, personal interview, September 30, 2019).

The expectation of this spirituality is that to succeed in business one must give; to be healed of ailments, one must provoke God to act by sowing a special seed; to travel through a bad road, one must sow a seed of safe journey for divine protection; to succeed in a job interview, one must sow seed of success. To overcome financial lack, one must consistently engage in giving. In return, God is said to be happy with the giver, and comes under obligation to carry out the giver's wishes.

Fundamentally, to drive home this sacred doctrine of provocative giving, and solidly ingrain it in the hearts of adherents, promoters lean on divine authorisation and infallibility. As observed by the researcher during one of the Sunday services attended, phrases depicting divine claims such as, "Thus says the Lord," "God told me," "Jesus appeared to me," "God said, you should sow a miracle seed," are utilised to convince followers. The implication of this prosperity gospel spirituality is the reliance on dogmatic theology, in which reason is religiously conquered, adherents sacredly colonised to create a platform for religious and economic benefits of the church. In this persuasion, Mr Settle (anonymised name), a member of the Anglican church posits:

It has become to so many prosperity preachers of the gospel as a medium to amass wealth for selfish purpose in various ways (Mrs Settle, personal interview, September 18, 2019).

16.6. Conclusion

The prosperity gospel promoters utilise a language of transaction and economy in espousing their doctrine of giving. They base this lexicon on a transactional union. The doctrine of provocative giving defines prosperity through a transactional union with the sacred, employing the language of a commercial venture, while identifying with the prevailing social-economic reality. They swing the pendulum between the social-economic reality to which they live, and the divine to which they turn for succour. Thus, they believe that for one to overcome the prevailing human sufferings, one must enter a transactional union with God. Within this union, one must give to fulfil his part of the transactional elements, and God in return, must bless the giver in a hundredfold.

PART IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS (II)

This section contains three chapters (chapters seventeen to nineteen). These chapters examine the impacts of prosperity gospel on social-economic challenges. In these chapters, three theories are used to analyse data: the Weberian, the Marshmallow and the Marxist theories. Firstly, the Weberian hypothesis proposes that religious ideologies have correlation with social-economic prosperity of a nation. It assumes that the capitalist spirit in Europe was propelled by certain religious ethics propagated by the protestants. Such ethics included hard work, responsibility, innovation, honesty, and entrepreneurial skills. I posit in this thesis that the prosperity doctrine does not imbibe the Weberian work ethics, and therefore, lacks the capacity to propel industrial revolution that can bring about material prosperity.

Secondly, the Marshmallow theory details the impacts of delayed gratification on personal achievement in life. I propose in this thesis that the prosperity gospel encourages a quick fix mentality instead of a delayed gratification. I maintain that a shortcut theology though can provide an immediate gratification but cannot propel a lasting material prosperity. Thirdly, the Marxist hypothesis explains a capitalist society in terms of a struggle between two classes – between the ‘bourgeoisie’ (the capitalist, or those who hold the means of production), and the ‘proletariat’ (wageworkers, or those who sell their power of labour to survive). The class war is rooted in a situation where the bourgeoisie such as the business, factory and industry owners, exercise enormous power over the proletariat such as peasant labourers, and the bourgeoisie uses such control to exploit the proletariat by paying them low wages to maximise gains. It presupposes that this exploitative tendency creates an economic structure, where inequality is entrenched. The research findings demonstrates that the

prosperity gospel does not practically solve material crisis, rather it only supplies an emotional spirituality, which helps adherent to cope, while the harsh realities persist.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE WEBERIAN THEORY

17.1. Introduction

Prosperity gospel has become a popular religious phenomenon in Africa. It has also mapped out its own way of dealing with existential challenges wherever it finds itself. In Nigeria, the responses of the prosperity preaching to social-economic challenges are quite unique – rhematisation, exorcism, pneumatic regeneration, redemptive soteriology, die by fire, spiritualised items, charismatic prophetism, and provocative giving. Despite these radical claims of fighting material adversities, official statistics suggests that social-economic woes such as poverty, unemployment, road accidents, short lifespan, diseases, poor medical facilities and still persistent. The official statistics of these social-economic challenges are explored in detail in chapter three.

It is obvious that amid a growing amount of prosperity gospel ideology, there is a growing rate of social-economic challenges. The prosperity gospel is not enough to make people wealthy. If it is, certainly, Nigeria would have been one of the most stable and leading economies in the world. What then is the missing link? Where does the notion that there is a link between religious ideology and material prosperity emanate from? And why is the correlation in reverse gear in Nigeria?

In this chapter, I will focus on the Weberian hypothesis.

17.2 Identifying the missing link

To identify the missing link, I refer in this chapter to the Weberian hypothesis. It was Max Weber, a German philosophical, political, and economic thinker that first linked religious ideology with social-economic prosperity in his book, “The

Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism” (Weber, 1905). Weber proposes that the protestant ideology basically built the dominant capitalist system as it is today. He believes that the contents of the protestant theology emphasised work ethics such as responsibility, hard work, innovation, creativity, and sincerity that propelled a capitalist spirit in Europe. He maintains that it was this capitalist spirit that was a springboard to the European industrial revolution. Weber draws his inspiration from Martin Luther’s idea of “one's calling” (Luther, 2018) and Calvinist doctrine of “predestination” (Calvin, 1953). Martin Luther, who was the arrowhead of the protestant reformative revivalism, birthed the doctrine of “one’s calling,” which was popular among protestant Christians (Luther, 2018). While the Roman Catholics proposed moral neutrality in one’s occupation, and directed their spirituality towards a monastic tendency, Luther on the other hand, opposed a monastic spirituality, in that it is confined to a secluded life, and that it alienates the Christian from the reality of his material environment (Luther, 2018). Luther argued that the Christian’s secular assignment is his calling – his sacred task, since by providence, God has saddled him with such responsibility. Luther maintained that the best service the Christian could render to God was to work hard in his secular occupation.

Calvinism borrowed from Luther’s doctrine of one's calling, proposing that a believer, whom God has predestined to be saved, will demonstrate their salvific status by engaging in a lifestyle that is diligent and pious (Calvin, 1953). Linking this to Luther’s doctrine of one's calling, this presupposes that the Christian must be morally upright and work hard in his secular job as his evidence of salvation. The goal of the Calvinists was to live a moral life, shun emotionalism, and embrace a practical and methodical lifestyle (Calvin, 2017). This ideology thus made them to be hard-working, diligent, and entrepreneurial. Therefore, according to Weber (1905), it was these work ethics that created the capitalist

mind-set among the protestants, which further triggered the industrial revolution in Europe. Weber contends that if one should evaluate the occupational data of Europe, specifically Germany, one will discover that business owners, skilled workers, and other technical workers of the labour market, were largely protestants.

The Weberian hypothesis suggests that the number of protestant students who acquired entrepreneurial, industrial, and technical education was greater than that of the Roman Catholics. While the Roman Catholics drifted more towards crafts, and as they became craftsmen, the protestants drifted towards skilled labour, thus becoming upper-rank technical industry workers (Weber, 1905). According to Weber, this distinction in the occupational configuration is a product of the teachings the protestants received from their religious affiliation. The protestants incorporated elements such as hard work, innovation, entrepreneurial skills, and technical education into their theological formulations. Resulting from religious beliefs, the protestants demonstrated more economic involvement and development, when juxtaposed with the Roman Catholic worshippers, who embraced moral neutrality and asceticism. Weber describes the spirit of capitalism as the motivation to consistently work hard in building more prosperity. So, the nexus of Weber's assertion is that only the capitalist spirit is capable of propelling material wealth, and that it is strongly linked with religious beliefs.

How does one then explain the prevalence of prosperity theology without prosperity in Nigeria? To find the missing link, one must investigate whether the Nigerian prosperity gospel celebrates the protestant work ethics that propel the spirit of capitalism in Weber's hypothesis. Simply put, is there a link between the

Nigerian prosperity gospel spirituality and the elements that propels a market economy or a developmental stride?

First, Weber's protestant ethic encourages people to get engaged in work in the secular world; to work hard to create business opportunities; and to develop enterprising and investment spirit. What it means is that the protestant ethic motivates people toward creativity, innovation, and competitiveness. Anybody that does not imbibe these creative and competitive mind-sets is thrown out of the job market. However, in the prosperity gospel ethic, there is an increasing demonstration of a collective and an individual surrender of human freedom of choice to divine interventionism and unmitigated miracles. The Christian is motivated towards the culture of miracles, and the possibility and reality of an unending interference of divine entities. An interviewee, Mrs Settle (anonymised name), observes this about the Nigerian prosperity gospel:

People now sit down thinking that God is a magician that because they have gone to church to sow seed to an anointed man of God, anointed man of God that has the anointing to attract wealth, the anointing to bring wealth, has prayed for them and they now go home to sit down (Mrs Settle, personal interview, September 18, 2019).

Here, superstitious belief takes over reason and logic. Every believer is encouraged to have a “man of God” or a “prophet” in his life, who directs his actions in terms of what to do, how to do it, when not to do it, and where to go, and when not to go, thereby diminishing his talent, competence, ability as he surrenders his free will to sacred powers. To this end, the believer’s hard-working spirit diminishes, hoping that divine help is inevitable. This ethic breeds laziness rather than hard work. Ven. Cat (not real name) has this to say:

It is not achieving it rather is adding more problem because it diverts the focus of people from dignity of labour. When you labour, you have benefits and there is even fear our future generation will forbids to work. They will think God will throw everything overnight for them (Ven Cat, personal interview, September 15, 2019).

This prosperity gospel ideology contravenes not only the spirit of capitalism, but also, biblical injunctions. For example, the Christian Bible admonishes: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). In the parable of the talents, the master rebuked the servant with one talent, who buried his money instead of doing business with it before the master came back (Mathew 25:18). Apostle Paul also cautions that anyone who does not want to work should not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). These are unambiguous premises that God is against the spirit of laziness, idleness, and unproductiveness. These provisions assume that one should work hard, save, and invest.

The second point is: Weber’s spirit of capitalism has a moral underpinning. The capitalist spirit may be interpreted as the greed to acquire more, but it is a greedy tendency with a moral compass. Here, it implies that the exploitative tendency of capitalism, recognised by Karl Max (2013), in his theory of “exploitation,” should be discouraged. Weber submits that there are moral rules upon which the capitalist spirit operates and the individual who contravenes them is sacked from the economic scene. What it means is that apart from elements such as hard work, creativity, competitiveness, innovation, and diligence, the capitalist spirit also operates with such virtues as honesty, truth, and sincerity. And in doing business, one is expected to act with truth and honesty. In other words, the capitalist spirit envisages a situation where practical reality saturates the market economy. It means where there are

practical issues, like corruption, greed, immediate gratification, dishonesty, and exploitation, the spirit of capitalism cannot thrive, in that there will be no ease of doing business. This inalienable reality is also highlighted in, “The Wealth of Nations,” where Adam Smith propounded the theory of “Moral Sentiments (Smith, 1761). Drawing on this theory, Weber believes that the spirit of capitalism compels the market player to adhere to the capitalist operational ethics, and that any entrepreneur who contravenes these rules will be forced out of the economic scene. This implies that the spirit of capitalism is a respecter of no one, and a no-nonsense ideology. Only those who follow the capitalist ethic can prosper in the long run. Thus, the missing link here, is that the prosperity gospel ethic not only encourages people to wait for God to do what they can do for themselves but encourages a short cut to material prosperity through over-reliance on miracle. This postulation is evident in Ven. Cat's words:

And also, it somehow provokes or stirs up the spirit of fraud, the spirit 419. There are many stories of people who have defrauded their organisation in order to sow seed in order for God to double it for them (Ven Cat, personal interview, September 15, 2019).

From Ven Cat's suggestion, it is presumed that the theology of quick fix encourages corruption and exploitation, and where corrupt practices holds sway, the moral compass of the Weberian hypothesis is attacked. And it reduces the ease of doing business. And where businesses do not thrive, there will be poverty.

The third point is: Weber's “Protestant Ethic” envisages piety in the discharge of one's secular calling. It calls on the believer to express moral virtues that strive for the betterment of a society rather than individual benefit. Adopting the notion of Weber, it is therefore incumbent upon political leaders who find

themselves in a leadership position in society to be pious in providing good governance to the citizenry. In this vein, Afegbua (2012) understands good governance as a leadership system in which leaders or concerned authorities engage in prudent management of a nation's natural, social, as well as economic resources, to bring about development that will improve the life of the citizenry. In this persuasion, good governance is the management and organisation of legitimate power structures and systems that will provide for the prosperity and basic needs of citizens. Dividends of good governance include – law and order, rule of law, due process, justice, equity, welfare, and protection of life and property. Good governance and provision of basic amenities are preconditions that allow for social-economic development. Thus, it is right to contend that there is a strong connection between development and pious leadership, or to put it more succinctly, bad leadership and underdevelopment (Nwabueze, 2018).

The Nigerian prosperity ideology focuses on material gains without creating a moral framework within which material possession are achieved. Hearing from Mr Teeth (not real name), a member of the Anglican Church, who has experienced the Nigerian prosperity gospel will suffice here:

It makes the people of nowadays not only but commercialising the gospel.... Then two, the quest for materialism has actually made these preachers lost focus of the gospel. People are no more willing to condemn what should be condemned. They are not concerned about the salvation of souls; they are concerned about what they get (Mr Teeth, personal interview, September 21, 2019).

This implies that material results are given priority and are celebrated irrespective of the means through which they are achieved. This implies that if a political leader, in his secular calling, engages in embezzlement of public funds

for personal prosperity, in the eyes of the populace, he is regarded as a successful person, even though the means through which his wealth is acquired is corrupt. Therefore, so long as prosperity gospel does not attack, head-on, illicit means of gaining wealth, it emboldens corrupt practices, not just among political office holders, but among the citizenries. This sentiment is also shared by Mr Shoulder (not real name), during an interview:

Sometimes, your so-called governors, they do so many bad things and at the end of the day, there are some Pastors, Reverends you so trust. The so-called governors will go under their church and the so-called Pastors will tell them, it is well with you, go live long governor (Mr Shoulder, personal interview, September 30, 2019).

In 2002, Nigerians learned of one Mr Lawrence Agada, a cashier, who was alleged to have defrauded Sharaton Hotel, Lagos, by thirty-nine million Nigerian naira (NewsWireNGR, 2021). He was alleged to have given the lion's share of the stolen money as a seed-faith to one of the branches of Christ Embassy. His generous gesture was applauded so much so that Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the founder, and head of the ministry, was said to have sent a letter to commend him for his good work, without investigating the source of such huge donation. No one deemed it necessary to find out how a cashier could have acquired such an outrageous amount of money. Also, one Mr Maxwell Odum, the CEO of MBA Forex & Capital Investment, donated the sum of one hundred and seventy-one billion Nigerian naira and was recognised as the highest donor to Christ Embassy in 2020 (NewsWireNGR, 2021). He was apprehended for embezzlement of one hundred and seventy-one billion naira of investors' funds in April 2021. In 2003, Eco Bank was defrauded of forty million naira by one Mr Gbenga Kehinde, an assistant manager, who was working with the bank. Kehinde was a member of

one of the branches of Christ Embassy, where he was alleged to have received a prophecy of a miraculous financial breakthrough. Before he got into the police net, he was alleged to have donated ten million of the stolen money to the church as tithes.

Supporting the notion that the Nigerian prosperity theology can encourage corrupts practices, Aribisala (2012) observes that a visit to the Nigerian mega-churches will convince one that corrupt political elites, who have robbed the nation of social-economic and social-political development, are often given front-row seats. Even though people may know that the political elites engage in thievery, they are often honoured with reserved seats as special guests. Aribisala maintains that sermons are craftily worded so that they are not offended. To this end, I suggest that Mega-pastors hardly follow in the footsteps of Prophet Nathan, who called king David to repentance, or Prophet Samuel, who confronted the greed and disobedience of King Saul, or John the Baptist, who called King Herod to repentance (2 Samuel 7:2–17, 12:1–25; 1 Samuel 1-15; Mark 6:15-29). Contrarily, when corrupt political leaders come to church, they are given the microphone to address the members of the church, while seeking political offices. Therefore, Ven Cat (not real name) provides:

One thing is this, for now, Nigeria is not poor in the real sense, we have all the resources, all the resources that can make us live well. Our problem is leadership, that is all. I don't think prosperity gospel can solve the problem of leadership, which is the major handicap of this country (Ven Cat, personal interview, September 15, 2019)

Thus, while the protestant ethic applauds moral value, and is concerned about how one can achieve prosperity through legitimate means, the prosperity gospel is concerned with how one achieves prosperity through a quick fix. This moral

lacuna supports corrupt tendencies, as sinners are not called to repentance. Money meant for social welfare, societal development, the creation of employment, the building of good road networks, are diverted into individual pockets, thereby creating more hardship within the society. The Nigerian prosperity ideology misses the moral flavour and catalysts that can trigger the development of a viable capitalistic society.

The prosperity gospel responses to the poverty situation in Nigeria will be considered as flawed as it fails to have a positive impact on political leadership. The Biblical saying, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is reproach” (Proverbs 14:34), is very apt here. Biblically, prosperity has also been linked to injunctions such as righteousness, honesty, obedience, and humanitarian disposition towards the poor. Nigeria as a nation cannot be described as a righteous nation, in that it tolerates injustice, the abuse of power, lawlessness, oppression, and corruption. This moral dysfunctionality is against the spirit of development and progress. Scholars such as Whittier, Williams & Dewett (2006) have agreed that morality has positive impacts on human behaviour and decision making. This opinion supports Ugwuegbe (2002) who claims that there are three steps in human ethical decision making – moral consciousness, judgement, and behaviour. This implies that religious teaching should be able to instil a moral awareness and remind the individual of the implication of his action. It is this moral consciousness that helps the individual to make the right judgement, and it is the right judgement that directs one's behaviour. Thus, any religious spirituality that does not accommodate these three ethical elements cannot provoke the spirit of capitalism.

17.3. Conclusion

This chapter shows that the Weberian proposal links religious values to societal development. It proposes that the protestants teaching created certain religious beliefs that were catalysts to the industrial revolution in Europe. The protestant values propagated realistic methods of solving problems. Ethics such as hard work, honesty, perseverance, righteousness, humanitarian assistance, creativity, and innovation, which underpinned any progressive society, were emphasised by the protestants. The resultant effect of such realistic spirituality was the rise of the spirit of capitalism and the emergence of the industrial revolution.

The chapter also juxtaposes Weber's theory with the Nigerian situation. The finding demonstrates that the content of the prosperity preaching lacks basic reality that may trigger proper capitalist mind-set and industrialisation. The prosperity teaching is centred on divine entities rather than the structure and system that create human suffering. Therefore, instead of motivating people to face reality, it motivates adherents to be docile as they expect a conquering entity that will miraculously stop all human woes.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: THE MARSHMALLOW THEORY

18.1. Introduction

In 1972, Walter Mischel, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, conducted research on a delayed gratification, using children between the age of four and five (Mischel & Ebbesen, 1970). Mischel and his team kept the children in a room and gave each of the children a marshmallow with a promise that they were leaving the room for fifteen minutes, and that any child who did not eat his marshmallow before they came back would get a second one as a reward for waiting. However, any child that would eat his marshmallow, before the researchers' return, would forfeit the second one. What it meant was that, to get two marshmallows, the child had to delay his immediate gratification by not eating the first one. Thus, when the researchers left the room, it was left with just the children and their marshmallows.

As the footage of the scene was watched later, the researchers observed the different behavioural patterns and facial expressions the children expressed, while trying to resist the urge to eat their marshmallow. Some ate the marshmallow straight away as soon as the researchers left, not minding the effects or the instruction they were given. Others stared at the marshmallow as they were engulfed with an internal contention between instant reward and delayed reward. While most of the children were unable to resist the urge to eat their first marshmallow, a few were able to delay their gratification by waiting till the researchers returned in order to have a second one. After many years, and as the children have grown up, the researchers embarked on investigating the impacts of such behaviour (delayed gratification) by tracking each child's progress in life. Mischel and his team discovered that the children who opted for the second marshmallow by delaying gratification had higher grades in

school, better social adjustment, and better successes in a range of issues in life. In this chapter, I will discuss the impacts of prosperity gospel, using the marshmallow hypothesis.

18.2. Instant gratification

I will define instant gratification as that urge to forfeit a greater reward for instant satisfaction. Instant gratification is that impulse to get it now rather than later. Having investigated the responses of the prosperity gospel theology to existential challenges, I will propose that its contents are saturated with promises of instant gratification. Whether rhematisation, charismatic prophetism, sacralised items, redemptive soteriology, or exorcism, the focal point is how to implore divine forces to bring about a miraculous prosperity. Therefore, I will call the prosperity gospel, the theology of instant gratification. It is a doctrine that has the potential to create a quick fix mentality among adherents. The incessant emphasis on miracles, divine intervention, and breakthrough, by purveyors of prosperity gospel, focuses the mind of the adherents on what they can get instantly without going through the procedures and processes of achieving it. Mrs Settle's (anonymised name) revelation is apt here:

Take for instance, I have no job, no trade, and you tell me your God is the God of miracle, believe in Him and He will prosper you. I have heard and I laugh it off that people now receive miracle alert, no business transaction, nothing, nothing, from where? (Mrs Settle, personal interview, September 18, 2019).

What it implies for the adherents is that if God can do it why should one go through the procedures and processes of getting it. That is why adherents can give money so that it can be doubled by God. That is why adherents can take

home from the church such items as water, oil, handkerchief, and wristband, in order to achieve prosperity. To this end, the effects of prosperity preaching is grave. There is the tendency that those who have imbibed this culture of instant gratification are vulnerable to engaging in dubious acts, such as corruption, bribery, theft, or quid pro quo to satisfy their immediate thirst. The danger is that prosperity gospel devalues the dignity of labour and production. This truth is suggested in the words of Mrs Settle (anonymised name), one of the interviewees:

...Until we will go back to practical theology, teaching the people hard-work, integrity, innovation, and the rest of them, it will never add value, it will never bring anything good to the society (Mr Settles, personal interview, September 18, 2019).

Adherents are summoned to just name and claim whatever they want. If Christian preaching does not emphasise the importance of perseverance, diligence, and hard work, it breeds a generation of lazy and indolent people, who will want to opt for a shortcut as mechanism of attaining material success. This creates the possibility of economic troubles rather than engaging in creativity and practical actions that underpin social-economic progress. People will spend productive hour in church praying and expecting a miracle. Mrs Settle maintains that:

...It will destroy science and technology. There are young people, who are no longer interested in education, they believe that the man of God is their God, once they come in contact with him, that is all, life will be easy (Mrs Settle, personal interview, September 18, 2019).

For instance, the over-reliance on the utopian theology of healing, poses serious health concerns. While the spontaneous intervention of God in the affairs of humans cannot be wished away, this should not be taken as a realistic mechanism for solving daily health challenges. When people are made to believe that healing resides in the church and with prosperity gospel preachers, and not in the hospital or with the doctors, there will be a danger of people dying from an ailment that should have been handled medically. When worshippers are invited for a healing campaign, instead of a medical outreach, then there is evidence to believe that people are encouraged to seek instant miracles, instead of a more practical, stable, reliable, and practical medical procedure. Therefore, despite the radical claims of the prosperity preaching, the health statistics in Nigeria are not encouraging. In the 1970s, the average life expectancy for women was 36.7 years and that of men was 37.2 years. There was an improvement by 2011. For women, these statistics increased from 36.7 to 55.3, and for men, it increased from 37.2 to 48.9. The current life expectancy in Nigeria stands at 54.07 years. This is due to improvement in quality of medical care. However, the life expectancy of the country is still ranked 16th in Africa and 216th in the world. This ranking is very poor when compared with country that do not rely greatly on miracles. In European countries such as Spain, Iceland and Switzerland, life expectancy is 82 years, and in China and Japan, it stands at 83-84 years respectively (Osibogun, 2004 & Nigeria Health Watch, 2020).

Of all the 11% global maternal death, Africa has more than 1%, while developed nations have less than 1%. According to World Health Organization (WHO), Nigeria accounts for about 14 % of maternal mortality globally – this was among the highest in the world in 2010. As of 2015, Nigeria had a maternal mortality ratio of about eight hundred and fourteen per one hundred thousand live births (Sageer et al., 2019).

In sub-Saharan Africa, malaria, typhoid, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis diseases constitute a public health care challenge that has continued to mount pressure and weaken public health care services. Malaria infection constitutes a great health challenge in Africa. Of the three hundred to four hundred million acute infections that are recorded globally each year, more than 75% of the cases and deaths are in Tropical Africa. Malaria infection has become one of the leading reasons for out-patient visits to health care providers, clinics, and hospitals. It has also been documented as one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the country. Records reveal that at least 50% of the Nigerian population goes down with at least one quota of malaria infection each year. Malaria infection is said to account for nearly 45% of all out-patient visit to health care providers (Okwa, 2019). Similarly, more than two billion people are infected with tuberculosis globally: this is one third of the population of the world. Between two hundred and fifty and three hundred thousand cases are recorded in Nigeria in 2007, of which 50% are smear positive. Globally, the country with the fourth highest number of cases of tuberculosis in 2007 was Nigeria (Umeokonkwo et al., 2019). One of the reasons for the poor health statistics in Nigeria has been identified as poor health care facilities. Greater improvements could have been achieved if the prosperity gospel pays greater attention to long-term gains of building hospital instead of mega churches and instant miracle centres. This sentiment is also shared by Dr Zero (not real name), a medical practitioner, during an interview session:

If you see the camp sites we have, if you see the cathedrals we are building, somebody built a cathedral with seven billion, and we go to India for kidney transplant and simple plastic surgery. Assuming that money was used to build a teaching hospital that can do, some of the best doctors in the world are my classmates, assuming we use it to build hospital, seven billion, and we have a

thousand beds, nearly every day one thousand people will be in attendance, plus about five hundred to eight hundred workers. So, you will have nearly two thousand people, plus their relatives that are taking care of them.... It will cause employment, and it will save us foreign exchange (Dr Zero, personal interview, September 22, 2019).

With standard hospital, more health issues will be solved in the long-term, rather than instant supernatural healing. Greater health challenges will be tackled practically if the church emphasises the need for a practical theology. There will be more treatment and healing if the prosperity preaching churches build a state-of-the-art hospital with modern medical equipment and employ trained medical experts that can treat various diseases.

Giving another example, as intimated already, prosperity gospel adherents believe having a safe trip is the responsibility of God. That is why a special prayer for journey mercies and safe arrival are sought after from one's prophets or pastor. Some go as far as sowing seeds of safe trip (traveller's seed), others stick an anointed sticker on their car windscreen to enable a safe journey. However, amid these divine claims by the proponents of prosperity gospel, the Nigerian statistics for road accidents are not encouraging. The overall rate of road traffic crashes in Nigeria is estimated at 41 per 1,000 people with mortality rate of about 1.6 per 1,000 people yearly. Various factors such as driver skills, vehicle conditions, roadway characteristics, weather conditions, bad road, speed violation, sleeping on steering, lack of concentration, careless driving, loss of control, mechanical factor, road obstruction, drunkenness, and traffic rules violations such as overloading or wrong overtaking, are hazards contributing to road traffic accidents (Detho et al., 2019, Alkali, 2019, Akinyemi et al., 2019, Iyanda, 2019 & Anebonam et al., 2019). This goes to show that the causes of

road accidents are not spiritual entities, but practical issues. Thus, to drive safely, one does not need a divine agent. The traveller only needs a good road network, good traffic signs, and good traffic rules and a system where offenders are punished. Thus, instead of opting for a shortcut theology, it will be more profitable to opt for the pains of creating a workable system. And to create workable systems, structures, and processes, one needs the ethics of delayed gratification. However, the ideology of delayed gratification does not emerge overnight, it is a product of consistent preaching and must be embedded into the Christian doctrine that the church formulates. The theologies that come out of the church can influence societal values. Theology should create the awareness of cause and effect. One must sow and wait for the harvest. One cannot sow and reap the same day. A child learns first how to sit, crawl, and stand before running. These processes cannot happen the same day, as the prosperity gospel makes people to believe. One cannot skip tested procedures instantly and expect the needed results. Thus, any society that imbibes the culture of quick fix will be economically poor, in that citizens will be avoiding labour, but expecting prosperity, and will be expecting food items without planting crops.

In a context where the sense of immediate gratification prevails over delayed gratification, there is the tendency for labourers to be attracted by an immediate route to material gains, instead of equitably, honestly, and justly discharging their duties. The sense of patriotism and the necessity of building a developed and working society will be easily traded for immediate satisfaction. For instance, money budgeted for road construction can be embezzled, with resultant effects of road accidents that can lead to the death of innocent road users. A civil engineer can compromise building standard for immediate financial profits and the resultant effects can lead to building collapse and death of

innocent civilians. The gospel of instant gratification, if popularised within a society, citizens can pick up arms and kill fellow citizens to satisfy their instant desires. King Ahab, killed Naboth, when he attempted to satisfy his unbridled desire for lands. King David had carnal knowledge of Bathsheba to satisfy his sexual lust, and in a bid to cover his sin, he ordered the killing of the husband, Uriah (1King 21:1-16 & 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 12:15-19).

Reitano (2018) has already linked crime to underdevelopment in Nigeria. Reitano suggests that crime is a destabiliser of social-economic development, and that it retards psychological wellbeing. It brings about social upheavals. The danger of the prosperity preaching is that it focuses the attention of the hearer on what to get instead of what to give to better the society. It is this motivation to gather wealth inordinately for selfish aggrandisement that leads to societal ills. The urge to for instant profits, makes a society to be susceptible to social vices.

18.3. Conclusion

The Marshmallow theory explains the human desire for a quick fix solution to human problems. As it has shown, a quick solution is not always the best and appears to be delusional. The prosperity gospel response to contextual challenges in Nigeria is delusional in that it lays undue emphasis on a quick fix, rather than cause and effect. The lack of an empirical approach, where delayed gratification is the watch word in solving social-economic challenges, poses a grave danger to any growing society. Citizens will think the end justifies the means. Decorum will be thrown to the wind, and people will be engrossed with corrupt and anti-social means of achieving success.

The contents of the prosperity preaching do not highlight the need to plant, water, prune and wait for harvest. It presents life as a bed of roses, where one just need to claim and grab whatever he wants. It presents a theology that relies solely on divine alteration of nature for one's benefits. Thus, when an individual's mind is filled with the theology of divine intervention, one will believe that hard work, honesty, perseverance, and patience are not necessary virtues in life. One will think to get to the desired point, one must jump over laid down rules.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: THE MARXIST THEORY

19.1. Introduction

Marx (2013), in a hypothesis, explains a capitalist society in terms of a struggle between two classes – between the ‘bourgeoisie’ (the capitalist or those who hold the means of production), and the ‘proletariat’ (wageworkers or those who sell their power of labour to survive). Thus, Marxist hypothesis depicts a class conflict between the controllers of production and the producers of goods and services. For Marxist theory (Marx, 2013 & Marx & Engel, 2018), the class war is rooted in a situation where the bourgeoisie such as the business, factory and industry owners, exercise enormous power over the proletariat, such as peasant labourers, and the bourgeoisie uses such control to exploit the proletariat by paying them low wages to maximise gains. It presupposes that this exploitative tendency creates an economic structure whereby inequality is entrenched. Marx in his hypothesis, proposes that for the bourgeoisie to maintain their privileged position, institutions such as religion are employed to pacify the proletariats to keep them in perpetual penury. In his structural functionalist proposal, Marx believes that religion is a tool deployed to pacify the oppressed in the society, hence the genesis of his popular dictum “religion is the opium of the masses.” How does this relate to the Nigerian context and prosperity theology? This is the crux of this chapter. The analysis is centred on three key elements of the Marxist proposal – class war, exploitation, and pacification.

19.2. Class war and exploitation

One of the key elements of Marxist theory, outlined in Karl Marx's book, entitled, “Capital” and “The Communist Manifesto,” is the “war of classes” (Marx, 2013 & Marx & Engel, 2018). Marx proposes that there is a class conflict

between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Marxist class war has been linked to other forms of class conflicts, such as that which exists between the 'oligarchs' and the 'commoners,' and between the 'patricians' and the 'plebeians' (Howard, Goldway, & Martel, 1970).

The Prosperity gospel has become an enabler of inequalities in the Nigerian society, creating a great divide between the rich and the poor. It fails to address the corrupt tendencies of the political class, which emboldens the political elites in amassing illicit wealth meant for the commoners, as the non-elites wallow in abject poverty. It is necessary to quote Mr Shoulder here again:

Sometimes, your so-called governors, they do so many bad things and at the end of the day, there are some Pastors, Reverends you so trust. The so-called governors will go under their church and the so-called Pastors will tell them, it is well with you, go live long, governor (Mr Shoulder, personal interview, September 30, 2019).

The words of Ven. Cat will also be necessary here again:

One thing is this, for now, Nigeria is not poor in the real sense, we have all the resources, all the resources that can make us live well. Our problem is leadership, that is all. I don't think prosperity gospel can solve the problem of leadership, which is the major handicap of this country (Ven Cat, personal interview, September 15, 2019).

Not only have the prosperity gospel preachers failed to address the corrupt tendencies of the political class, but they have also carved out themselves as elitist religious class that helps to milk the poor dry of their little income through numerous religious giving in form of tithing, seed sowing, donation, and offerings. While such monetary donations enrich the income of the General

Overseers or Prophets, the poor are promised a utopian blessing that is said to manifest in hundred-fold return. To this end, Mrs Fan, a member of the Baptist Church observes:

Such preachers become more richer, they feed on them, they feed on their congregation. They can drive them to bring anything in the name of, not minding the pains in the name of making it on the side of their members. The truth is that those preachers are becoming richer and just like the rich becoming richer and some of the congregation remain poor (Mrs Fan, personal interview, September 24, 2019).

Thus, both political and religious elitist groups have one thing in common and that is the exploitation of the commoner, thereby creating class inequalities. Where the society is socially polarised on the basis of prestige, status, wealth, economic or political power, opposing class structures are inevitable. In European classical history, this was quite evident in the “war of the Orders and Spartacus.” (Howard, & Martel, 1987). Similarly, the Romans found it hard to initiate peace between the patricians (the upper class) and the plebeians (the lower class). Socrates also acknowledges a class war inherent in societies. In Plato's Republic (Plato, 2000), Socrates suggests that no matter how small a city may be, it is often divided into two – the city of the poor and that of the rich. While factors that can drive inequalities in each society may differ from one society to the other, one of the factors that has driven inequality in Nigeria is the greed of the religious and political elites. This position puts forward the idea that members of society are at war with one another. This provision also recognises the tendency of a small wealthy elitist class to dominate the large group of the poor commoners.

The already established evidence recognises two distinct classes within the Nigerian society, and this class inequality is orchestrated by the great divide between the rich and the poor. Notwithstanding, despite the existing of such nomenclature, such the middle class, I have chosen to recognise the class of the poor and that of the rich within the Nigerian state in this evaluation. The middle class is assumed to have been subsumed within the poor class. Thus, the class struggle is between the upper class and the lower class, or put more succinctly, the rich and the poor. The rich class are the political class, the socio-economic class, and the mega-religious class. The poor class are the poor persons on the streets hustling for their daily bread. The underlying factor in this classification is socio-economic privilege.

One of the factors that creates this class inequalities in Nigeria is the failure of the political class (Afegbua, & Adejuwon, 2012 & Yimer, 2015). Yimer (2015) posits that the political leadership deficiencies have resulted in failure in other domains of poverty alleviation, education, security, employment, and health, which should have benefited the poor. The political elites, rather than concentrating on productive leadership, are engaged in an unproductive struggle to control state structures and apparatus to gain self-economic reward. Political aspiration is not based on ideological commitment but on the quest for political power, patronage, and influence. This political nature ensures the prominence of a governing class who do not have ideological prowess, or a commitment to lift the poor out of poverty. The lack of an ideological framework and commitment toward the betterment of the poor masses, makes political leadership become a contest for shallow and egocentric gains. Aspiring political leaders do not see the necessity of outlining their macro and micro vision towards the impoverished commoners. Where there is a policy statement, it is only used to deceive the masses to win election. The dearth of explicit

commitment and will to solve social-economic crisis, evolves a predatory governing class that are concerned with power grabbing and control, and political alignment and realignment to perpetuate themselves in office (Afegbua & Adejuwon, 2012). In effects, Nigerian leaders, such as General Ibrahim Babangida, perpetuated himself in office militarily for eight years, and Olusegun Obasanjo, who finished two terms wanted to amend the constitution to allow him serve for another four-year term. These tendencies made both General Ibrahim Babangida and Olusagun Obansajo treat the country as their individual property. Afegbua & Adejuwon (2012) further observes that consequent resistances to such selfish tendencies are visited with a brute force and a violation of the right of the citizenry. This decline in moral discipline, and in addition to the lack of commitments to the plight of the poor, create a great divide between the rich political class and the poor masses. (Afegbua, & Adejuwon, 2012).

There is the perception that the easiest way to gain wealth and elevate one's social status is through political offices. There is also the notion that political office holders are unaccountable to the populace. The destructive impact of these notions on the stability of democratic tenets and good governance is very clear. Political contest has become a do or die affair. This is manifested in electoral malpractice and violence, political assassination, and the destruction of lives and property (Collier, 2009). The failure of the political class has an overbearing impact on the private sector as well, as it increases corrupt practices. Thus, it increases the cost of doing business through illicit transactions. It also increases the price of commodities, raises the cost of management, and poses the risk of breaching agreements (Ebegbulem, 2012).

The end receivers of the failed system are the poor people who do not have the money and influence to navigate over the rocky economic terrain (Umukoro, 2014). While the poor masses are in abject poverty, one will often be surprised at the regular display of wealth by the upper class. It is quite common to see top businesspeople, top politicians such as former and serving presidents, governors, senators, legislators, state house of assembly members, local government chairpersons and councillors, and political party executives going with police escorts with their flashy cars and flamboyant lifestyle. One will be amazed by the exotic cars, high-quality and costly outfits, shoes, and bags the children, wards, and wives of these elites go out with. They run into hundreds of thousands and millions of dollars (Umukoro, 2014).

Mustapha (1986) observes that in Nigeria, as inequality explicitly worsened, the upper class continues to gain from illicit tax wavers because of the “who know man.” Mustapha also alleges that the Nigerian legislators continue to receive outrageous salaries and allowances that are among the highest in the world. It shows that there is collaboration between political and economic elites. To steal from the common patrimony, political office holders usually use businesses to award inflated contracts to their cronies with an expectation of ‘kick-back,’ and many top business moguls, who know the right button to press, have become so rich, while exploiting their closeness to top political figures (Mustapha, 1986).

In 2018, a new statistic from The World Data Lab's Poverty Clock, suggests that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the poorest inhabitants in the world. The Indian population is seven times larger than that of Nigeria. It means about 90 million people now living in extreme poverty in Nigeria represents approximately about 50% or half of its population, estimated at 180 million. The World Data Lab's Poverty Clock maintains that almost six people fall into the trap

of extreme poverty in every minute in Nigeria (World Data Lab, 2018). At the same time, the gap between the rich and the poor widened as the number of millionaires grew by 44%. The number of mega-pastors, who own private jets increased, with their net worth running into millions of US dollars. The number of prosperity gospel pastors with private jets were five in 2011 (Forbes Magazine, 2011), but increased to seven in 2021 (Saharareporters, 2021). While 62.7% of the poor class are falling below the poverty line if measured by \$1.25 USD/person/day 2005 PPP line benchmark, mega-prosperity gospel preachers are increasing in net worth. For instance, Bishop David Oyedepo, the founder of the 'Winners Chapel' church is estimated to have a net worth of ₦92 billion. The net worth of Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the founder of the 'Christ Embassy' church is put at ₦57.9 billion. The net worth of Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo, the General Overseer of the 'Redeemed Christian Church of God' is put at ₦50.1 billion. The net worth of Prophet TB Joshua, the founder of the 'Synagogue Church of All Nations' is put at ₦46 billion. The net worth of Pastor Ayodele Oritsejafor, the founder of the 'Word of Life Bible Church' is put at ₦14.7 billion (Forbes, 2011). While these church bodies are exempted from tax payments, the owners are concentrated on amassing riches and luxuries. The poor are summoned to continue to give their little financial income to a God whom they are told will bless them, and as they get poorer, the mega-pastors continue to accumulate wealth and get richer. It implies that the society suffers deficits, in that there are people, who are outrageously wealthy, and who live boisterously, while the commoners continue to suffer.

19.3. Opium of the exploited

Adam Smith (2010), in his "Theory of Moral Sentiments," proposes that concentrating the wealth of a nation within the reach of a few, naturally results

in a contentious class struggle, where the wealth of the minority upper class arouses the indignation of the majority poor class. The poor class, who are staggered by poverty, compelled by want, and summoned by envy, become vulnerable to an instinct to invade the wealth of the upper class. In the structural-functionalist proposal of Karl Marx (2013), he admits that to be able to quell the commoner's instinct to invade the wealth of the rich, and to maintain the status quo, religion is constructed to calm the commoners. Thus, Marx regards religion as the "opium of the masses". This opium analogy has also been echoed by Howard & Martel (1987) and Howard, Goldway & Martel (1970). It implies that religion is a mechanism used by the oppressors to calm uncertainties over the exploitative role they play in the society.

It is in this context that the prosperity gospel is best defined. It is the theology of hope amid chaos. It is a mechanism used to pacify the poor masses, so that they do not concentrate on the real issues. Prosperity gospel elites, in order to perpetuate themselves in position of relevance, without being challenged by the suffering masses, use religion to appease the commoners. Mrs Fan, during interview (not real name), advances:

They tell the people what they want to hear, what their ears are inching to hear and not the reality of life – what the people want to hear that will make them happy (Mrs Fan, personal interview, September 24, 2019).

In this telling, prosperity theology is viewed as a function of something practical. It is a product of real human challenges – the urge to overcome dysfunctional society. Specifically, like Marx's religious opium, I will admit that prosperity theology has undeniable functions in the Nigerian society that are synonymous with an application of an opium in treating the sick or the injured. To this end, it reduces the masses' immediate calamities and supplies them with a soothing

illusion capable of giving them the hope of carrying on. To this end, Mrs Fan maintains:

Yes, it might give them some little relief because they will be made to understand that what they are told will come to pass but looking at it from reality of life, it does not actually take away the problem of the people (Mrs Fan, personal interview, September 24, 2019).

Amidst the oppressive structures, prosperity theology sows hope; amidst the unemployment, it sows hope and amidst the fears, it chooses faith. While poverty increases, it promises a utopian prosperity; and where there are sicknesses, it provides a promise of divine healing. Prosperity theology is thus, a pacification theology. It provides a momentary relief, while the genuine issues persist. In this sense, people put their trust in the prosperity gospel than the society itself. As the society brings suffering, prosperity theology brings opium to the people to cope in times of personal crisis. Mr Shoulder (not real name), an interviewee, opines:

When someone says God is with you, don't worry, it is well with you, you feel relieved, but that person is not doing you any good, because when you tell me, it is well with me, God is with me, and you don't know what I am passing through, you don't know what I will do the next minutes, you don't know my faith, you don't know what I am up to, you don't know anything about me, you just tell me, God is with you, go and succeed. Now, I will say, wow that is great, I love that. However, I may turn the next minutes, I will feel that ah God is not hear, what is going on? This guy just said God is with me, but I am still passing through this pain. At that point, I may feel more pains (Mr Shoulder, personal interview, September 30, 2019).

Meanwhile, prosperity gospel does not seek to bring a revolutionary aim, it seeks to maintain the structural defects that create an unbalanced society. By focusing the attention of the devotee on the utopian rather than the system that breeds inequality, political exploitation, corruption, impunity, and lawlessness, prosperity theology turns the awareness of the suffering masses away from the class structures that saturate daily experience. Therefore, prosperity theology provides a false consciousness that solidifies an unworkable system and encourages an ideology that validates the unhealthy continuity of the reign of the ruling class. It is not out of place to suggest that this pacification theology is an opium dose that keeps burdened people docile as they are being overloaded with more burdens of social-economic crises. Prosperity gospel though reveals to the adherents they have a contextual problem, but it does not provide a practical solution to the problem. As the purveyors focus more on spiritual entities, they explain away gross government incompetence and sway the minds of the adherents from the prevailing inequalities. The prosperity preacher evokes, creates, controls, and skews the emotions of his audience towards a utopian solution in an Almighty God, who is summoned to fight all raging crises. While the adherent is engaged in finding utopian solution to a practical problem, the political elites, the mega-pastors, and the ruling class, feel at ease, smile, and continue with their predatory tendencies. An interviewee, Mrs Fan, in his view, suggests:

Honestly speaking, there is a strong deviation. Today, the prosperity gospel prosperity preachers have deviated. They are no more doing practical theology. They are becoming emotional, they have deviated. Like I mentioned at the course of this interview, they are not what they give out after what they give out. They are after what they can acquire and that is the reason people are buying jets individually. I once ask myself, what are these people going to use these jets for?

For Christ's sake. You can see self and is resulting from emotions (Mrs Fan, personal interview, September 24, 2019).

Thus, prosperity preaching keeps the poor in order. It implies that the overthrowing of an exploitative society and the emergence of a classless society, where justice, equity, rule of law, and the prosperity for all, will take precedence, will become like a chase after the wind. As the prosperity gospel concentrates on utopian reality, it creates an escapist mind-set that is concentrated on a psychological escape from practical reality. Through submerging the adherent into a new religious expression, the prosperity gospel aims to make up for the arbitrariness and vulnerability of the Nigerian social-economic settings. Typically, the prosperity gospel's escapist summon, is achieved by offering a religious sensationalism to a real-world upheaval. This genre of theology is characterised by catalysing mentalization. That is, this escapist theology fosters true emotional involvement from the adherents. The Nigerian escapist theology (Prosperity gospel) is thus deployed to a real world, where the adherents are faced with the cruel realities of poverty, unemployment, poor health facilities, disease, incessant road accidents, crime, kidnappings, and low life expectancy. Adherents are embroiled in a sensational pacification, which serves as a mental escape, or coping mechanism, where contextual troubles persist. To this end, it is right to propose that the aim of the Nigerian prosperity theology is to provide adherents with a sensational promise, rather than to provoke enduring and critical debates, aimed at addressing contextual social conditions. Consequent on this finding, I acknowledge that the prosperity theology, is capable of distracting followers from the causes of societal hardships. People only turn to this escapist religious expression, in that it provides the devotee with a mental escape from a bleak society or economy, and a rough reality. Therefore, the prosperity preaching is an effortless way to escape into a temporary world of

reality, saturated with promises of hope, amidst the turbulence. It is an emotive spirituality encapsulated in apocalyptic promises.

Whilst I argue that the prosperity gospel doctrine is saturated with promises of hope rather than practical solutions to real world challenges, in contrast, Asuquo (2020) suggests that a few prosperity church leaders apart from emotional support, provides tangible solutions to adherents' social-economic challenges. Asuquo, in his telling, submits that a few prosperity gospel churches are involved in building hospitals and schools for poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Asuquo maintains that as a positive gesture, a good number of staff members are employed for the day to day running of such schools and hospitals, thereby reducing unemployment in the labour market. In this view, the attempt by a few prosperity gospel purveyors to build schools of higher learning is a positive gesture that should be commended, in that, education is a channel for individual empowerment. The power of education has been documented by Luke (2018). It shows that the more people are educated, the brighter their chances of creativity and innovation; and the more a society is saturated with innovative minds, the more industries and companies are created, which can lead to more job opportunity and material prosperity. However, Obadare (2016) and Okosun (2018) argue that the institutions of education established by prosperity gospel churches are tailored towards the children of the elites, in that, the children of the poor cannot afford the exorbitant school fees of such educational institutions. Okosun (2018), in his submission, believes that such institutions of higher learning are built with the monies donated by the poor members of the congregation, whose hard-earned money are milked out of them by the purveyors of prosperity gospel, with a promise of a hundred-fold return on their giving. Okosun maintains that instead of the school fees to be subsidised for the children of the poor members, the fees are pegged at an exorbitant rate, where

only the rich can afford education, thus, disenfranchising the children of the poor from acquiring needed education, and in the process creating more poverty.

From this perspective, it may not be intuitive to assume that the prosperity gospel is fighting poverty holistically. What educational opportunities generally do is to encourage personal development and autonomy (Luke, 2018). The resultant effects of this, regarding development, is that individuals are more likely to utilise educational opportunities in order to attain a brighter future and greater economic potentials. To this end, it is encouraging to acknowledge the positive gesture of some of the prosperity gospel preacher who are able to build a few institutions of higher learning and this has provided job opportunities for members of staff who are employed in such institutions, however, since most of the monies for the establishment of such educational institutions come from the poor member of the church, the school fees should be subsidised for the children of the poor. In this way, poverty can be fought head on, in that, more people will be empowered through education to become more meaningful and resourceful in the society. In this way, the prosperity gospel can engage poverty through the vehicle of education, such as engineering, business, computing, and medical classes, as well as giving a good number of church-granted scholarships to the children of the poor. Through this mechanism, the prosperity theology can give lasting, practical, and emotional support to adherents.

Furthermore, what is obvious from the prosperity gospel doctrine is that people are taught to think positively to achieve material possession. The prophets of this theology emphasise individual prosperity but are silent about how to achieve this prosperity empirically. Or, they have not developed a model of economic success that adherents can follow to achieve material prosperity.

Instead, they rely on the intervention of divinity in the material world. The prosperity gospel assumes that divinity does not desire poverty for anyone, and that those who engage in positive declaration, give money to the church, or have faith can plunge themselves into prosperity. No doubt, these doctrines are a statement of personal empowerment, autonomy, upward mobility, and hope wrapped into a theological language. In this regard, church members who rely on a God-given success are likely to be more self-confident, autonomous, optimistic, and hopeful about life outcomes than their counterparts who do not share such belief.

Naseem & Khalid (2010) believes that positive outlook can have positive impacts on the outcome of events. If this is accepted, then, there is need to praise the power of prosperity gospel. Declaring positive words or believing in a divine intervention in one's bad conditions creates sense of optimism. A positive mind may help to approach bad conditions more positively. Prosperity gospel adherent may focus on the best outcome and not the worst. This state of mind creates positive outlook and enables the believer to navigate over challenging life's situation. According to Ramesh, Sathian, Sinu, & Kiranmai (2013), a positive outlook has the potentials to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, heart attack and stroke. Thus, in this submission, it is best to assume that the hope the prosperity gospel gives to adherents can create a positive approach to life, thereby increasing the possibility of a healthier lifestyle. However, the hope the prosperity theology supplies may be short-lived if it is based on utopian promises only, and not on impacting social-economic parameters of a nation.

The promises of hope that prosperity preaching churches provide is not based on any economic or political data that shows an upward developmental trajectory, it is a call to believe that someday things will be well. The desperation

for hope, the fear of the unknown, and the spiritual support the prosperity gospel supplies, give credence to the phenomenon. As prosperity theology becomes an opium, and as it provides an intangible hope, the masses, without deep understanding of its implications, are unwilling to be devoiced from the ideology, because of its immediate pacification. This implies that as more people flood the religious centres, more churches are built to provide emotional support and not industries to lift people out of practical suffering. For instance, during the researcher's field trip, it is observed that much more is invested in building religious centres compared to what is invested in building businesses, factories, and schools. While driving along a distance of ten kilometres in one area in Lagos, the researcher took a census of church and business advertisements, this is the data collated:

Three clinics and hospitals, one water factory, two private schools, three banks, one printing press, two petrol stations three shopping centres, and nineteen churches (Personal observation, September 20, 2019).

Dr Zero (not real name) also supports this proposal when he posits:

When you enter any developed society, from their airport, it is products that will welcome you. When you enter and when you are coming to any city from the airport in Nigeria, it is the faces of General Overseers and their church building that will welcome you. Hence, we have some of the five richest pastors in the world in Nigeria, but we are the global poverty capital of the world (Dr Zero, personal interview, September 22, 2019).

The deduction from this data is that people may think that one can pray his way out of poverty, recession, or underdevelopment. People may think that solutions to practical problems lies in spiritual mechanism. As religion becomes

the opium of the masses, the factual issues that breed poverty, economic woes, insecurity, disease, and sickness are left to foster.

19.4. Conclusion

The Marxist theory depicts an antagonism between two classes of people in a society – the rich and the poor. The privileged rich tend to exploit the poor masses. Fearing that the poor masses will revolt against the rich, the rich deploy religion to keep the poor in checks. Hence, Karl Marx in his hypothesis, suggested that religion is the opium of the masses.

Juxtaposing the Marx's hypothesis with the Nigerian prosperity phenomenon, I suggested that adherents find meaning and hope in the prosperity gospel, even though the hope it provides is momentary and sensational. However, it is the pacification tendency of the prosperity theology that keeps the poor masses in unceasing suffering. It in turn, makes the poor to assume a docile posture as they concentrate on spirituality. This docile posturing further encourages the social-political and social-religious structures that creates misery. It empowers the privileged rich, who plunder the nation's matrimony. Thus, the masses see religion as the solutions to practical problems, rather than seeing religion as a tool for attacking the structures of exploitation, erected, and maintained by the religious and political elites.

PART V: SUMMARISATION

This segment contains one chapter, and it summarises the findings of the research.

CHAPTER TWENTY: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From 1967 to 1970, Nigeria was engulfed with a brutal civil war. The civil war deepened political crises, halted social-economic growth, and dimmed the hope of stability in the years that followed. The Nigerian economic framework was disrupted, and considerable infrastructural damage was sustained. Because of the war, active work force was reduced, and unemployment rate increased. Many industrial engagements decreased, production was at a standstill in some parts of the country, and a good number of resources was spent on contingencies of the war, which is the purchase of ammunition. The demand for basic necessities was high as supplies were disproportionately low.

As political instability persisted, and as succeeding governments failed to build a robust and stable economy, poverty and unemployment, poor health facilities, bad road network flourished. It was within this complicated social-economic context that the prosperity gospel appeared in the 1970s, claiming to have had the key to all social-economic problems. Prosperity gospel assumed that it had the solutions to the prevailing crises. As social-economic challenges such as poverty, sickness and poor health facility, insecurity, unemployment, high mortality rate, and infrastructural decay persisted, prosperity gospel found a breeding ground. Prosperity gospel was marked as all-crushing weapon against poverty. The prosperity gospel believed that suffering was not the will of God for humanity and must be rejected. Prosperity theology advocated all-inclusive material success for every believer. Thus, prosperity was said to be a sign of healthy relationship with God. Proponents of prosperity gospel supported their claims with the concepts of blessing in the Old Testament and salvation in the New Testament. Promoters of prosperity gospel presumed that God was a

blessing giver and a liberator who was able to liberate adherents from social-economic challenges.

Because there was every tendency for people to embrace the gospel of hope amid an overwhelming difficulty, prosperity gospel spread across Nigeria and subsequently popularised within the African continent (Illogu, 1985 & Maxwell (1998). Prosperity message penetrated and saturated the African religious spirituality (Magbadelo, 2004 & Folarin, 2006). The notion of prosperity gospel was spread from the Pentecostal milieus to the general body of African Christianity. Prosperity is now advocated in many Christians pulpits in Nigeria.

As the prosperity gospel appeared on the Nigerian soil in the 1970s, factors like the International Monetary Fund, Structural Adjustment Programme, and political unrest of the 1980s, modernity, African cosmology, and indigenous Pentecostal gospel music, aided its rapid spread. This rapid spread was not without some form of reactions from the Pentecostal holiness movement and the mission churches. The theological reaction of the Pentecostal holiness spirituality was in form of emphasis on doctrines such as new birth, justification, sanctification, and restitution. Pentecostal purity faith group such as the Deeper Life Bible Church were unable to identify with the theology of prosperity. The materialistic drive of prosperity gospel was perceived as a dissuader of spiritual benefits. Rather than material prosperity, the rapture of the saints, echoed in the minds of the puritans. This eschatological motivation concerned with the last things and end time envisages a time when both the living and the dead in Christ will ascend into heaven to be with Jesus during the parousia (Jesus' second coming). To this end, Pentecostal puritans preached that material possession must be traded away in order to enter one's heavenly home. (Matthew 24:29-31 & 1Thessalonians 4:15-17).

Also, the reactions of the mission churches to the phenomenal spread of prosperity teaching in Nigeria was more of stiff opposition. As the hurricane move of the prosperity ideology hit harder, the mission churches attempted to mount a defence mechanism by reinforcing their liturgical rigidity. This closed-door approach bowed to the overbearing invasion of the prosperity spirituality. Thus, the advancement of the prosperity gospel resulted in the emergence of two opposing perceptions about material spirituality. As the anti-prosperity campaigners took a radical approach in their criticism, the pro-prosperity advocates took a soft posture in their advocacy.

Meanwhile, as the prosperity gospel claim to address social-economic concerns, and as its popularity increased, issues such as poverty, unemployment, sicknesses, high mortality rate, road accidents are still persistent points of worry in Nigeria. The research investigated why there is a worrying number of social-economic challenges amid the overwhelming popularity of prosperity gospel, by examining the responses of the prosperity gospel to social-economic challenges. In this vein, the thesis investigated how prosperity gospel reacts to bad conditions. Simply put, it examined the mechanisms prosperity gospel uses to conquer material crisis. The research findings show that prosperity gospel deploys strategies like rhematisation, pneumatic regeneration, redemptive soteriology, exorcism, provocative giving, prophetism, and spiritualised items, in combating social-economic difficulties. Secondly, the thesis examined the impacts of prosperity gospel on social-economic challenges. The research findings show that the prosperity gospel does not practically solve material crisis, rather it only supplies an emotional spirituality which helps adherent to cope, while the harsh realities persist. Thus, the thesis proposed that prosperity gospel is just a coping mechanism amid a chaotic condition. It is an emotive theology.

However, this emotive theology has implications for adherents. Prosperity gospel makes human prosperity a function of a deity. Then, it is worth thinking: if one's material success and well-being are products of a relationship with a divinity, who is to be blamed for poverty or unemployment? Certainly, it is not the government. In this persuasion, I believe that the claims of the prosperity spirituality in Nigeria makes it easy for the citizens to excuse government failures. The over reliance on divine intervention and miracles can encourage adherents to assume that they can escape dysfunctional society because all they need to do is rhematise, exorcise, and prophesise themselves into riches.

Also, it is worth thinking: what will the society look like without a utopian theology of prosperity? Perhaps, political leaders will be held to account by their citizens. The Scandinavian nations, such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are often applauded, in that they have some of the best performing governments in the world. Ironically, in these societies, the numbers of citizens who identify as religious are low. For instance, in Sweden, only 20% of the population identify as religious, but the poverty rate is under 2%. Contrastingly, in Nigeria, nearly 97% of the population identify as religious, with a poverty rate of nearly 50%. This does not mean that the more unreligious a nation is, the more prosperous it will be. The Weberian Theory has already demonstrated that there is a link between religious values and prosperity. Weber believes that the industrial revolution in Europe was propelled by what he called the "Protestant Ethics." He presumes that the content of protestant theology encourages responsibility. Thus, what is important is the content of the theology that saturates the minds of citizens.

Indeed, there can be other factors that are responsible for poverty, however, it is important to consider the extent to which spirituality like the prosperity

theology has reduced citizens' enthusiasm in calling government to account. Therefore, the political elites and the megachurch pastors are the benefactors of the prosperity theology. The political elites keep evading accountability through the medium of the prosperity theology, while the megachurch owners, who take money from the poor through seed faith, tithes, offering, and donations, without giving back to the society, keep getting richer. As these megachurch pastors earn millions of monies that are not taxed, and as the poor citizens become poorer, they present prosperity gospel as an opium to pacify the masses. They provide hope to an oppressed population. As the citizens focuses on the sweet promises contained in the prosperity theology, and as they hope that someday, all human suffering will be taken away by a miracle working deity, the structures that are responsible for social-economic woes are left to strive.

However, it is worth noting that a theology of pacification has its positive role to play. Many people find succour in the prosperity gospel. Centred on building a union with a divine agent, it provides hope in harrowing condition. It espouses a belief system that helps Christians to be consoled in their troubles. It is a consolatory theology that provides a 'happy pill.' It takes away pain by fantasising the minds into a different reality, by giving brief respite, and by providing a momentary euphoria. This mentalisation is effective in de-emphasising one's calamities, but all too often, it can become a crutch, in that the succour it provides can be temporary.

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APPENDIXES

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13. Mr Shoulder, personal interview, September 30, 2019. (Baptist Church).

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15. Dr Zero, personal interview, September 22, 2019. (Baptist Church).
16. Mrs Settle, personal interview, September 18, 2019. (Anglican Church).
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Fig 8, Revd Too, personal image, April 10, 2021.

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Fig 10, Miss Doo, personal image, October 2, 2019.

Fig 11, Redeemed Christian Church of God, personal image, October 3, 2019.

List of Simi-Structured Interview Question Samples

1. What do you like about the prosperity gospel teachings?
2. As an individual Christian, how has the prosperity gospel helped you to cope in times social-economic difficulties?
3. Nigeria is currently facing social-economic challenges such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, kidnappings, road accidents, as a believer of prosperity doctrine, what should Christians do to overcome these challenges?
4. What do you think should be the response of prosperity gospel to the poverty situation in Nigeria?
5. Some Christians assume that the solution to problems of Nigeria lies in the hands of God, what do you think about that?

6. Can you explain to me how has the prosperity gospel impacted your life?
7. Was there any time you thought you have come to the end of the road, and you found meaning in the prosperity gospel?
8. If you are sick today or feel that your life is in danger or think that things are not moving the way you expect, as a believer in prosperity gospel, what will you do?
9. How has the prosperity gospel in any way discouraged your life?
10. What is it that you do not like about the prosperity gospel?
11. Within the community levels, can you mention some tangible social projects initiated by prosperity gospel churches that benefit the poor?
12. Looking at Nigeria, how has the gospel of prosperity helped to fight social-economic challenges such as poverty, sickness, unemployment, and security?
13. What are the economic impacts of the prosperity gospel?
14. Prosperity gospel purveyors contend that giving, positive confession, visualisation, and exorcism can make the individual Christian to have all-inclusive prosperity, what could you say about that?
15. Would you say the prosperity gospel as practised in Nigeria, encourages creativity, hard-work, diligence, and innovation, or only celebrates miracles and divine intervention?
16. What is your belief about demons, witches, and wizards?
17. Prosperity gospel Christians believe that witches, wizards, and demons can stop them from living a successful life, what is your opinion about that?

18. In the New Testament, there are evidence of demons causing infirmity, and Jesus occasionally cast them out. Do you think poverty and sickness causing demons should be cast out from the life of the individual Christian?

19. Can you explain to me the benefits of giving, and how it has helped you to overcome financial difficulty?

20. In Europe, the protestant Christians preached hard work as part of their teachings, and that led to rapid industrial development, do you think it is necessary to incorporate action-oriented ethics such hard work, honesty, innovation, creativity as part of the prosperity gospel teachings in Nigeria?

21. What are your benefits as a redeemed Christian living in Nigeria?

22. There is prophetic wave swooping through the prosperity movement, can you tell me your experience and opinion about this?

