

Prosperity Gospel: Social and Economic Corruption in Disguise

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Abstract – Prosperity Gospel has spread very fast from its origin to the rest of the world. However, it has done more harm than good to people involved through depriving the subjects and enriching the preachers. Basing on the fact that psychological motivation and giving sacrificially can lead to blessings, victims have increased day by day. The purpose of this paper is to empirically discuss prosperity gospel as corruption in disguise in the church. In a nutshell, the victims and the governments have failed to bring to a stop this debacle that has propagated both social and economic corruption.

Keywords: Prosperity Gospel, Social Corruption, Economic Corruption, Church, Christianity

I. INTRODUCTION

Fundamentalists argue that the church is meant to sanctify and balance the society which is always demanding and evolving. Pointing to the church as a source of solidarity, it is supposed to bring together people as it has done since the days of its establishment by Jesus Christ Himself. As the founder of Christianity, Jesus promoted teachings that were deemed valuable to the generations that came after him. Amongst the fundamental teachings of Jesus Christ were; the sermon on the mountain where he emphasized his teachings on morality (Matthew 5, 6 & 7). In these teachings, the recipe for Christianity is presented to guide those who wish to live as per the New Testament way of life. Taking a keen look at chapter 5 which theologians have called Beatitudes, Jesus teaches about the aspect of love and humility which opposes the notion of force and mastery.

Contrary to the teachings mentioned above, the church today is characterized with myriad of controversial aspects that solicit mixed reactions. Building on people's ignorance and vulnerability, the church has experienced dynamism and shake up but has been responding variedly on the same aspects. Preachers have presented themselves in a way that depicts a deity kind of relationship with the subjects instead of portraying a servant relationship. Mostly associated with evangelical Protestantism is the aspect of prosperity gospel which has strongly hit Christianity. Prosperity Gospel has been given different names like, prosperity theology, the success gospel, the gospel of health and wealth, and sometimes, the seed faith, but the face of the gospel is the same despite the name. In other words, the real notion behind this type of the gospel is that positive confession, donations and sacrificial giving, together with faith, leads to financial blessing and physical wellbeing (Walton, 2009). Capitalizing on psychological manipulation, vulnerability and ignorance of

their subjects, prosperity gospel preachers have immersed resources at the expense of their subjects (Adoyi, 2012).

Prosperity gospel has been a source of hope that never materializes for the people who have pegged on it. For a long time, the world has experienced the rise of preachers whose aim is to live lavish lifestyles not because they earn a considerable salary from their formal employment but rather self-employment characterized with force and mastery. Prosperity preachers preach, sell items like anointing oil, pens, books and even fake miracles just to attract a multitude of people whom they deprive the little they have, to add onto what they have already gathered. Jesus warned that the last days shall experience people who are lovers of themselves and money, a fact that we have seen its fulfillment already not only through the members but through their leaders also. Disguising their interests to reflect God, prosperity preachers have given people the view that it is the will of God that His people should be blessed, but with conditions that donations and sacrificial giving mixed with faith and positive confession. The notion that has now prevailed for long through such a gospel is that suffering is not the will of God and therefore, anyone who is suffering does not fulfill the will of God. The gospel of prosperity has made preachers to become religious entrepreneurs and not spiritual leaders (Lauterbach, 2016). Through the empirical view of existing literature, this paper discusses how a section of the church has openly promoted theft and corruption disguised in the name of the Lord.

II. THE PROBLEM

The apostolic era marked the period when the church was born and spread throughout the world. Taking into the account that the early church fostered unity and brotherhood, the aspects of greediness, self-interest and manipulation were not promoted. Instead, every person's need was met as the bible puts it in the book of Acts 2:42-45, NKJV that:

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”

Note that the scripture above is contradictory to what is being practiced in the churches that are proposing the

prosperity gospel. Promoted in the media and culminated by viewers, the phenomenon has engulfed the innocent who hope that their despair and frustration can end by associating with a given “servant of God,” whom most of the time is believed to be anointed and given the ministry of deliverance. In the contemporary society, a mass transition of people has been experienced from their churches which they perceive to lack the power of health, wealth and blessings to those they perceive to have. Since people have perceived religion to be sacred, people have been afraid to rise to the occasion and rescue the world from this growing debacle in the name of God. The problem that has been persistent in this case is that people have not realized that, preachers of the prosperity gospel have promoted and are still promoting theft and corruption in its highest level in the church.

III. THE ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Prosperity gospel traces its roots from the United States of America, where diversity in different issues including race and religion were found in 19th century. Originating from the intersection of three independent ideologies namely: the gospel of pragmatism, the new thought and Pentecostalism, it gained popularity in the mid-19th century during the healing revivals that were experienced at that time. Eventually, it grew steadily to gain mileage in some countries of other continents (Bowler, 2013). Millions of people around the world had accepted that prosperity gospel is a way to go in the early 2000’s onwards (Rosin, 2009). Through televangelism, prosperity gospel has gained mileage and every preacher who wants to have the same effect as its international preachers has, ended up on the media (Robin, 2010). The Gospel has been replicated in Africa and its growth rate is considerably high. The fact that Africa as a continent is marred with poverty, the reality of people being victimized becomes inevitable (Heuser, 2016).

The church today is characterized with a large number of women followed by the youth. In the wake of revolution in the church, youth and women have been fighting for their place since the ministry has favored elderly men. However, in the turn of events, the coming of the prosperity gospel has ensured that it capitalizes on the weaknesses that have been there for a long time especially in women and youth ministry. For instance, prosperity preachers understand that women need economic empowerment, family stability, economic independence and a welcoming environment. On the other hand, youth are welcomed in such churches with the promise of good jobs coming by, stable families, freedom in the use of technology and modern dance and music. Addressing such issues during the services makes the women and the youth feel like their problems are being met and, in response, they give in to such preachers more and confess positively.

In as much as the issues discussed above are true about women and the youth, elderly men are not left behind in the trap of the prosperity gospel. As a matter of fact men have

faced serious problems given that they are the heads of the family. As leaders and breadwinners, the aspect of fighting poverty has been the main agenda, which they feel that the prosperity preachers are addressing directly. Because prosperity preachers understand the psychology of motivation, they dwell deeper and deeper into discussing how the solutions to the problems that men face can be solved just through giving. Since they support themselves with scriptures, the truth is that, they are manipulating people psychologically and this cannot easily be realized (Robbins, 2004).

IV. REASONS WHY PROSPERITY GOSPEL IS GROWING

The first and foremost reason why the Prosperity Gospel is thriving is to fulfill the scriptures as recorded in the bible. As mentioned earlier, one of the fundamental teachings of Jesus Christ was that, the end times shall come packaged with aspects of false prophets and gospel of self-interest. The book of Matthew among the Gospels presents to us a picture of all the characteristics of a true and false believer. For instance, the Beatitudes presents a picture of a true Christian that the church should have (Matthew 5:1-16). The bible also presents a man full of himself, loving money and pleasures, than God (2 Timothy 3:2). For such scriptures to be fulfilled therefore, such aspects of the gospel like, prosperity gospel must be witnessed.

In the same line, misuse and misinterpretation of scriptures has been another thriving ground for the prosperity gospel. Since its genesis in the United States of America, prosperity gospel has dwelt mostly on isolated scriptures. The best example in this case is the scripture like; *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you”* (Luke 6:38). Such a scripture is very good, and whoever does as it says, the truth is that they are blessed. However, the reality dawns in on how and why one is giving. Most of the time, the bible has encouraged that, giving is to be done to those who are in need, and not those who already have. The study of hermeneutics stipulates different approaches to interpreting the word. Amongst them is the understanding of the context of a scripture and linking it with other related scriptures to come up with a desired meaning. However, prosperity preachers have fashioned themselves with scriptures that suit their interests through manipulating their audience using the same bible they believe in (Apologetics Index, 2016).

Vulnerability of people in the contemporary society is another reason why they are being caught in the trap of giving their resources in the name of seeking blessings of prosperity. Combined with lack of biblical knowledge, Christians have been brainwashed to believe that God’s blessings come when you give, failing to acknowledge where the resources they give go and what the resources do. Furthermore, the fact that people have testified of the miracles they receive from the “servants of God” causes attraction towards seeking the miracles they want. Forgetting that the

miracles may be faked, the people fall in the trap of giving to receive more. Even after such preachers are exposed, their churches end up getting more popular and even get more adherents. What is most important for such preachers is actually attracting as more people as they can, since the returns are directly proportional to the number of people. The fact that people have different challenges in life, even the financially stable people become vulnerable to this situation of conman ship (Robin, 2010).

Additionally, prosperity gospel has grown eventually, and gained ground because of the aspect that one does not need to belong to a given church or to be an adherent. In fact, most preachers of this gospel have gained mileage through the media, before even pilling up their church members. Since most of the proponents of this gospel are on media, it is easy for one to listen, watch, follow and even support through the advancements. Modern technology has thus promoted the thriving of prosperity gospel today. Members of both mainline and charismatic evangelical churches have become partners to the preachers the prosperity gospel without even making physical contact. It has all gone with the issue of faith being in action and miracles follow. Most of the adherents of this gospel are known to support any preacher whom they feel has touched their lives through their sermons and speeches (Coleman, 2011).

Furthermore, the aspect of the setting of churches that promote this kind of gospel is strategic. Finding such churches in rural settings is so rare and uncommon. Urban centers are the best settings for such churches because of a number of reasons. Given that most people in urban centers are either working or looking for jobs gives a platform to those preachers who propone the prosperity gospel. Also, the setup of urban centers in terms of infrastructure and telecommunication gives a viable platform for both the preachers and the adherents of the gospel. For a preacher to speak of prosperity, he should be in an environment that reflects what he is teaching and preaching about. The reflection is demonstrated through a posh environment and lifestyle since everybody would want to believe in the notion of; “seeing is believing” adage, which can be well portrayed in an urban setting (Akiri, 2018).

Biblical teachings based on the fact that those who work on the altar should eat from the altar (1 Corinthians 9:13; Deuteronomy 18:1) have also contributed greatly to the growth of the prosperity gospel. However, in the New Testament, we see a new trend being set. Apostle Paul, deemed by many to have done a lot of ministry work in the New Testament calls for everyone to work with his own hands. He reiterates that; “whoever does not work should not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). This does not imply that whatever comes to the altar is not meant for the priests. The reality is that, priests should eat from the hands, tithes and offerings from the congregation. However, the problem with prosperity preachers is the “greedy” target behind using the scriptures that support them, and the business environment they have set

in the house of God. Jesus on one occasion condemned the fact the house of God had been turned into a den of robbers and yet it was a house of prayer (Matthew 21:13).

Last but not least, the Gospel of Prosperity has gained mileage because the governments have no rules that regulate how churches get and spend the money received. In the wake of events, the church can find itself in a state of accountability if only the government can draft a policy that would act as a guide for churches in matters of finance. Some countries like China, Russia and Indonesia have very high levels of restrictions to religious bodies. Though this may seem to be a hinderance to the church in some areas, the truth is that when done with the right intention, the social and economic corruption experienced in some churches would not thrive. Countries have been seen to gear towards enacting laws and policies that aim at ensuring that every religious movement is registered, and, religious ministers attain given levels of education in religious circles, among other factors. Truly speaking, laws and policies regulating church expenditure would put a break on preachers who are misusing resources from people for their own gain (Pew, 2019).

V. ECONOMIC CORRUPTION THROUGH PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Most of the preachers that propone the prosperity gospel are seen in the foreground continue giving as destiny changers to the lives of their subjects. However, what goes on in the background is totally a thing of pity and filth. Preachers of the prosperity gospel employ several ways to ensure that funds are raised, but with no proper accounting at the end of the day. Such a scenario creates a platform for those involved with financial issues to get a leeway on fraudling and embezzling the funds with no question from anybody. The fact that the church for a long time has been exempted from submitting their returns to the revenue authorities also gives them an upper hand in swimming in the wealth created by its congregants. Several ways are used by the preachers who promote the prosperity gospel to get money wrongly (Heuser, 2016).

In the first place, the fact is that some of the people who were once adherents of this doctrine have diverted after failing to realize the truth. They have confessed that tricks are employed in the process of demonstrating miracles and testimonies. There is no argument that the bible portrays the ministry of Jesus and that of the Apostles to be more powerful when accompanied with signs and wonders. In the same line, the bible comments that those who believe shall be followed with signs and wonders (Mark 16:17-18). Note that, in this verse, signs and wonders shall follow those who believe, not that, those who believe shall follow signs and wonders. But because of deception of humankind, in order to demonstrate that he has special anointing, miracles and testimonies are faked to make those who follow signs and wonders believe that the preacher in context has special anointing on them (Rosane, 2017). Theft and corruption crops in when adherents or the followers have to give in money and other resources in

order to receive blessings from the “servant of God.” The bible condemns such acts of bribing for the sake of receiving miracles on any favor from the people of God, since the gifts from the Lord are freely received and they should therefore be freely given (Matthew 10:8).

The face of theft and corruption also is seen in the kind of items that the preachers sell, mostly termed as healing and deliverance mediums. Most of the time in this case, a variety of items have been sold, deemed to be anointed by the “servants of God.” Sold very expensively, one is given directions on how to use the medium that is believed to be anointed and holy. As a matter of fact, this business of selling such mediums alone can make someone very rich. However, the question to ask here is that, why sell a commodity that is very cheap like a handkerchief very expensively? The answer is that it is an opportunity to steal from people believing in the power of the so called “anointed mediums.” Honestly, they have to be bribed for them to sell the anointing which they never bought, if it is true that they are anointed. Those who bribe do so with no consent since it is done disguised in the name of the God (Daniels, 2015).

Projects that are initiated by such preachers, whom most of them are self-proclaimed bishops of their own ministries are mostly meant to syphon money from the pockets of people who never benefit from the same. Some preachers have asked for donations which they claimed to use carry out some sorts of projects that are meant to benefit the poor but it ends up that the poor people in context are themselves. Most of the preachers in this category run big businesses and live luxurious lives at the expense of their congregants, whose majority are impoverished (Kwakye, 2015). Most of the people that have been misused to make money by such preachers are the orphans and the widows who are mostly perceived by the society as less privileged. The people giving towards such a course would donate a lot of money and resources which end up being diverted mostly for personal gains. Such dealings can be deemed to be theft and corruption of the highest order in the name of helping the needy in the society (Ibid).

Similarly, most preachers of the property gospel have taken airtime on the television and radio stations capturing millions of audiences. By doing so, they give their account numbers and ask for support from their viewers. The sole aim of the support they ask for is to enable the programmes to continue airing, an implication that they have to pay for the airtime. The honest view in this case is that, they actually ought to be supported but, transparency should be their shield. However, despite the fact that the airtime may be paid by only a few donations, the preachers will continue asking for the support even when the donations have superseded the requirement. In so doing, hundreds of people send a lot of money which ends up in the pockets of the preachers (Kwakye, 2015). The worst cases are situations where their followers sometimes sacrifice in that, at the expense of listening to the programmes on radio or watching them on

television, they continue giving without knowing how their money will be spent. In the same line, some preachers have openly asked for specific amounts of money from their viewers in a manner that they should wait for a miracle just by doing so. Without telling the audience what the money will be used for, the preachers insist on the viewer to “*plant the seed*”. In their own words, they promote the notion that; “*you cannot reap what you have not planted*”. Labeling the money sent by the viewers as a “seed,” they get lump sum collections while the person sending the seed waits for a season of harvesting without materializing (Chaves, 2010).

Given that the nature of the work done by the priests, financial issues in the church should be done by qualified people just as it was done by the apostles during the early church by appointing deacons (Acts 6:1-15). However, most of the churches that are proponent of the prosperity gospel promote their corrupt deals through appointing members of their families or close relatives to take charge of the collections. In so doing, anything wrong taking place would not be leaked outside the preachers’ confidants. If the church was to run smoothly and money used as it is meant to, the aspect of oversight should be considered (Freeman, 2012).

VI. SOCIAL CORRUPTION THROUGH PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Effects of prosperity gospel should be ignored at the cost of the victims and the church at large. Honestly speaking, prosperity gospel has brought more harm than good which it portrays socially, since the church members cannot be rebuked and corrected. In the wake of events, morality has been compromised in the churches that promote prosperity gospel. Biblically, good morals are emphasized for the purpose of living well with everyone around. Different forms of moral decadence have been entertained in this era. For instance, the dressing code has been corrupted and what comes out in churches mostly those that adhere to prosperity teachings is questionable. Fashion that is not in line with the Christianity prevails in such environments since the essence of freedom is granted. In the same line, fornication, adultery, alcoholism, homosexuality among other forms of immorality prevail in such churches since the traditional teachings that condemned immorality no longer exist.

Mainstream churches have faced the problem of losing members who leave their churches to join those that preach prosperity gospel. In such a setting, the traditionalists are facing a rough time in convincing their members that the blessings of the Lord are not necessarily pegged on giving and motivation. Adherents of the prosperity gospel break away from their initial churches and some break with other members. This has caused wrangles in the church as the body of Christ to an extent that the church has been turned into a politicking arena where the best politicked ends up with a large congregation. Therefore, it is worth saying that, since prosperity gospel has caused wrangles and divisions in the church, social corruption has therefore been experienced.

As a final stance to promulgate social corruption, the faithful of the property gospel have danced to every tune that the “servants of God” come up with. By doing so, we have witnessed sarcastic behaviour that has left people in awe. For instance, the faithful have gone from just believing the word to eating and drinking anything that is believed to be blessed with their preachers. Media has captured more often instances where preachers are applying sprays to the members, giving them water that they have had a bath with to take, giving them detergents to drink among other funny and dangerous liquids. Similarly, cases where the preachers are touching their members inappropriately have been reported and seen. Masked with the word deliverance, female members have allowed preachers of the prosperity gospel anoint their private parts to test and enhance fertility. As a result, social boundaries have been breached by such preachers contributing to high levels of social corruption. Such incidences imply that prosperity preachers are as bad as witchdoctors, but they carry out their activities openly. By doing so, they have sold the mediums used in such deliverance services expensively and immersed wealth besides the money that is paid for books and special deliverance (Kwakye, 2015).

VII. CONCLUSION

The bible is very clear in the articulation of issues that are sometimes claimed otherwise by people who are working to benefit themselves. The plethora of issues affecting the church today arises from selfish interests where individuals understand that they can manipulate their subjects for their own gain. It is a fact that prosperity gospel has thrived because individuals with greedy and selfish interests have given false hope and manipulation to their members. They have stolen thousands of shillings from members for their own luxury and interests. It is unfortunate that, they just cannot accept the fact that they have been empowered by the members whom they have misled with hope of better tomorrow through giving and the power of positivity. This has caused corruption of the highest order both economically and socially. Given the fact that the media has given prosperity preachers the platform and the governments the permission and freedom of worship, the growth of this billion-dollar industry is unstoppable. The governments know what is happening but have not acted appropriately on their role of creating laws and policies that would regulate the income and expenditure of churches. Individuals that have taken a step to criticize such preachers have always been threatened with the consequences that come with dishonoring the men of God. The bible condemns any sought of corrupt dealings. More so,

corruption has been deemed to be a gate to hell (Amos 5:6-7, 10-15). Proponents of corruption in disguise in the church should be warned.

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