

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342417792>

Overview of Prosperity Gospel

Chapter · June 2020

CITATIONS

3

READS

10,576

1 author:



[Sampson M Nwaomah](#)

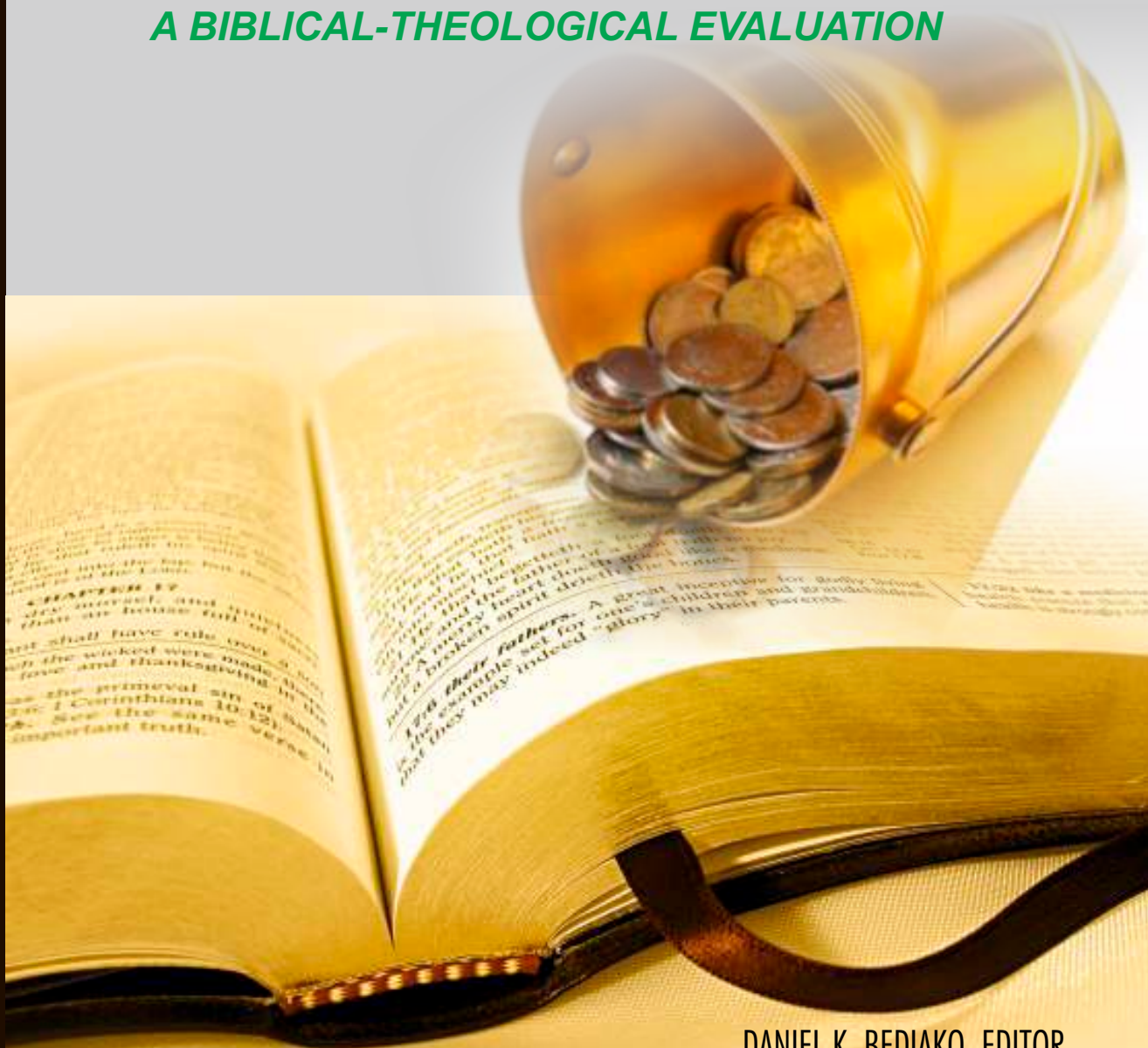
Adventist University of Africa

53 PUBLICATIONS 122 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

PROSPERITY GOSPEL

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION



PROSPERITY GOSPEL

A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

DANIEL K. BEDIAKO, EDITOR



DANIEL K. BEDIAKO, EDITOR

Copyright © 2020 by
the Biblical Research Committee
West-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists
Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Edited by Daniel Kwame Bediako
Cover designed by Rutty Nyame

Printed in Ghana by
Advent Press
Accra

ISBN: 978-9964-962-21-0

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter 1	
Overview of Prosperity Gospel	3
— <i>Sampson Nwaomah</i>	
Chapter 2	
Theological Method of Prosperity Gospel	19
— <i>Martha Duah</i>	
Chapter 3	
Theology of Prosperity Gospel	51
— <i>Martha Duah</i>	
Chapter 4	
Prosperity in the Old Testament	89
— <i>Theodore Dickson</i>	
Chapter 5	
Prosperity in the New Testament	119
— <i>Michael Akpa</i>	
Chapter 6	
Material Prosperity and Christian Life: Ellen G. White's Perspective	137
— <i>Daniel Dei, Robert Osei-Bonsu, and Vincent Same</i>	

Chapter 7	
Prosperity, Faith, Power, and Miracles	149
— <i>Efe Ehioghae, Patrick Etoughe,</i> <i>and Jean Esso</i>	
Chapter 8	
Prosperity Gospel and Biblical Stewardship	171
— <i>Daniel Dei, Robert Osei-Bonsu,</i> <i>and Paul Ikouba</i>	
Chapter 9	
Prosperity Gospel and the Great Commission	189
— <i>Jacques Mbende</i>	
Epilogue	205

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Sampson M. Nwaomah

Introduction

Prosperity Movement is a religious phenomenon that has rapidly gained and sustained ascendancy in some Christian circles over the decades. This movement is known also as ‘Prosperity Gospel’, ‘Prosperity Theology’, ‘Word of Faith’, ‘Health and Wealth’, ‘Name It and Claim It’, ‘Seed Faith Movement’, ‘Blab It and Grab It’ and ‘Prosperity Preaching’.¹ As the synonyms imply, the prosperity movement emphasizes faith, wealth, physical well-being, and victory as essential elements of Christianity. Although this movement seems more entrenched among Christians with Pentecostal traditions, it has appealed to some outside these circles. While some have questioned the biblical foundation of its teachings, the movement has attracted a large following of Christian churches whose members are optimistically claiming scriptural passages on wealth (i.e., money and possessions) as reinterpreted by key proponents of the movement.

This chapter provides a general overview of Prosperity Gospel. It begins with a brief definition, traces its historical development, and shows how it is propagated, especially in Africa.

Definition

The Lausanne Theology Working Group has defined Prosperity Gospel as the teaching that “believers have a right to the blessings

¹ This study will use the most common terminologies (i.e., ‘Prosperity Gospel’, ‘Prosperity Theology’, and ‘Faith Movement’) interchangeably.

of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”² Stated differently, it as a “Christian theology whose signature teaching is that God wants believers to be rich and enjoy good physical health.”³ For C. B. Peter, this is a “gospel of human possibility . . . wrapped in God’s name.”⁴ Advocates of Prosperity Gospel believe that poverty characterizes the work of the devil and is inimical to productivity.⁵ The true Christian, therefore, must not be poor because God at creation endowed humanity with wealth, health and victory.⁶ Since Christ came to reclaim humanity’s legal right to wealth, health, and success, which had been surrendered to Satan at the inception of sin, the redeemed now take their place in Christ and through faith actualize these legal rights in their lives. This and similar notions define the theology, homiletics and liturgical practices of the churches that have embraced this gospel.

Similarly, from a traditional Pentecostal point of view, prosperity is viewed as “a function of repentance and renewal of a relation-

² Lausanne Movement (Africa Chapter), “Lausanne Theology Working Group Statement on the Prosperity Gospel,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34.2 (2010): 99; see also The Lausanne Theology Working Group, Africa Chapter, “A Statement on Prosperity Teaching,” *Christianity Today*, December 9, 2009, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/decemberweb-only/gc-prosperity-statement.html> (accessed August 12, 2015).

³ Debra J. Mumford, “Prosperity Gospel and Africa American Prophetic Preaching,” *Review and Expositor* 109 (2012): 371.

⁴ C. B. Peter, “The Church’s Response to Poverty: A Jungian Appraisal of the ‘Prosperity Gospel’ Phenomenon,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 14 (2009): 140.

⁵ R. Mate, “Wombs as God’s Laboratories: Pentecostal Discourses of Femininity in Zimbabwe,” *Africa* 72.4 (2002): 549-568.

⁶ Benson Idahosa, *You Are God’s Battle Axe* (Benin City, Nigeria: Idahosa World Outreach, 2010), 77. See also Isaac Phiri and Joe Maxwell, “Gospel Riches: Africa’s Rapid Embrace of Prosperity Gospels Offers Concern—and Hope,” *Christianity Today* 51.7 (July 2007), 23. Michael Okonkwo, Bishop of the Redeemed Evangelical Mission, a Nigerian Pentecostal church, was quoted to have said “[M]any are ignorant of the fact that God has already made provision for his children to be wealthy here on earth. When I say wealthy, I mean very, very rich . . . Break loose! It is not a sin to desire to be wealthy” (ibid.).

ship which had been broken by sin and pollution; it is also a sign that healing has occurred.”⁷ A significant manifestation of this victory is the occurrence of “signs and wonders,” which the believer experiences in everyday life and are measured in terms of material wealth, good health and success of the believer. The presence of these signs and wonders was the realization of the presence of the kingdom of God.⁸ And partakers of the kingdom receive liberation and healing, which must be evident in all areas of the believer’s life—financially, socially, and physically. Since liberation and healing come through signs and wonders, the Pentecostal evangelistic methodology is characterized by an emphasis on miracles and related rituals.⁹ In fact, it was believed that at the dawn of the twentieth century signs and wonders would accompany an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the Word.

Synopsis of the Historical Development

The origin and global influence of Prosperity Gospel has been attributed to several sources including Essek William Kenyon (1867-1948), A. A. Allen (1911-1970), Kenneth Hagin (1917-2003),¹⁰ Kenneth Copeland (1936-), and Fredrick K. C. Price (1932-). Some of these proponents were influenced by Oral Roberts (1918-2009), who is regarded by many as the father of Prosperity Gospel.¹¹ Copeland attended Oral Roberts University in 1967, witnessed first hand the ministry of Roberts, and learned from him. But Hagin, whose disciple he later became, also influ-

⁷ Ogbu Uke Kalu, *Power, Poverty and Prayer: The Challenges of Poverty and Pluralism in African Christianity, 1960-1996* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 127.

⁸ Allan Anderson, “Pentecostal Approaches to Faith and Healing,” *International Review of Mission* 91 no. 363 (2002): 525.

⁹ W. A. Saayman, “Some Reflections on the Development of the Pentecostal Mission Model in South Africa,” *Missionalia* 21.1 (1993): 46.

¹⁰ Ron M. Tavish, “Pentecostal Profits: The Prosperity Gospel in the Global South” (M. A. Thesis, University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, 2014), 10-12, who argues that the greatest influence on Prosperity Gospel was Kenneth Hagin.

¹¹ Ken Silva, “True Origins of the Prosperity Gospel Aka Word Faith Theology,” <http://apprising.org/2014/08/30/true-origins-of-the-prosperity-gospel-aka-word-faith-theology/> (accessed April 15, 2015).

enced Copeland. Price credits Hagin as the greatest influence in his life and ministry. Although Hagin claimed “the Lord Himself taught me about prosperity. I never read about it in a book. *I got it directly from heaven*,”¹² both Roberts and Allan had already been preaching the message for about ten years prior to 1959 when Hagin claimed to have received his revelation.¹³

It all began in the 1950s after World War II. Some white American Pentecostal preachers stepped away from traditional Pentecostal preaching to reviving Kenyon’s theology of “dominating faith,” which he borrowed from the Metaphysical Movement—“lauding positive thinking using the science of psychology.”¹⁴ These revivalists focused on themes such as healing, prophecy and evangelism using silent prayer, anointing oil, anointing kerchiefs, laying on of hands, and the classical prayer of faith as a springboard to release one’s faith toward God for blessings.¹⁵ By the middle of the 1950s revivalists resounded Kenyon’s theology in varying “constituted gospels of health, wealth and prosperity” in American Culture.¹⁶ They presented faith as that which operates the authority to positive confession and actualization of health and wealth in a believer’s life. Through radio ministry, books and articles, and the use of formulas and catchphrases, the preachers encouraged people to claim their legal right to health, wealth and success.

Roberts seemed significantly influential among the revivalists because of his “shrewd ability to anticipate the new frontiers for ministry in radio, television, and education,” and his “influential catchphrases” like “‘Turn Your Faith Loose,’ and ‘Something Good is Going to Happen to You’” “to sum up his theology.”¹⁷ In

¹² Kenneth E. Hagin, *How God Taught Me About Prosperity* (Tulsa, OK: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, 1985), 1. Emphasis his.

¹³ Silva, “True Origins of the Prosperity Gospel,” who notes that Allan was the first prosperity preacher who referred to poverty as a “spirit.”

¹⁴ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 48. It seems Roberts was also influenced by Napoleon Hill’s book *Think and Grow Rich* (1937) and had established a close and longstanding relationship with Hill. Relying on texts such as 3 John 2 and Luke 7:38, coupled with a crisis

1956 he changed the title of his periodical from “Healing Waters” to “Abundant Life” and published his first book entitled “*God’s Formula for Success and Prosperity*,” which offered believers a systematic way to approach divine blessings.¹⁸ This was followed by a number of other books on the topic. He introduced his formula for wealth in 1970 with his book “*Miracle of Seed-Faith*.”¹⁹

Referencing Luke 6:38,²⁰ Roberts taught that whatever a Christian desired, he or she needed to sow it first and God would give abundantly in response and in proportion to the seed sown. If love is needed, love must be sown. If it is time that is needed, time must be sown. If money is needed, then money must be sown, and should be expected immediately the seed is sown.²¹

By the late 1970s the movement had become prominent and its theology had gained dominancy in the American theological landscape. Subsequently it attracted more preachers from major denominations and even across racial lines to draw in the black and the Latino population of America. Then appeared a proliferation of associations formed by these preachers to cement and support their ministries, especially the non-denominational churches of the movement, with the organization of annual conferences. As the

in his life and ministry and what he taught was a divine intervention in 1947 to purchase a new car at very ridiculous price, Roberts immediately began to preach the prosperity message. By 1954 he was promising refunds to people who gave him money and who did not receive the amount of their gift returned to them, from an unexpected source, within a short period (Silva, “True Origins of the Prosperity Gospel”).

¹⁸ Silva, “True Origins of the Prosperity Gospel.”

¹⁹ Ibid. Oral Roberts’ idea of “seed faith” was based on the principle of sowing and reaping, and it taught that anything you sow into God’s Kingdom will result in an abundant return. He called this “the divine economy” system. This system is “based on the belief that God wants to provide God’s people with material prosperity.” This blessing could be “activated by faith in the goodness of God and the law of sowing and reaping, or seed-faith” (see Mumford, “Prosperity Gospel,” 373).

²⁰ On the discussion of this passage and the teaching on wealth in the Gospel of Luke, see Sampson M. Nwaomah, “Prosperity Gospel in the Context of Jesus’ Teachings on Wealth in the Gospel of Luke,” *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission & Ministry* 10 (2014): 3-17.

²¹ Mumford, “Prosperity Gospel,” 374.

number of graduates from the movement's educational institutions increased, more prosperity churches and ministries mushroomed expanding across continental lines, especially the third world.²²

Nigeria and Ghana on the West Coast of Africa rank high in the reception of the teachings of the faith movement. Paul Gifford identifies Enoch A. Adeboye and David O. Oyedipo as major proponents of this theology in Nigeria.²³ Nevertheless, in Africa one of the earliest inspirers and promoters of this gospel was the late Nigerian Archbishop Benson Idahosa.²⁴ In Ghana, major advocates include Eastwood Anaba, Mensa Otabil, Duncun Williams, and Agyen Asare. Through the teachings and publications of these proponents and others, there has been a major attraction to Pentecostalism in Africa²⁵ because many see their miracles and healings as validation of the word of God and have been persuaded to become Christians.²⁶

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu writes, "The New Pentecostal Churches (NPCS) of Africa emphasize prosperity of all kinds. Wealth, health, success, and ever-soaring profits in business are coveted, cherished, and publicly flaunted as signs of God's favor. In this new type of Christianity, success and wealth are the only genuine marks of faith."²⁷ And as Gifford posits,

²² Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, 69, 86-89.

²³ Paul Gifford, "The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: Expecting Miracles," *Christian Century* 124 (July 10, 2007), 21. See also Sampson M. Nwaomah, *The Gospel of Wholeness: Biblical Reflections of Anointing, Healing and Prosperity*, (Ibadan: Positive Press, 2012), 64-87.

²⁴ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'Born of Water and the Spirit': Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa," in *African Christianity: An African Story*, ed. O. Kalu (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 2007), 339-358. To the contemporary list in Nigeria we may add Ayo Oritsejafor, Matthew Ashimolowo, Chris Oyakhilome, Daniel Kolawole Olukoya.

²⁵ The Pentecostal churches which are mostly African Initiated Churches (AIC) are the fastest growing congregations in Africa. Some even have branches in America, Asia, and Europe.

²⁶ Godwin I. Akper, "Prosperity Gospel: A Case Study of Benue State in North-Central Nigeria," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 1 (2007): 48.

²⁷ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "Did Jesus Wear Designer Robes?" *Christianity Today* 53.11 (November 2009), 38-39.

The theme of success emerges also in an explicit preaching of a prosperity gospel according to which God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share in Christ's victory over sin, sickness and poverty—blessings which can be obtained by a confession of faith. This gospel is invariably linked with ideas of 'seed faith,' or with the biblical image of 'sowing and reaping.' Tithes and offerings become instruments of prosperity.²⁸

Consequently, in Africa the Pentecostal message (i.e., prosperity preaching and theology) is deemed a tool of hope equipping adherents to aspire for health, reversal of economic desolation, expansion of wealth, and prosperity in all human endeavor. Justifying the acceptance and popularity of Prosperity Gospel in Africa, some teach that this brand of faith resonates with African traditional religion, which is "supposed to provide such blessings as fertility, longevity and abundance."²⁹ This assertion, however, is disputed by J. C. Thomas who contends that the individualistic philosophy of Prosperity Gospel distances it from African traditional religion, which cherishes collective wellbeing.³⁰ Indeed, not only has the biblical foundation of Prosperity Gospel been seriously questioned, but it has also been observed that this gospel is influenced by New Thought,³¹ or at best, it is the "intersection between Pentecostal-

²⁸ Gifford, "The Prosperity Gospel in Africa," 20.

²⁹ Willaim M. R. Simpson, "The Significance of Andrew Perriman's Faith, Health and Prosperity in the Word of Faith Debate," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16.1 (2007): 68.

³⁰ J. C. Thomas. "Poverty and Capitalism in West Africa: A Christian Perspective," *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 14 (2009): 49-59. See also idem, "Prosperity Preaching: West African Traditional Belief, or a Foreign Import?" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 17 (2012): 163-172.

³¹ Simpson, "The Significance of Andrew Perriman's Faith," 73, finds such influence in Prosperity Gospel's substitution of self-realization for submission and self-sacrifice, its opposition toward the traditional debasement of creature before Creator, its belief in the power of humanity's thoughts and words to shape its circumstances, and its promise of health and prosperity as a natural corollary of various spiritual laws that can be put into action.

ism, New Thought, and an American gospel of pragmatism, individualism, and upward mobility.”³²

Manifestations of Prosperity Gospel

The pervasive dotting of the Faith Movement on the world’s religious arena puzzles researchers. It is not restricted to any region, people or group. It is a discrete Christian movement but lacks all the denominational characteristics. It claims orthodoxy, yet it cannot be identified with the well-organized orthodox institutions. The churches of the Faith Movement spring up independently in diverse ways and forms with large member congregations, even in sparsely populated areas and/or poor communities.³³ While preachers of the movement refute the stereotype term “prosperity preacher,” they emerge with a message of supernatural promises of Christian faith that is measured in material wealth, health and success in every aspect of Christian life. Apart from huge billboards that announce their presence in communities and the spiritual services they offer, they hone their ideology through their lifestyle, music, hermeneutics and theology, and homiletics.

Lifestyle

The preachers of Prosperity Gospel are themselves the living examples of their message of divine prosperity. Most live extravagantly—with luxurious cars, private jets, mansions with gold-plated fixtures, expensive designer clothing, vacationing in exotic places, and so on. Their lavish lifestyle reminds their followers of the power of faith that lays claim to hidden spiritual realities and translates them into material realities.³⁴

³² Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, 11. See also Simpson, “The Significance of Andrew Perriman’s Faith,” 73.

³³ Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, 4-8.

³⁴ Costi Hinn, “Riches I Heed Not: Why Benny Hinn’s Nephew Traded Gulfstream ‘Gospel’ Ministry for the Real Thing,” *Christianity Today* 61.8 (October 2017), 103-104. Fredrick Price states, “I’m only doing it so that you can see that there’s somebody the same color that you are, breathing the same contaminated air, paying the same outrageous prices for everything else, and I’m prospering because of the Book” (cited in Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, 134. See also Deborah Potter, “The Prosperity Gospel,” *Re-*

The extravagant lifestyle associated with the prosperity teaching leads some of them into financial stress. This in turn often leads to manipulation, fraudulent activities, embezzlement of church funds, literally begging audience for money, or even covenanting with demonic powers. To members and admirers, the lavish living of the preachers is evidence of the authenticity of their preaching. Some scholars suggest that Prosperity Gospel encourages laziness.³⁵ Others regard it as an impetus for delusion.³⁶ Members of the prosperity churches become vulnerable to fraud, false teaching, false faith and expectations, and even loss of faith when it seems that God has not “honoured their faith.”³⁷ Indeed, some preachers may confess that the riches this gospel promises exist only on their wish lists and remain only ‘a miracle on the way’, leading some to frustrations and even suicide.³⁸

Music

Music transcends language and culture. It is, therefore, one of the effective mediums of communication for any Christian move-

ligion and Ethics Newsweekly (August 17, 2007), <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1051/feature.html> (accessed March 7, 2015).

³⁵ See Olugbenga Olagunju, “Health and Wealth Gospel in the Context of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 14 (2009): 149-162; and Nwaomah, *Gospel of Wholeness*, 73-78.

³⁶ A. O. Dada, “Prosperity Gospel in Nigerian Context: A Medium of Social Transformation or an Impetus for Delusion?” *ORITA: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 36.1-2 (2004): 95-105.

³⁷ Lausanne Movement, “Lausanne Theology Working Group Statement on the Prosperity Gospel,” 99-102.

³⁸ Many stories of unfulfilled expectations abound. In May 2014, a Mountain of Fire Ministry pastor in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, committed suicide (see nationalweekender.net, May 2, 2014) and another who sought financial assistance for eye surgery and instead was given anointing oil by the church was denounced for crying out (see sunnewsonline.com). It must also be noted that not all Pentecostal pastors teach an extreme kind of Prosperity Gospel. For example, Tunde Bakare, a Pentecostal pastor, is said to have torn a book in which the author, David Oyedepo, claimed that “the anointing oil is not a symbol of the Holy Spirit, that it is the life of God in a bottle” (<http://www.topcelebritiesng.com/why-i-tore-bishop-oyedepos-book-pastor-tunde-bakare/> [accessed March 5, 2015]).

ment. According to Matthews Ojo, gospel music “could be used to mean a distinct kind of music composed and rendered by men and women who call themselves Christians and who refer to their music as ‘ministration of the Good News in songs’.”³⁹

Like many Christian institutions, the Faith Movement uses music in transporting Prosperity Gospel message to the homes of many. They churn out all kinds of songs with diverse rhythms, lyric and tunes. Songs with titles such as “The Lord shall provide all my needs,” “Jehovah Jireh takes care of me,” “Me, I no go suffer [I will not suffer],” and “Everything na double [I receive blessings in double]” promote faith as a force that actualizes Christian rights to health, wealth, and financial security in the material world.

More importantly, the Christian hip-hop industry is slowly turning away from the evangelical message to the prosperity message. For example, a celebrated Zimbabwe hip-hop artist claims his message is intended not only to minister and inspire the word of God, but also to remind people of God’s promise of prosperity, health and success. He attributes his fame and success to the gospel he preaches through his music.⁴⁰ A Texas-based hip-hop artist released a track praising Joel Osteen, a prosperity preacher of the United States.⁴¹ The representation of Prosperity Gospel in music attracts both young and old who in varying ways feel economically and socially deprived. For them, such music runs contrary to the grim economic and social realities of life. Thus, prosperity songs provide resilience, energize the vulnerable to fight back, sustain a sense of hope in despair, and enhance ebullient disposition amidst despondency.

³⁹ Matthews Ojo, “Indigenous Gospel Music and Social Reconstruction in Modern Nigeria,” *Missionalia* 26.2 (1998): 210-231.

⁴⁰ Simbarashe Gukurume, “Singing Positivity: Prospering Gospel in the Musical Discourse of Popular Youth Hip-Hop Gospel in Zimbabwe,” *Muziki—Journal of Musical Research in Africa* 14 (2017): 37-38.

⁴¹ Tony Cummings, “Rappers Against Prosperity Gospel: The New Wave of Militant Emcees,” www.crossrhythms.co.uk (accessed January 9, 2019).

Hermeneutics and Theology

The preachers of the Faith Movement may be independent, but united in their hermeneutical approach. They make generous use of Scripture to propagate the ideology of Prosperity Gospel. Assessing their use of Scripture, William Simpson identifies four hermeneutical flaws.⁴² The first is a strong ideological bias that demands “(*a priori*) a prosperity gospel from the Scriptures.” This bias controls their reading of Scripture, disallowing the text to speak to them. The second is a utilitarian use of Scripture that reduces the Bible to a contract for success.⁴³ This approach disregards historical contexts of passages and seeks to universalize and make normative what could have been a localized and contingent theme. Thirdly, prosperity hermeneutics shuns engagement with the scholarly community and rather emphasizes subjective revelation. Subjective revelation is what is known to the preachers of this movement as revelation knowledge, which transcends sensory knowledge and reveals the reality of the spiritual realm. It is attainable only through the spiritual realm and superior to sensory knowledge. This theory creates sensory and revelation levels of biblical knowledge, and sees revelation knowledge to be superior, as it is received directly from God.⁴⁴ This revelation knowledge, supported with prooftexting techniques, takes the normative role in their hermeneutics. The fourth flaw is a violation of exegetical principles: the movement’s hermeneutical approach does not regard as important the study of literary elements (e.g., genre, structure, argumentation) and historical contexts (e.g., backgrounds, date, authorship, and culture) of the biblical text.

⁴² Simpson, “The Significance of Andrew Perriman’s Fath,” 75-79.

⁴³ Claiming Luke 4:18 as proof, Billy Lubansa, *The Job Walk: Feet Washed in Butter* (Lagos, Nigeria: Rehoboth 2007), 19, writes, “People of God, you must believe that when the gospel is preached to the poor it helps them to grow rich. This is because that is how God intended to deal with the poverty issue and the gospel is a prosperity building message!” See also Basilius M. Kasera, “The Biblical and Theological Examination of Prosperity Theology and Its Impact Among the Poor in Namibia” (MA Thesis, South African Theological Seminary, 2012), 107.

⁴⁴ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 102.

Millard J. Erickson defines theology as a “discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily on the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to issues of life.”⁴⁵ A cursory look at this definition may lead one to think that the teachings of the faith movement are theologically sound. The movement’s teachings systematically and culturally address issues of life expressed in terms that are meaningful in contemporary context. However, a critical look causes one to conclude otherwise. The hermeneutical approach adopted suggests that instead of Scripture the so-called revelation knowledge (subjective revelation) is the primary source of the theology of the movement. Thus, the teachings of the movement theologically turn the Bible head down to project the message of health, wealth and success. For instance, two Ghanaian prosperity preachers, Eastwood Anaba and Mensa Otabil, on the basis of Jacob’s shrewdness with his brother Esau, construct a doctrine of acceptable business shrewdness, which can be emulated by believers today. For these two preachers, the ‘strong’ can take advantage of the ‘weak’, and the ‘wise’ can subdue the ‘ignorant’ for personal prosperity.⁴⁶ They promote injustice in the name of self-enrichment, while Scripture strongly argues against injustice and unjust behaviors. Consequently, the theology of the Faith Movement is deemed incorrect with a potential to distort the relationship between the believer and God.

Homiletics

Prosperity Gospel preachers frequently make use of the pulpit and media during special assemblies like monthly prayer meetings or annual conventions to spread their teachings and attract followership. Some own radio and television stations. They pick a biblical passage and, instead of giving their audiences insights into the

⁴⁵ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd print (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 23.

⁴⁶ See J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Learning to Prosper by Wrestling and by Negotiation: Jacob and Esau in Contemporary African Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 21 (2012): 64-86.

passage, they integrate messages of health, wealth and success. Their homilies project irregularities of life as resulting from inability to play by the rules of Christian faith. Therefore, some of their homilies aim at those satisfied with mediocre living, those who think they are undeserving of God's blessings, the sick, the demon-possessed and encourage them to speak positive confessions over their lives. While they speak positive confessions into the lives of their audiences or exorcise by positive confession of ejecting demonic personalities, the preachers also prophesy about peoples' present and future situations.⁴⁷ There are also instances where they make reference to their material property—the pricy shirts, the pair of shoes, the house they live in, the cars they drive, the private jets, and others—as evidence of God's blessings.⁴⁸ They then call upon their followers to sow seed money to overcome barriers to upward mobility in their lives. Believers are encouraged to imagine their future and create desired expectations such as new homes, new cars, a wealthy spouse, job contracts, employment, and visas to travel to other countries where they could further prosper. They are further motivated to confess their desired expectations and declare the realization of such experiences in faith. In some of these situa-

⁴⁷ See, for example, Naomi Haynes, "Pentecostalism and the Morality of Money: Prosperity, Inequality, and Religious Sociality on the Zambian Copperbelt," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (2012): 123-139.

⁴⁸ For example, several Nigerian prosperity preachers own private jets. Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor said, "I am not ashamed to own a plane. I think it is a necessity and not a luxury" in an interview by the *Tribune*, November 25, 2012, <http://www.tribune.com.ng/sun/interview/9258-im-not-ashamed-to-own-a-plane-oritsejafor-says-i-had-no-idea-how-the-jet-came-about> (accessed August 20, 2015). See also "God's private jets" in the *Vanguard*, November 28, 2012, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/11/gods-private-jets/> (accessed August 20, 2015); Carmen McCain, "Private Jets for Jesus," *Daily Trust*, November 7, 2012, [http://weeklytrust.com.ng/index.php?option=com_content &view=article&id=11164:private-jets-for-jesus&catid=57:my-thoughts-exactly&Itemid=154](http://weeklytrust.com.ng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11164:private-jets-for-jesus&catid=57:my-thoughts-exactly&Itemid=154) (accessed August 10, 2015); Tony Rapu, "Is it right or wrong to own a jet? It goes deeper," *Daily Post Online Nigeria Newspaper*, November 26, 2012, <http://dailypost.com.ng/2012/11/26/pastor-tony-rapu-is-right-wrong-jet-it-goes-deeper/> (accessed August 10, 2015); and Mfonobong Nsehe, "Wealthy Nigerians, Pastors Spend \$225 Million on Private Jets," *Forbes*, May 5, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/05/17/wealthy-nigerians-pastors-spend-225-million-on-private-jets/> (accessed August 20, 2015).

tions the preachers reprimand or ridicule the faith of some people or their audiences, teaching that their economic status and wellbeing represents their level of faith and giving.

In the homilies of prosperity preachers, “grace makes rich, Christ is a magic genie,”⁴⁹ and faith unlocks spiritual inheritance. Their homiletical approach emphasizes visualization and positive confession, concepts related to New Age technique and magic respectively. Here, spiritual power is brought into the sphere of *human* control and akin in principle to a form of idolatry or occult manipulation.⁵⁰ This is the basis for the “name it claim it” teaching. Indeed, Prosperity Gospel proponents live, sing, construct, teach, and preach prosperity—wealth, health, and success.

Prosperity Gospel and Seventh-day Adventists

The influence of Prosperity Gospel knows no bounds in the Christian world. There are indications of this influence among some Seventh-day Adventists in Africa. For example, some members, including pastors, are adopting the style and theology of prosperity preachers in anointing, music, and prayer and deliverance. Some may even question the traditional teachings of the church regarding health and wealth. There are reports of non-Adventist clergy being invited to lead ministerial leadership seminars in some Adventist Church conferences. There are also reports that some members regularly visit prosperity preachers for prayer and deliverance.

While the influence of the Faith Movement is beginning to gain grounds in some Seventh-day Adventist circles,⁵¹ the church has not undertaken any major work to help members understand this phenomenon. Only few Adventist theologians have touched on Prosperity Gospel in their writings.⁵² For example, in one brief

⁴⁹ Hinn, “Riches I Heed Not,” 103.

⁵⁰ Simpson, “The Significance of Andrew Perriman’s Fath,” 85.

⁵¹ See, for example, Bukola Ajide, *The Unknown Secrets of Prosperity* (Lagos, Nigeria: Victory Sanctuary, 2007).

⁵² E.g., Nwaomah, “Prosperity Gospel in the Context of Jesus’ Teachings,” 3-17; idem, *The Gospel of Wholeness*; and Alberto R. Timm, “Prosperity Gospel: Deceptions and Dangers,” *Adventist Review Online*, <http://www.Adventist>

article, Alberto R. Timm has observed that this gospel distorts God's character, presents a utopic image of human existence in spite of the great cosmic conflict, distorts the essence of Christ's teachings, applies to the New Testament church many Old Testament promises of theocratic prosperity, and distorts the whole spectrum of Christian obedience.⁵³

The remaining chapters of this book present a biblical-theological evaluation of Prosperity Gospel from an Adventist perspective. It is hoped that after reading this book, you will be able to understand the hermeneutical and theological shortcomings of Prosperity Gospel, its inconsistency with the biblical concept of prosperity, and the challenges it presents to biblical faith, lifestyle, and mission.

review.org/prosperity-gospel-deceptions-and-dangers (accessed June 11, 2015); idem, "Prosperity Gospel: A Brief Critical Analysis," *BRI Newsletter* 45 (2014), 1-7.

⁵³ Timm, "Prosperity Gospel: Deceptions and Dangers."