

The Problem of Prosperity Preaching In The Light Of Matthew 26:6-13.

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Abstract: In African Church the Church is engulfed by prosperity preaching, which is the approach of material procession from God through positive confession induced by Christian preachers. This contemporary religious phenomenon calls for concern among believers. And whereas a critical contrast with Jesus' response to Judas Iscariots reaction against His anointing shows that there is something wrong with this idea that sounds like God made a mistake in not creating all fingers equal. This research applied critical exegetic examination of Matt.26:6, related literature, journal and internet materials and found that extreme Prosperity preaching runs contrary to Biblical truth as it places material possession as a yard stick for measuring the kind of God the believer is serving, and it draws a thick line between the relatively poor and the very rich. Consequently this research recommends for a return to the standard gospel that focuses on salvation than prosperity preaching.

Keyword: Poverty, the Poor, Gospel of Prosperity and Commercialization

I. Introduction

Prosperity Gospel is widely considered to be plaguing the African church [1]. And the contemporary wave of neo-religious movements in Africa had left people to ask, 'what would have been the ultimate purpose for the advent of Christianity into Africa?' And furthermore, to compare the original form of Christianity at its infant stage in Africa and its contemporary jolted state. Taking the Church of Scotland Mission which came into Nigeria in particular through the Cross River basin (Calabar in particular) by the Jamaican Missionaries [2 and 3], glaringly show that the Church came in with the spreading of the true gospel and the civilization of Africa. Their cardinal objectives were vigorously pursued with the opening of mission stations, Mission Schools [4], Social work Mission Hospitals and Agrarian ventures.

This Mission was anchored on

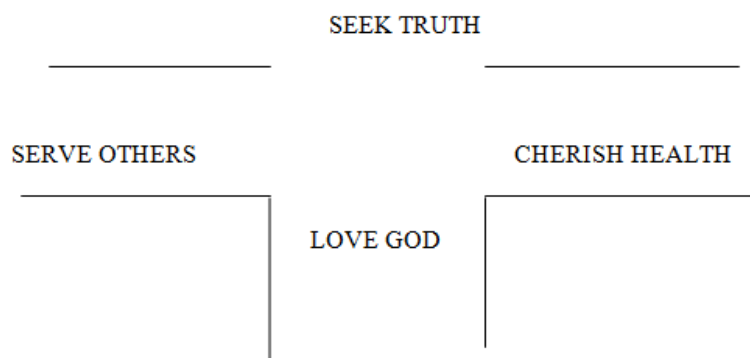


Fig 1

[2]

The relics of these contributions still echo loudly all over the place. It was the same with other missionary outfits all over Africa. They virtually provided every thing including prefabricated building materials for the residence of the Missionaries, Churches, Schools and even social gathering places for the people. Morally the Church had zero tolerance for corruption as Teachers and Catechists never waited for panels and committees to determine the plight of the erring ones. Then the supervisors of schools were demy-gods and had sound judgement for every immorality. Moral and civic education was not just a subject of studies but a way of life. Pastors, Catechists and Mission Teachers were the local jury whose sound judgements were worth it. There was a dressing code that challenged the rough worldly fashions or nudity. Churches were in competition on the issue of moral impeachability hence the Presbyterians would claim to be as straight as the Rule. Then the preacher could sleep wherever night had befallen him or her.

Like wild wind the Church is now engulfed by loud shouts as though of victory but that of prosperity messages. This is sharply in contrast with rudimental teaching of Jesus Christ that challenges men to repentance. Today, phone ringing tones are made up of prophetic utterances that promise death to real and imaginary enemies with background Amen(s) and Hallelujah(s). Today it is like God reacts in man's favour when He is given surprising huge money called seed of faith as though there are gifts that can set God on his heels no matter who gives it. A critical contrast with Jesus' response to Judas Iscariots reaction about Mary Magdalene's anointing shows that there is something wrong with this idea that sound as if God is a money doubler or a debtor that must pay, or that God made a mistake in not creating all fingers equal. And that the size and carriage of one's God depends on his ability to make one wealthy, healthy and prosperous. This negates the fact that God had created a situation where all things must glorify Him, and caring for the poor is one of the ways.

Today, the craving for materialism has displaced the virtues for which the Church was known in Africa. Contemporarily every pastor is after number not membership, quality, magnificent buildings, flashy Cars and money not souls for Heaven. Now the church is like a fashion parade ground where it is difficult to distinguish between the Harlots and the Believers. Things have gone so bad that the dailies are awash with varying degrees of negative stories from the Church. Today, is like everything is about money, money, money. To achieve this there is the creeping in of crazy quest for titles like Doctor (without University degrees), Prophets, Prophetesses, and all kinds of names just to attract recognition not by output or God's approval. Native doctors and witches and wizards now find places in Churches which they either found themselves or the ones they crept into. The pictures of preachers are now the points of attraction than salvation messages, false claims and search for secret powers are reported along with religious associated ritual murder cases. For prosperity's sake the pastors' device all kinds of means by which to raise money not minding the financial status of members who must sow bountiful prosperity seeds by fire and by force. It is like saying that the Church is now the agent of impoverishment than agent of social well being of the believers in Africa which was *abi niti* the bad rock for mission. It is noteworthy here to state that one is not soliciting for the Stone Ages where the African Churches were spoon fed, No, but for moderation among the Churches with her primary objectives placed in the front burners. It is obvious that African churches are today independent and are capable of funding herself without any form of manipulation of the membership in the name of prosperity gospel as it is unacceptable to feed the church with chaff and hoodwink her into church commercialization scheme for the benefit of the Priests.

Exegetical Analysis on Matthew 26:6-13

The gospel according to Matthew is the first gospel in the positioning of in the New Testament books.

Unfortunately, there is less evidence available for answering this question than for the other Gospels. We can, however, make a few observations. First, even though the Gospel of Matthew is attributed to an eyewitness, it is also written in the third person rather than in the first person. In light of our discussion of the other three Gospels, this may suggest the possibility of a similar use of scribes. Second, though this Gospel is attributed to an eyewitness, it used previously written material (compare Matthew 1:18 with JST, Matthew 2:1). It is also possible that the Gospel of Matthew, like the Gospel of Luke, also used the Gospel of Mark as one of its sources... "It may be also, as some scholars speculate, that of the four gospels now in the New Testament, Mark was written first; that Matthew and Luke had before them Mark's account when they recorded their testimonies [5].

Irenaeus the bishop of Lyons at the close of the second century ascribed the authorship to Matthew "while Peter and Paul were in Rome. He also positioned the Gospel before the writing of Mark's gospel. Eusebius adds that Mathew having first preached to the Hebrew and committed it writing in his mother tongue [6]. Cardew corroborating Tasker says;

The author of the Gospel has traditionally been identified with "Matthew," who according to this Gospel is one of Jesus' twelve disciples (see Matthew 9:9; he is called "Levi" in Luke 5:27). The main source of this tradition is Irenaeus (a second-century bishop) who writes: "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect" (Against Heresies 3.1.1). It is also possible that Papias (another second-century bishop) refers to this tradition: "Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language" (quoted by Eusebius, in his Church History, 3.39.16).

This gospel has nothing in the prologue as clue to the authorship. "The early church unanimously ascribed the gospel to Matthew" [7], although it has been suggested by many scholars that there is no textual provision to authenticate Matthew's original authorship theory as there is no available manuscript that suggest so eighth. According to Barclay (1975:4) "Scholars are agreed that the first gospel as it stands does not come from the hand of Matthew" as one who was an eye witness would not have needed to use Mark's Gospel in the compilation of his own account. Other explanations in support of unknown and known individuals who might have authored the book do not hold up (Lindsell, 1971:1), however, the date of authorship is fixed at AD 50 [8],

“but not later than AD 70”(McCain: 125). It is agreed that Matthew wrote a Jewish audience in Palestine. However it likely that they were Greek speaking Jews [7].

The place of event was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper probably healed by Jesus Christ. The record here says a certain woman anointed Jesus Christ with oil.

Some think that the woman mentioned here was Mary, the sister of Lazarus; others Mary Magdalene; but against the former opinion it is argued that it is not likely, had this been Mary the sister of Lazarus, that Matthew and Mark would have suppressed her name. Besides, say they, we should not confound the repast which is mentioned here, with that mentioned by John, John 12:3. This one was made only two days before the Passover, and that one six days before: the one was made at the house of Simon the leper, the other at the house of Lazarus. (Barnes)

His disciples, one of them, viz. Judas was indignant over the use of the costly oil, hence the question "Why this waste?" (Matt.26:8). His contention was that it would have been more profitable to sell the oil for the welfare of the poor. But Jesus Christ retorted, "But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. "She hath done it to embalm me—entafiasai me. The Septuagint use entafiasai for the person whose office it was to embalm, Gen. 50:2, and entafiazw for the Hebrew... which signifies to prepare with spices, or aromatics, Gen 50:3" (Barnes).

The pouring of ointment upon the head of Christ was a token of the highest respect. Where there is true love in the heart to Jesus Christ, nothing will be thought too good to bestow upon him. The more Christ's servants and their services are cavilled at, the more he manifests his acceptance. This act of faith and love was so remarkable, that it would be reported, as a memorial of Mary's faith and love, to all future ages, and in all places where the gospel should be preached. This prophecy is fulfilled. This singular action was "Christ's Final Announcement of his Death, as Now within Two Days, and the Simultaneous Conspiracy of the Jewish Authorities to Compass It—The Anointing at Bethany—Judas Agrees with the Chief Priests to Betray His Lord" (Jamieson biblehub.com/commentaries).

Pulpit commentary on verse 11, "Ye have the poor always with you", says, St. Mark adds, "and whensoever ye will ye may do them good," opines that this is in strict accordance with the old Law: "The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in thy land" (Deuteronomy 15:11). The existence of the poor creates space for the exercise of the graces of charity, benevolence, and self-denial; and such opportunities will never be wanting while the world lasts. "Me ye have not always"; i.e. in bodily presence. When he speaks of being with his Church always to the end, he is speaking of his Divine presence. His human body, his body of humiliation, was removed from the sight and touch of men, and he could no longer be received and welcomed and succoured as heretofore. In a different and far more effectual mode he would visit his faithful servants by a spiritual presence which should never fail or be withdrawn. To the objectors he would say, "You will no longer have opportunity of honouring me in my human form; why, then, do you grudge the homage now paid me for the last time?" (Pulpit Commentaries biblehub.com/commentaries) And you rather can express the divine law of doing charitable works on the poor who will always be there. By implication Jesus Christ unequivocally state that there is no time all will be rich a like. Common sense also lends credence to this axiom. Of course man causes God to receive thanks in the act of charity and expression of benevolence

Jesus Christ used this scenario to announce his imminent death. "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" (Matt. 26: 10 -11). Jesus applauded her. It is this question and Jesus response that gave rise to the enquiry made by this research visa-avis Prosperity preaching. The phrase that is escalated here is "you always have the poor". Could it be that Jesus was away Det. 15:11, "For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land." and its continual effect? If he did, did he make any provision to up turn this old responsibility on the Jews who must make provision for the poor. Or did he yield to the provision of the same law by telling his disciples that they will always have the poor with them. A critical examination of the Greek word for the poor here is "tous ptōchous" from the root word ptōchos meaning poor; perhaps pitiful or inferior [9], poor, destitute- poor, destitute, spiritually poor, either in a good sense (humble devout persons) or bad. Strong Helps, (2011), [11], adds that *ptōxós* is (from *ptōssō*, "to crouch or cower like a beggar") – properly, bent over; (figuratively) *deeply destitute*, completely lacking resources (earthly wealth) – i.e. *helpless as a beggar*. (*ptōchós*) relates to "the pauper rather than the mere peasant, the extreme opposite of the rich" Thayer's Greek Lexicon (2011) traces the development of the word

ptōchos, ptōchoē, ptōchon (ptōssō, to be thoroughly frightened, to cower down or hide oneself for fear; hence, ptōchos properly, one who slinks and crouches), often involving the idea of roving about in wretchedness...; hence, 1. in classical Greek from Homer down, reduced to beggary, begging, mendicant, asking alms: Luke 14:13, 21; Luke 16:20, 22. 2. poor, needy (opposed to plousios): Matthew 19:21; Matthew 26:9, 11; Mark 10:21; Mark 12:42, 43; Mark 14:5, 7; Luke 18:22; Luke 19:8; Luke 21:3; John 12:5, 6, 8; John 13:29; Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 2:10; James 2:2, 3, 6; Revelation 13:16; in a broader

sense, destitute of wealth, influence, position, honours; lowly, afflicted: Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18 (from Isaiah 61:1

II. Conceptual Framework

Poverty

Poverty is the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money (debility due to malnutrition or lack of fertility) or material possessions, or renunciation as a member of a religious order of the right as an individual to own property. It is indigence penury want destitution; meaning the state of one with insufficient resources. Poverty may cover a range from extreme want of necessities to an absence of material comforts (the extreme *poverty* of the slum dwellers). While indigence implies seriously straitened circumstances (the *indigence* of her years as a graduate student), penury suggests a cramping or oppressive lack of money (a catastrophic illness that condemned them to years of *penury*). Want and destitution imply extreme poverty that threatens life itself through starvation or exposure (lived in a perpetual state of *want*) (the widespread *destitution* in countries beset by famine) [11].

The Poor

The poor in general terms could be defined as one who lacks material possessions, or characterized by poverty or less than adequate resources to depend on. On the other hand one who is lacking spiritual or material possessions could be said to be poor. The poor could be seen from two perspectives as the bible shows, the first as in "...the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3), and secondly as in "the poor always with you" (Mt 26:11) and those in need of arms "...give to the poor," (Mark 10:21). The second group are the people the believer may need to express his/her charity on, while the first group require a spiritual touch as to be satisfied. While this paper had undertaken to place the story of the anointing of Jesus Christ in its context, it is necessary to mention the fact that the paper's focus is neither on the woman, the cost of the ointment nor on Jesus' approval, but on Jesus Christ's response as it relates to the poor being always with the people. "The poor always with the believers" simply implies that poverty is a natural phenomenal continuum that can only come to an end in the city of equality and equity – "Heaven" - a place where the poor will be compensated at the bosom of Abraham and those rich unto self regret.

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, which he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. (Luke 16:23-25)

Adams reflecting on Matthew 26 verse 9, said that charity much of the time serve as a cloak for covetousness as God is robbed of his right under the pretence of devoting what is withheld to some charitable purpose, to which there was no intention ever to give it. For Adams this disciple of Jesus Christ (no matter the withheld name by synoptic gospel authors) was not genuinely sincere in his expression as John 12: 6 puts it, "This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief. As he had the money box he used to take what was put into it". John insists that Judas appealed to charity to stop reduction in the treasury as it is common with some treasurers who find it difficult to fund Church projects for the love of keeping more money they can draw from for their private uses.

Clarke, (2000), [12], commenting on Matthew 26 verse 11, quips that the disciples had the poor always, and consequently, have the opportunity of doing them good at any time; but not himself as his bodily presence was about to be terminated. By implication Jesus had maintained that the poor provides opportunity for the believers to express love. In Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to the self claimed repentant rich man, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." This story buttresses the fact that the poor were part of Christ's scheme, hence he had the mandate to preach to them in Luke 4:16ff. In deed the anointing to preach to the poor did not state that Jesus had come to remove poverty even though that may not be a palatable condition. One thing that is evident is that it is not correct to assume that poverty is a crime of any person as it may not rightly be referred to as a curse. Nor can it be attributed to God's inability to provide for his subjects as some prosperity preachers will want their audience to believe. But in the poor the believer expresses God who is love as the image thereto.

Prosperity Preaching

Prosperity gospel precipitates from Neo Religious movements which is... is nothing but a charismatic form of Christian Science. It is *the fastest growing segment of professing Christianity in recent years...among churches connected with the Positive Confession movement or Word-Faith movement (all part of the modern*

Charismatic movement). It has involved two distinct but closely related factions: the Norman Vincent Peale/Robert Schuller Positive-Possibility thinkers/Positive Mental Attitude, with their roots in New Thought; and the Kenneth Hagin/Kenneth Copeland Positive Confession and Word-Faith groups, which have their roots in E.W. Kenyon, William Branham, and the Manifest Sons of God/Latter Rain movement... It does not yet constitute a new denomination, but it certainly represents innovative teachings outside of mainstream Christianity. The situation is so serious now because of the dominance over the so-called Christian media achieved by the teachers of Positive/Possibility Thinking and Positive Confession [13].

On the spiritual sphere prosperity gospel is a veritable instrument in the hands of the preachers who themselves are struggling to survive from the clutch of poverty. This contemporary wave of gospel presentation revolves round wealth, money and other individual material enhancement of the believer. In many cases it is presented in such a way that Christianity is portrayed as having missed the point far behind by concentrating on the gospel of "Christ crucified" more than riches and firm. Following the growth rapidly noticed in prosperity gospel movement a body of research has developed that has been preoccupied with tracing the relationships between Pentecostalism, modernity and neo-liberalism... At the same time a parallel literature has developed that associates discourses about witchcraft in Africa with changing patterns of production and consumption and with new forms of wealth... In this literature, witchcraft has been accounted for in terms of moral economy; as a levelling force opposing new material inequalities, or conversely as a force in the accumulation of wealth and power... On the other hand, Pentecostalism has been shown to address issues of wealth and inequality, particularly through the so-called prosperity gospel, but also through its ideas of demonic agency ... An overlapping theme in studies of both witchcraft and Pentecostalism has been their associations with individualist ideologies of modernity and with transformations of social relations and kinship. Both the spread of Pentecostalism and the resurgence of occult beliefs and practices have been related to economic transformations and the neo-liberal economy (Hasu) Most respondents to the recent survey simply define the prosperity gospel as "the gospel that promises only financial break-through," (Folarin) or "the preaching that does not address the concern of salvation from sin but only emphasizes that God will make everyone materially rich" (Folarin). It is also defined as "the gospel that people should accumulate material things." Yet others define it as "the gospel that defines poverty as sin" (Folarin). The above points sum up the definitions that can be given to the concept. It is exclusively financial, and neglects the spiritual well-being of the believers.

Prosperity preaching and its Locus standi

Prosperity preaching may be defined as the teaching that believers "have a right to the blessings 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" (<http://www.lausanne.org/aboutlausanne>) "...prosperity gospel is something different from a biblically-oriented approach to stewardship. Even given the basic outline of the prosperity gospel, it is clear that there are fundamental differences between the health-and-wealth gospel and biblically-based, theological approaches to human flourishing" (Spencer).

It is recognized that this teaching or preaching is a phenomenon that cuts across denominational barriers. Prosperity teaching can be found in varying degrees in mainstream Protestant, Pentecostal as well as Charismatic Churches. It is worthy of note to mention that the phenomenon of prosperity teaching is being addressed here not any particular denomination or tradition (<http://www.lausanne.org/aboutlausanne>). "One of the most striking characteristics of the prosperity theologians is their seeming fixation on the act of giving" (Jones). Their errors are briefly listed and explained by Jones as follows.

The Abrahamic covenant is a means to material entitlement.

The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22) is one of the theological bases of the prosperity gospel. It's good that prosperity theologians recognize much of Scripture is the record of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, but it's bad that they don't maintain an orthodox view of this covenant. They incorrectly view the inception of the covenant; more significantly, they erroneously view the application of the covenant.

... God promises to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great... The elements of the covenant are threefold: making Abraham into a great nation, blessing Abraham personally, and blessing all nations in Abraham. The promises of the covenant are unconditional. The rest of the OT repeatedly refers back to God's oath to Abraham in the Torah. The NT does the same by pointing out that Jesus Christ, Abraham's seed, will make possible the final fulfillment of that covenant in the future [14].

Jesus's Atonement extends to the "Sin" of Material Poverty.

In his *Bibliotheca Sacra* article "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel," theologian Ken Sarles observes how the prosperity gospel claims that "both physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the atonement." This seems to be an accurate observation in light of Copeland's statement that

“the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, and poverty on Jesus at Calvary.” This misunderstanding of the scope of the atonement stems from two errors prosperity gospel proponents make.

Christians give in Order to Gain material Compensation from God.

... “True prosperity is the ability to use God’s power to meet the needs of mankind in any realm of life” and, “One had been called to finance the gospel to the world.” While such statements may appear praiseworthy, this emphasis on giving is built on motives that are anything but philanthropic. The driving force behind this teaching on giving is what prosperity teacher Robert Tilton referred to as the “Law of Compensation.” According to this law purportedly based on Mark 10:30—Christians should give generously to others because when they do, God gives back more in return. This, in turn, leads to a cycle of ever-increasing prosper.

Faith is a self-generated Spiritual Force that leads to Prosperity.

Whereas orthodox Christianity understands faith to be trust in the person of Jesus Christ, prosperity teachers espouse something quite different. “Faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function,” Copeland writes in *The Laws of Prosperity*. “There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God’s Word. Faith causes them to function.” This is obviously a faulty, perhaps even heretical, understanding of faith.

Prayer is a tool to Force God to grant Prosperity

Prosperity gospel preachers often note we “have not because we ask not” (James 4:2). They encourage us to pray for personal success in all areas of life. As Dollar writes, “When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass. It is a key to getting results as a Christian.” (<http://www.crfloodollarsministries.org/BibleStudy/Articles.asp?id=329>) This research adopted Jones’ position because it helped to explain and point out the errors this paper is striving at.

John 2 as a Locus for Prosperity Preaching

Here below are three different translations of the passage above for a comparative analysis;

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in health; I know that it is well with your soul”. (RSV)

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. (KJV).

“Dear friend, I am praying that all is well with you and your body is healthy as I know your soul is” (LSB/TLB)

The passage above is traditionally attributed to Apostle John. This conclusion arose from its similarity with First and second John. The identification of the “elder” in v. 1. As in the case of 2 John 1, one would identify the author of the letter, who designates himself “the elder,” as the author of 1 John, 2 John, and the Gospel of John, that is, John the Apostle [15], “Scholars in liberal tradition do not accept the Johnine authorship and suggest a possible date after the death of the apostle. And so AD 90 is suggested [16]. McCain listing this under Johnine writings says it was written between AD 85 and AD 95 [7]. This letter is more administrative than it is theological.

I wish above all things- *peri panōn euchomai*. Above all things I pray that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, *kai ugiainein*, to which one MS. adds *en aleueia*, which gives it a different meaning, viz., that thou may be sound in the truth.

The meaning of the phrase in v. 2, ... (kaqws euodoutai sou Jh yuch, literally, “just as your soul is well off”). The noun yuchv (yuch) is used 10 times in the Gospel of John and 2 times in 1 John; of these 6 of the uses in the Gospel of John and both in 1 John refer to a person’s “life” (as something that can be laid down). In John 10:24 and 12:27 the yuchv (yuch) is that part of a person where emotions are experienced; one’s yuchv (yuch) is held in suspense or deeply troubled. This is, in other words, the immaterial part of a person as opposed to his physical existence. A close parallel is found in Philo: “therefore nourished with peace, he will depart, having procured for himself a calm and peaceful life, thus he is found fortunate as truly also blessed...he prospers with both health and strength of the body, and he prospers with the fruition of virtues of the soul (yuchv, yuch).”⁸²⁹ The equivalent contemporary idiom would be to speak of ‘spiritual’ health as opposed to physical health. The author affirms that Gaius is indeed well off spiritually, and he prays that Gaius’ physical health would match his spiritual health, i.e., that Gaius would be as well off physically as he is spiritually.⁸³⁰ It is the spiritual health which is to be the standard, by which one’s physical health is measured, not the other way round [15].

The prayer of St. John for Gaius includes three particulars: 1. Health of body; 2. Health of Soul; and 3. Prosperity in secular affairs. These three things are so necessary to the comfort of life, every Christian may in a

certain measure expect, and for them every Christian is authorized to pray; and one should have more of all three if one devoutly prayed for them. It appears from the last clause that the soul of Gaius was in a very prosperous state (Adam). If one follows Adam it is clear that Gaius' fitness into the Kingdom of God could not have been determined by material prosperity; although that would have been necessary. In this comment Adam does not place material prosperity on the priority pedestal as the prosperity preachers do. Barnes, in addition opines that, "it is not necessary to suppose, in order to a correct interpretation of this, that Gaius was at that time suffering from bodily indisposition, though perhaps it is most natural to suppose that, as John makes the wish for his health so prominent. This passage cannot stand the textual application for material prosperity (Barnes). In summery "the author affirms that Gaius is well-off spiritually (*it is well with your soul*). He prays that Gaius' physical *health* would match his spiritual health. The "health wish" is a standard feature of the first-century epistolary format..." [15].

Beloved, I wish above all things - margin, "pray." The word used here commonly means in the New Testament to pray; but it is also employed to express a strong and earnest desire for anything, Acts 27:29; Romans 9:3; 2 Corinthians 13:9. This is probably all that is implied here. The phrase rendered "above all things" - peri pantōn - would be more correctly rendered here "concerning, or in respect to all things;" and the idea is, that John wished earnestly that "in all respects" he might have the same kind of prosperity which his soul had. The common translation "above all things" would seem to mean that John valued health and outward prosperity more than he did anything else; that he wished that more than his usefulness or salvation. This cannot be the meaning, and is not demanded by the proper interpretation of the original...The sense is, "In every respect, I wish that it may go as well with you as it does with your soul; that in your worldly prosperity, your comfort, and your bodily health, you may be as prosperous as you are in your religion." This is the reverse of the wish which one is commonly constrained to express for our friends; for such is usually the comparative want of prosperity and advancement in their spiritual interests, that it is an expression of benevolence to desire that they might prosper in that respect as much as they do in others [17].

From the above presentation it is clear that prosperity preaching which revolves round materialism may not have been the centre piece of the author's advice to Gaius and by extension not to be so emphasized without balance. And through the study of the theology and biblical interpretation of prosperity gospel, this paper had presented five clear reasons why this movement's teachings concerning wealth are incorrect. Prosperity gospel negates the law of charity in Deuteronomy 15:11 "For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land" by teaching that poverty is a curse. The implications of this concept are obviously significant.

First, if wealth and health are a result of the degree of faith a person has, this leads to the conclusion that the poor are poor because they are spiritually deficient. This is exactly the reason that Corbett and Fikkert announce the need for rejecting the prosperity gospel when they comment that repenting of a belief in the prosperity gospel is an important step in being able to help the poor in a meaningful way. While personal sin may result in poverty, the prosperity gospel ignores the effects of the sin of others and structural evils that may be the cause of poverty. Believing harder fails to eliminate poverty and advance human flourishing. Second, the prosperity gospel overemphasizes the importance of temporal wealth on the individual. While Scripture records examples of faithful rich men (e.g., Abraham), it also records examples of people who were poor or sick, yet were also faithful (e.g., Paul). Establishing conditions where widespread, holistic human flourishing is possible is a good thing that is entirely different from a quest for individual wealth and health. Third, the so-called law of faith that sees a direct correlation between positive thinking and material prosperity distracts individuals from understanding the natural laws that govern economic reality. Expecting a future supernatural blessing to make a balloon payment on a mortgage may tempt someone to ignore the financial realities of an excessively large loan-to-value-ratio on a house. This could result in real, naturally caused financial ruin (Spencer).

Bankruptcy of Prosperity Preaching

The bankruptcy of prosperity preaching had earlier been discussed but for emphasis there are

a). The prosperity gospel is built upon a faulty understanding of the Abrahamic covenant. b) The prosperity gospel is built upon a faulty understanding of the Atonement.c). The prosperity gospel is based upon a faulty understanding of the biblical teachings on giving. 4. The prosperity gospel is based upon a faulty understanding of the biblical teachings on faith. d). The prosperity gospel, in general, has been constructed upon faulty biblical interpretation [18].

It is also discovered that different preachers approach the presentation of the gospel from a business and marketing perspective wherein the material gain of each programme is the ultimate target than the original business of God's saving of souls. The influence has so engulfed the Church (generic) that all passages of the bible are interpreted in the light of wealth and capitalism. These preaching are punctuated with intermittent prophetic pronouncements which aim at psyching up the believer to bring out the last money in his or her pocket. Alter calls are seldom in such gathering of the believer as the un-churched are not the target. Things are

becoming so confusing that the preaching of the cross is becoming obsolete. Good looking and oratory is now an added advantage to every preacher as ability to play on words is a sure way of raising more money. Preachers are hired on percentage for their ability to raise money and not souls. Passages are handled with reckless abandon as bits of quotation as are made out of context or unexplained. Things have gone to the extent that basic Christian principles are being sacrificed on the Altar of "Seed of Faith" which are sown at each prophetic pronouncement. According to Robison (2013), [19], "Jesus focus on the joy of giving, not on the promise of return is grossly neglected... what some ministers teach today about money often encourages greed".

Numerous people's... lives have been negatively affected by this unbalanced teaching on giving. The teaching has come from ministers who are using Scriptures on "getting the return" to appeal to the Western materialistic mind-set. "Just give and it will come back," these ministers tell the crowds, with a fervour that convinces many listeners. They refer to a thirty-, sixty- and hundredfold return in a way that implies the contributor can expect to receive an immediate blessing--presumably so his or her debts can be quickly eliminated. The fact that some people's spending habits and financial practices should be drastically altered is not even addressed...Some ministers believe they are teaching the truth, and they may be sincerely seeking to help the hearer... My intention is not to accuse anyone of deliberately misleading or manipulating those whom they impact. But I've seen firsthand the unhealthy consequences of this type of teaching, and the manipulation breaks my heart [19].

And because of the level of poverty in Africa people ordinarily incline towards this teaching like the tree sourcing for the source of photo-(Sun) for photosynthesis. This is in sharp contrast with the rudimentary teaching of Jesus Christ that challenges men to repentance. The sound of a dropping pin can be heard in the Church today during sound gospel message than the boisterous sound that punctuates prosperity messages. Phone ringing tones are now made up of prophetic utterances that promise death to real and imaginary enemies with background Amen(s) and Hallelujah(s). It is like God reacts in man's favour when He is given surprising huge money called seed of faith as though there are gifts that can set God on his heels no matter who gives it. A critical contrast with Jesus' response to Judas Iscariot's reaction about Mary Magdalene's anointing shows that there is something wrong with this idea that sound as if God is a money doubler or a debtor that must pay, or that God made a mistake in not creating all fingers equal. These brands of messages portray a sense that the size and carriage of one's God depends on his ability to make one wealthy, healthy and prosperous. Proper analysis here creates in the mind of the believers "Individualized God" as the worth of one's God shows how rich he is by the amount of wealth and money such individual controls and the poorer one is the manifestation of one's God. By this human creation the ideology of individualized gods in Buddhism manifests. This negates the fact that God had created a situation where all things must glorify Him, and caring for the poor is one of such ways.

For fear of the lopsided effect of this movement

McConnell points out that "any new religious movement [within Protestantism] must bear the scrutiny of two criteria: biblical fidelity and historical orthodoxy." Regrettably, the Positive Confession movement fails on both counts. The historical roots of this movement (which Charles Farah has called "Faith Formula Theology") lie in the occult, and most recently, in New Thought and its off-shoot, the Mind Science cults. Its Biblical basis is found only in the peculiar interpretations of its own leaders, not in generally accepted Christian theology [13].

Gospel of prosperity is a materialistic Christian belief and a doctrine taught in some Christian groups that God will grant wishes to the faithful, especially those wishes involving material wealth by their prayers and inducement on God. Prosperity

...movement grew rapidly in the American South and in the impoverished urban areas, meanwhile dividing into dozens of small, contentious sects separated by doctrine and by such practices as faith healing...After the 1960s, prosperity through faith became a dominant theme, taken up by Roberts and other television evangelists. But all the Pentecostal sects—ranging from the largest, the Assemblies of God, to small storefront churches—shared an ecstatic tone that continued to have a powerful appeal in the United States, Latin America, and Africa. The movement in Europe, after rapid growth in the early 20th century, had stabilized by mid-century. A similar movement within the Roman Catholic Church, the charismatic movement, won large numbers of followers beginning in the 1960s [20]

Gospel of prosperity or prosperity theology teaches that Christians are entitled to well-being and, because physical and spiritual realities are seen as one inseparable reality. This is interpreted as physical health and economic prosperity. Teachers of the doctrine focus on personal empowerment, promoting a positive view of the spirit and body. They maintain that Christians have been given power over creation because they are made in the image of God. They teach that positive confession allows Christians to exercise dominion over their souls and material objects around them. Leaders of the movement view the atonement as providing for the alleviation of sickness, poverty, and spiritual corruption; poverty and illness are seen as curses which can be broken by faith and righteous actions. There is, however, some prosperity preaching churches which seek a more moderate or reformed paradigm of prosperity. Caldwell, pastor of a Methodist mega-church, supports a

theology of abundant life, teaching prosperity for the whole human being, which he sees as a path to combating poverty. This "... American author and televangelist, argues that prosperity is governed by laws, while other teachers portray the process formulaically. Journalists David van Biema and Jeff Chu of Time have described Word of Faith Pastor Creflo Dollar's teachings about prosperity as an inviolable contract between God and humanity" [21].

However, most scholars are of the view that wealth is interpreted in prosperity theology as a blessing from God, obtained through a spiritual law of positive confession, visualization, and donations. Most people

simply define the prosperity gospel as "the gospel that promises only financial break-through," or "the preaching that does not address the concern of salvation from sin but only emphasizes that God will make everyone materially rich." Some others define it as "the gospel that people should accumulate material things." Yet others define it as "the gospel that defines poverty as sin." Two points sum up these definitions: It is exclusively financial, and it neglects the spiritual well-being of the people. The definitions above suggest that non-prosperity preachers formulated the definitions, and that they are derogatory and misleading. Prosperity preachers would not define their own theology so negatively. This explains why many of those that legitimately belong to the category refuse to identify with the term. There is hardly any Christian denomination that does not preach salvation from sin. Also, there are an insignificant number of denominations that interpret poverty as sin. Most preachers of the prosperity gospel overwhelmingly reject this view of poverty. It is therefore unwarranted to derive the interpretation of a concept from the view of an insignificant minority of the group.

Sarles (1986), [22], commenting on prosperity teachers says that their "method of interpreting the biblical text is highly subjective and arbitrary. Bible verses are quoted in abundance without attention to grammatical indicators, semantic nuances, or literary and historical context. The result is a set of ideas and principles based on distortion of textual meaning" Indeed, a survey of the volumes of literature produced by the prosperity teachers yields numerous examples of such misinterpretations. Prosperity teaching insists that the paradigm of one's physical well being determines how benevolent one's God is. This gospel equates the essence of God's reality and reliability with the abundance of ones material affluence than spiritual well being hence poverty remains a curse that a Christian is exonerated from by his or her faith in Christ Jesus. This gospel seem not to take cognizance of the record of Luke 12 ; 15, "...man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." and 1 Timothy 6:7-9

There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Proponents of prosperity gospel are those preachers emphasize that the blessings of God depends on how much one gives for the welfare of God's servants whose anointing are infectious enough to attract God's favours on those that favour the prophets. They fulfil 1 Timothy 6:7-9,

For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction,

by varying degrees of act of greed and unprintable practices to attain their goals. They live ostensible life at the expense of members who by simple analysis do not realize the much orchestrated prosperity.

Prosperity gospel is different from social gospel which is the base for the provision of social amenities by the Church as a means of bridging the gap between the haves and the have-nots as earlier mentioned. It rather seams to take from those who do not have, and the little they have is swindled into the bags of the rich prophets. And in other to achieve this focal point of prosperity gospel; the proponents set themselves as proves of the reality of their teaching by the application of human manipulations that hoodwink believers to exploit the unsuspecting. In Africa as well as in other parts of the world, prosperity gospel remains the after mat of Pentecostal bid to bridge the gap between the preachers of the gospel and the wealthy members of the society. It is assuming some alarming proportion in the recent past leading to several unorthodox and sharp practices which are inimical to Christianity. The most worrisome aspect of it is that the unsuspecting enquirers who are bent on fighting poverty are on daily bases being hoodwinked by dubious people under the cloak of prosperity message. As part of social change it affects natural or African native soothsayers and diviners who are now loosing their trade for the prosperity preachers who replace charms with bottles of anointing oil or stickers that can ward off evil men and spirits. It is common to find holy water bottles or oil or sticker hung on farms and at individual doors, which hitherto was the product of the native doctors for those that believed in them.

Preachers who have charisma with which to sale their wares go as far as the planting of flowers in the Alter which is diabolic means of reaching the end. In some cases it is difficult to differentiate between the church and the shrine of the native doctor hence corruption in the house of God. While this work was being concluded, a news item in one of the Nigerian dailies reported of the nabbing of a prophet and some of his members suspected of ritual murder. Such sporadic flashes abound giving no one any joy cogitating on the side

effects of prosperity preaching. Nonetheless the hermeneutics of the prosperity movement leaves much to be desired.

Commercialization

The word Commercialization is derived from commerce connoting the ideology of managing a business basis for profit, developing commerce to exploit for profit, or to debase in quality for more profit. The concept of commercialization in this context does not imply that the church buildings are now turn to provision stores or Warehouse and shops where articles of trade are displayed and sold. The idea projected is that the Church is fast turning to a market place where all manner of people and winds of doctrines are displayed for the purpose of making money and not the making of souls for eternity. Many preachers today rather see in Christ an avenue of making money and acquiring wealth. In the case of the Church, commercialization simply means to run church meetings and programmes with the view of making money or garnering material substances in the name of giving to God hence every meeting must end in offerings and seeds of faith. The underlining intent and content of this type of propagation is all about personal wealth acquisition but in the name of God. The height of this method of Church business has risen to the level that a lot of thing go for the worship of God as far as such applied tricks could generate money. The church has become so commercialized to the extent that even committee meetings snowball into fund raisings almost always. Confusing practices and doctrines are therefore on the increase in the churches. These strange practices and doctrines are steadily robbing off on the true gospel and the spiritual standard of what used to be the hope of the hopeless leading back into Carl Marx's definition of religion as the opium of the masses. The contemporary state of the church challenges history which is all about originality and the aim of the church's entrant into the continent of Africa. To get at the root of the matter this research went down memory lane to determine the initial intent and content of global mission which is all about souls winning and discipleship (Matt. 28:19-20). At this juncture it might be pertinent to define who a missionary is and what the original motif of mission enterprises in Africa was before the present day twist that makes the church a market place than a place of the worship of God.

This contemporary scenario encourages making merchandise of the believers contrary to African mission (Evangelization of Africa) efforts which dates back to over 130 years ago. It could be recalled that these Missionaries were non-profit organizations whose aims included

- Helping to alleviate the poverty and deprivation that are still widespread in Africa by funding projects that foster self-reliance.
- Raising the awareness of the plight of the African people through Mission education and various publications.
- Providing up-to-date information relating to justice and peace issues that concern the countries in Africa where we live and work.
- Working with Africans on structural changes that will help build the Reign of God and thereby helping them to become agents of their own liberation.
- Helping to bring about healing and reconciliation.
- Being bridge-builders to help promote inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue [23].

Missionaries were members of a religious groups sent into areas to proselytize and/or perform ministries of service, such as education, literacy, social justice, health care and economic development. The word "mission" originates from 1598 when the Jesuits sent members abroad. The word Mission derived from the Latin missionem (nom. missio), meaning "act of sending" or mittere, meaning "to send". The word was used in light of its biblical usage; in the Latin translation of the Bible, Christ used the word when sent the disciples to preach in his name. The term is most commonly used for Christian missions, but can be used for any creed or ideology [21].

From the preceding paragraphs, therefore, this paper supposes that a large percentage of what the church (generic) is doing in Africa today is opposite the original intent and content of mission hence the problem of commercialization. This concept has also stratified the people of God into those who serve a good and benevolent God and those who serve the God that is poor or chose to be poor because they do pray too hard or have no faith in the God of generosity. By means of this concept the prosperity preachers make merchandise of the believers.

There is no gain saying; the fact that what is referred to as missionary effort mostly by Africans themselves are not in consonance with Church mission but business enterprise. This situation rises from lopsided presentation of prosperity gospel in Africa. This is worrisome as it calls for a theological address to moderate this good aspect of the gospel that is being beclouded by materialism. As it is, the theological study of this movement and analysis of all such examples of misinterpreted texts fall within this scope to buttress the harm so far caused by Prosperity preaching.

III. Conclusion

In concluding this paper one may state that though the disciples of Jesus Christ condemned his anointing by a certain woman, Jesus himself did not see that benevolence any less a welcome development. He saw in it a prophetic action geared towards his death and resurrection or and announcement of his departure as that prepared him for it. It is a fact that this woman expressed high sense of generosity by this singular and rear event. On the other hand the disciples' preference for the poor was not a sincere approach as the author of John's gospel would have it.

The same passage buttresses the fact that there is no end to the existence of the poor among the believers on earth until the final consummation. This passage also recalls the Deuteronomy 15: 11 "For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land", which is the Jewish law of brotherhood. In the poor the Jews were to express the grace of giving as it is applicable to the spiritual Jews- the believers. The Christian is to express God's kindness and generosity by giving to the poor in Africa, and not castigating them as prosperity preachers tend to do. Poverty is not a curse and the poor is not cursed.

By extension this passage cuts prosperity preaching at the root since poverty is not a curse, as earlier mentioned, but the act of God or the mistake of the individual. This passage rejects the notion that all believers must be rich as to prove that they are serving a living God. Otherwise it proves that the believer who has not the whole world serves a different God from the believer who happens to be rich. If this notion stands the test of time, though it has never and will never, it means the stunningly rich brother has a different God. This also presupposes that the Christians have two Gods/gods whichever may be the used spelling.

This paper notes that that 3 John 1:2 is not a good locus standi with which to annul Deuteronomy 15:11. It is untrue as it is impracticable judging from visible evidence among believers. For instance, how many had by faithful claiming of a thing got it, rather it creates covetousness. The mere fact that all fingers are not equal lends force to the position of this paper. While one wishes that the Church prospers in all ramifications; one may remind the believers that what should be of high demand should be godliness and contentment which is a great gain. While the prophets and other anointed men of God may not stop talking about prosperity thy need to tailor their message in line with the pure milk of the word to avoid 21st Century heresy in Africa. And on a final note this paper states interalia; one further recognizes that there are some dimensions of prosperity teaching that have roots in the Bible, and one affirms such elements of truth below. One does not wish to be exclusively negative, and but recognizes the appalling social realities within which this teaching flourishes and the measure of hope it holds out to desperate people. However, while acknowledging such positive features, it is the overall view of this paper that the teachings of those who most vigorously promote the 'prosperity gospel' are false and gravely distorting of the Bible, that their practice is often unethical and un-Christ-like, and that the impact on many churches is pastorally damaging, spiritually unhealthy, and not only offers no lasting hope, but may even deflect people from the message and means of eternal salvation. In such dimensions, it can be soberly described as a false gospel. One calls for further reflection on these matters within the Christian Church... to be willing to make a very clear statement rejecting the excesses of prosperity teaching as incompatible with evangelical biblical Christianity. <http://www.lausanne.org/aboutlausanne>

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