

# The Protestant Ethic and African Pentecostalism: A Case Study

Paul Gifford  
SOAS, University of London

Trad Nogueira-Godsey  
University of Cape Town

## Abstract

In 2008 South Africa's Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) produced a report on Pentecostalism, *Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and its Potential Social and Economic Role*, which makes great claims for the public effects of Pentecostalism, proposing that Pentecostalism will do for South Africa what Max Weber argued Calvinism did for eighteenth-century Europe. The report is influenced by "the claims of sociologists of religion that Pentecostalism has a special affinity with market-based development, and a kinship with what historians call the "Protestant ethic": a cluster of beliefs, attitudes and habits that underpinned the spectacular economic growth of north-west Europe during the industrial revolution." This article will review the results published by the CDE vis-à-vis the construction of a "Pentecostal Ethic" and present a case study of an African Pentecostal church, Winners' Chapel, which challenges the assertions made by the CDE. As an example of the prevalence of "victorious living" within African Pentecostalism, Winners' Chapel does not conform to the Weberian model of the Protestant Ethic.

Max Weber's highly influential work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, answered many questions about the relationship between religion and economics when it was published in two parts in 1904 and 1905, but has generated many more questions still circulating more than a century later. Weber

successfully introduced the world to nuanced connections between moralities and the market, first alluded to by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* more than a century earlier. The “Protestant Ethic” has become in recent years a platform for examining modern religious movements and their effect on the twenty-first century global economy. With the rise of neo-liberal capitalism, some scholars are attempting to demonstrate the relevance of Weber’s thesis (or at least some interpretation of it) in the contemporary world. One such scholar is Peter Berger, a sociologist from Boston University, whose lecture, “Max Weber is Alive and Well, and Living in Guatemala: The Protestant Ethic Today,” attempts to answer the theoretical question: “To what extent is Weber’s notion of the Protestant ethic helpful in understanding developments in the world today” (2010: 4). Berger has focused his attention on the rapidly expanding Pentecostal movement, which celebrates its birth from the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, just one year after the first publication of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Berger’s comparisons between Pentecostalism’s position in the modern global economy and Weber’s analysis of Protestantism’s position in industrializing Europe has inspired others to test the comparison via sociological analysis using current data. The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), located in Johannesburg, South Africa, with the help of Peter Berger, completed an extensive study in 2008 with the aim of determining Pentecostalism’s potential social and economic role in South Africa. If Weber’s data was complex in 1905, the situation today has become immensely more complex. Nevertheless, the CDE’s report claims to find a correlation between Weber’s Protestants and South African Pentecostals today, effectively uncovering a Pentecostal Ethic in South Africa.

This article will briefly present key arguments and data published by the CDE, followed by a case study which provides a significant challenge to the hypotheses in the CDE Report, *Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and its Potential Social and Economic Role*. This case study of the Nigerian-based church, Winners’ Chapel, and its leader, David Oyedepo, represents a genre of African Pentecostalism associated with the North American Word of Faith movement, sometimes called “prosperity gospel” teachings. Resources for interpreting Oyedepo’s ministry and impact are drawn primarily from his writings, particularly his 2006 book, *Signs and Wonders Today: A Catalogue of Amazing Acts of God among Men*, which contains many testimonies by followers of Oyedepo and attendees of Winners’ Chapel. We do not claim that David Oyedepo nor Winners’ Chapel is representative of the whole of Pentecostalism in Africa, as the diversity of the movement prevents archetypical references to one individual, one church, or one geographical location. However, Oyedepo’s ministry does epitomize the concept of “victorious living,” a theme that has pervaded the whole of Pentecostalism in

Africa to varying extents. By introducing David Oyedepo and Winners' Chapel and their focus on "victorious living," we hope to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the social and economic roles of Pentecostalism in Africa.

## CDE Report

The setting that spurred the focused report by the CDE is described as one in which the South African government has failed and is failing to resolve issues of poverty and poor service delivery. South Africa's poor are therefore urged to curb the "growing sense of entitlement among citizens and communities" and take it upon themselves and their localized communities to bring about an economic change in the country (2008a: 31). In order to achieve this, poor communities must retain and foster social cohesion as they struggle to narrow the gap between rich and poor. Because religious groups are often thought to provide a certain manner of social cohesion (at least among its own followers) it is not surprising that the CDE looked to religion as the possible glue for social cohesion and the engine that might drive South Africa's economic development.

The explosive growth of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity in South Africa led the CDE to conduct the study in conjunction with Peter Berger of Boston University and James Hunter of the University of Virginia to explore the possible developmental role of Pentecostalism in South Africa's future. The report attempts to reveal how Pentecostals have been "under the radar" of politicians and public-policy makers while leading a "silent revolution . . . associated with attitudes, habits and dispositions that promote market-led growth" (2008a: 9). The report identifies Pentecostals as descendants of early Protestants who have inherited the "Protestant Ethic," a term coined by Max Weber and characterized by a "this-worldly (or world-accepting) asceticism, a disciplined and rational approach to work and social activity, and a deferral of gratification and instant consumption" (2008a: 12). However, as Birgit Meyer has noted, before a comparison can be made between South African Pentecostals and the pre-industrial Calvinists of Northern Europe studied by Weber, one must first question if such a comparison between actors is useful considering the dissimilarity of stages. "If it was Weber's concern to highlight the role of Protestantism in bringing about capitalism, today the question is more complicated..." (Meyer 2007: 11). Assuming that Pentecostalism is a self-contained sphere ignores the long history of capitalism and its own effects in the formation of identities (both global and local), leading eventually to Pentecostalism's own "entangle[ment] with the culture of neo-liberalism" (2007: 12). Jean Comaroff speaks to this "entanglement" when she says, "these shifts in the nature of religious life are not adequately seen as either 'models of' or 'for' new socio-economic forms; rather they are intrinsically, dialectically entailed

with the economic and technological transformations of the current moment” (2008:14).

An integral part of the CDE report identifies Pentecostalism as a movement imbued with social capital (2008a: 5). Social capital is defined in the study as “supportive resources held by social networks, families, community organizations and the quality of their linkages” (2008b: 52). Francis Fukuyama had previously defined social capital as “an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals” (2001: 7). The term “social capital” has had a nebulous existence in the social sciences, with many scholars debating about how one could define it, could interpret it, or if it even exists. Despite these debates (all of which occurred well after Weber’s death), most scholars agree that social capital is an important factor to consider when speaking of economic development. The problem is, however, what constitutes social capital, and we must not assume all social capital is positive. Keefer and Knack (1997) have argued that horizontal associations (or membership in civic or community groups and organizations) have, at best, an ambiguous effect on economic activity, and furthermore, their studies show that religious groups may actually hinder development by creating a polarizing effect due to their special interests as believers of a particular faith. This polarizing effect came through the CDE’s own report when it was revealed that a frequent response to questions about the conditions in the surrounding communities was “that the people deserved to rot in a Hell of their own making” (CDE 2008b: 49). We do not intend to paint a portrait of South African Pentecostals as unsympathetic or malicious, though it is important to illustrate the potential for polarization that exists among religious groups.

Measuring social capital is a difficult if not impossible task. Putnam (1993) famously sought to measure social capital in Italy by group membership or “horizontal associations,” though this was difficult because statistical data gave no indication about the extent to which one was involved in the group. The CDE takes a simpler approach to gauge social capital among Pentecostals—they simply asked participants in the survey how many friends they had. Ironically, it was the “non-church goers” in the “black areas” who reported the highest amount of friends. Instead of suggesting that the number of friends reported by individuals may be a poor method of gauging social capital, Lawrence Schlemmer (the compiler of the report) suggests that Pentecostals in black areas find themselves besieged in these areas of “social and moral decay” and therefore have fewer friends (2008b: 53). Levels of social trust are also indicators of social capital. Although the CDE surveys attempt to ascertain levels of social trust among Pentecostals, the results show no remarkable difference when compared with other Christian groups. In the end, the report is forced to admit, “on balance the levels of social capital available to the Pentecostal congregants are mixed and not

significantly more than in other denominations” (2008b: 55). This admission, oddly enough, contradicts the central arguments of the full report itself (2008b) and the abridged report (2008a) which intend to uncover the hidden social capital thriving among Pentecostals in South Africa.

The data also has trouble matching claims made in the report when addressing Pentecostals’ propensity to save money, one of the characteristics vital to the comparison with Weber’s Calvinists. Data gathered from “the suburbs” actually revealed “very high savings rates among non-churchgoers” (2008b: 60). One possible explanation to account for lower rates of savings among Pentecostals is subsequently written in bold: “Contributions to the church absorb significant amounts that might otherwise be available for saving” (2008b: 60). In this case, the report directly contradicts the hypothesis that Pentecostals are inclined to save more money.

## Classification of Pentecostals

Despite inconsistencies in the CDE report, it clearly raises the important question about the relationship between Pentecostalism and economic development. The first and possibly greatest hurdle for any study of Pentecostals is that of classifying exactly who are and who are not Pentecostals. The famous Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles of 1906 is often cited as the birthplace of Pentecostalism, or at least the event that propelled the movement into an international phenomenon. Many of the Pentecostal denominations that have sprung forth from this great revival proudly wear the name Pentecostal and are referred to by scholars as Classical Pentecostals. The 1960s and 70s brought about a revivalist movement (sometimes referred to as the “second wave” generation) in many mainline Protestant churches. These spirit-filled Protestants are often referred to as Charismatic Christians and demonstrate a Pentecostal influence through style of worship, focus on the Holy Spirit, belief in miraculous healings, and the practice of speaking in tongues. Since the Charismatic revival of the 1960s and 70s many Protestant congregations as well as Catholic churches have undergone similar changes and experienced varying degrees of Pentecostal influence. Additionally, “non-denominational” churches have sprung up all across the globe, claiming no allegiance or identity other than Christian, but revealing strong Pentecostal influences through doctrine, style of worship, and mission. Churches of this nature have been recently grouped together by scholars to form a third wave of Pentecostalism referred to as “Neocharismatic” and including megachurches as well as various forms of Prosperity Theology. It is this third group that comprises the largest proportion of the estimated 601 million Pentecostal Christians on the globe (Anderson 2010: 14; on the variety within African Pentecostalism, see Gifford 2004; 2009: 109-72).

The spread of Pentecostalism and the wide-reaching influence of Pentecostalism on global Christianity create a significantly altered context that does not lend itself easily for comparison with other traditions or other eras of history. Unlike industrial Europe, which saw clear, and often bitter, divisions between Protestants and Catholics, Pentecostalism seems to have refused to draw the proverbial “line in the sand” between itself and other Christian denominations. It is precisely this trait that many have cited as the main cause for Pentecostalism’s wide reaching success in gaining converts—for it is a faith that does not require conversion *per se*. One can remain Catholic but be “spirit-filled” and take part in divine healing crusades, or even speak in tongues (Csordas 1994). Pentecostalism’s “capacity for absorption,” to borrow a phrase from Harvey Cox, has created a movement so diverse that few characteristics can be universally applied, outside of recognizing the rapid rate at which it is expanding (Cox 1995: 222).

The impact of such diversity is particularly relevant to studies such as that conducted by the Centre for Development and Enterprise. The CDE’s approach is to lay out their terms of what constitutes “Pentecostal” and then examine the group by geographic location, which largely constitutes divisions of race and economic means. By comparing responses given by Pentecostals in “Suburbs” with those given in “Black Areas” the CDE report fails to analyze the differing characteristics of Pentecostal behavior particular to various churches across the spectrum of congregations in these geographic regions. The groups making up those considered to be Pentecostal are labeled as “Old Pentecostal, New Pentecostal, Mainstream Churchgoers, Non-Churchgoers, and Separatists,” which are grouped together under the heading “All Charismatics” (CDE 2008b: 56). While it may be noted that geographic location as well as race may have as much, if not more, claim to affect economic behavior of Pentecostals (or any South African), the comparison as such fails to illuminate which behaviors are indeed characteristics brought forth by the Pentecostal movement in all its forms. Admittedly the purpose of such comparisons was to demonstrate the potential for Pentecostal engagement with social and economic issues in “Black Areas” versus “Suburban Areas,” however it should not be assumed that Pentecostalism is a homogeneous movement divided along these lines. If significant differences in economic behavior exist between these two “Areas”, it is much more likely that such differences are accounted for by race and class than by Pentecostalism. Furthermore, in the particular case of South Africa, the CDE report has failed to recognize any of the lasting effects of apartheid and the subsequent obstacles that remain even after the system was dismantled.

Related to the classification of Pentecostals, and insufficiently addressed in the CDE report, is the emergence and rapid growth of Prosperity Gospel teachings in Africa. With emphasis on financial prosperity through material

blessings bestowed on those whom God favors, this growing movement within Pentecostalism seems the most relevant to a discussion on Pentecostalism's potential economic role in Africa. Sometimes called "Health and Wealth Christianity" by outsiders, this trend can be traced back to the Word of Faith movement of North America, founded by evangelists such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland. Prosperity theology is simple and appealing: through the death and resurrection of Christ, the Christian can share Christ's victory over sin, sickness, and poverty. This is achieved usually by claiming success as a right and subsequently believing it into existence in the Christian's life. Although no statistical data exists on the prevalence of Prosperity teachings, it is certainly the most visible strand of Pentecostalism in Africa, occupying much of the Christian media and boasting the largest church auditoriums on the continent. The pervasiveness of these teachings is so intense that it led the Cameroonian Nyansako-Ni-Nku, President of the All Africa Conference of Churches, to declare that a "disease called Pentecostalism" is infecting Africa (Cole 2007). He doubtlessly had the Word of Faith movement in mind when referring here to Pentecostalism. The teachings of the Word of Faith movement are not restricted to an easily traceable movement, but have infiltrated many congregations of different allegiances. In Ghana, for example, "almost all charismatic churches (and indeed many beyond them) would hold some form of the [Word of Faith] gospel" (Gifford 2004: 48).

Increasingly, Prosperity Gospel teachings are taking center stage in African Charismatic/Pentecostal Christianity. It may even be the case that Prosperity teachings are overtaking the Pentecostal movement itself and moving beyond Pentecostalism to envelop various forms of Christianity in Africa. The CDE report downplays the prevalence of Prosperity Gospel teachings within the movement, calling it a "concern" that is "played up in some [congregations] and played down in others" (2008a: 26). This ambivalent stance towards the movement disregards the impact of Prosperity teachings on the whole of Pentecostalism.

The ministry chosen for discussion in this article does, in fact, adhere to the Word of Faith Movement and happily subscribes to its theology. However, the emphasis on financial gain through faith is one facet of a larger theology that is overtaking African Pentecostalism, which we have termed "victorious living." Victory, in this case, is wide ranging and many African Pentecostal teachers and pastors proselytize a Christianity characterized by "victorious living", but the degree to which they emphasize financial gain as representative of living victoriously varies. There are at least six distinct avenues to this victory that are discernable in African Pentecostalism, any or all of which may be easily observed in African Pentecostal sermons and literature. The first avenue is "motivation." A church can inculcate drive and determination through a positive message—

one that may even be described as “success through a positive mental attitude.” Secondly, entrepreneurship may be overtly encouraged. At an increasing number of churches at least once every service you will have to turn to your neighbour and ask: “Have you started your own business yet?” Thirdly, success may be attained through practical life skills such as: hard work, budgeting, saving, investing, organising time, avoiding alcohol. Fourthly, the Faith Gospel itself is an avenue to success, particularly components therein that promote “sowing” or “planting a seed.” This avenue teaches a doctrine that encourages people to donate funds to a ministry and claims God will reward their donation through miraculously bestowing wealth upon them. This requires faith on the behalf of the believer, so faith and giving tithes and offerings to the church become instruments of one’s advancement. Fifth, the avenue to success is associating oneself with “the man of God”, one who is favored by God and therefore possesses “the anointing” of God. Pastors increasingly claim the ability to prosper their followers and as such make themselves indispensable to those that believe. Lastly, and related to this last point, the pastor can deliver followers from the evil spirits that impede the progress that is one’s due as a Christian.

In the case study presented below, it will become evident that David Oyedepo utilizes the fourth, fifth, and sixth avenues to attain success or “victorious living.” The first three avenues do not feature prominently in his writings or his sermons. We present these avenues to success here because the CDE report exhibits a specific understanding of Pentecostalism, characterized by the first three avenues to success (motivation, entrepreneurship, and practical life skills). These characteristics, while they do exist within African Pentecostalism, by no means characterize it, and may be overshadowed by the last three avenues to success (Faith Gospel, the “anointing,” and deliverance from evil spirits).

## Winners’ Chapel

Living Faith Church Worldwide, better known as Winners’ Chapel, was founded in Lagos in 1983 by David Oyedepo. There are currently more than 4,500 Winners’ Chapel branches both locally and internationally. Winners’ boasts in Lagos the biggest church auditorium in the world, seating 50,400, and in Nairobi where they draw up to 9,000 on a Sunday they are constructing what they claim will be the biggest church in East and Central Africa. Winners’ policy is to have only one church in any one city or town, to which the church provides free or subsidised buses. Provision of transport means that Winners’ clientele is far more heterogeneous than most churches; besides the many SUVs and Mercedes in the car park, there is a large percentage of the congregation bussed in from slums. The senior pastors, at least in the continent’s major cities, tend to be Nigerians, well schooled in founder Oyedepo’s teaching and fiercely



loyal. They recommend Oyedepo's books, promote the pilgrimage to the annual conference ("Shiloh") at headquarters ("Canaan Land," outside Lagos, where their new Covenant University is situated as well).

Throughout Oyedepo's ministry a clear theme emerges—a theme which may be loosely termed "victorious living." The concept of "victorious living" is certainly not exclusive to Oyedepo or his ministry, but is prominent in various degrees throughout African Pentecostal churches and ministries. This is echoed through the words of Ann Bernstein, director of the CDE, as she sums up the Pentecostal imperative in South Africa by saying, "The message in different ways is - you can do it; you can change your own life, you can improve your life" (Bernstein and Rule 2010: 123).

#### *Oyedepo's Biblical Power Instruments*

Emphasis on "living victoriously" is found in all features of Oyedepo's ministry. His "biblical power instruments," as listed in his book, are claimed to be Oyedepo's genuine innovations in Christianity. These include anointing with oil, the practice of washing one another's feet, "the blood," and "the mantle" (2006: 53). These "instruments" play a central role in Oyedepo's teachings and ministry and are discussed at length in his 649-page book, *Signs and Wonders Today: A Catalogue of Amazing Acts of God among Men* (2006), a book that gives almost definitive expression of how Oyedepo understands his ministry, and as well, through the abundance of testimonies, gives equally definitive expression of how his followers understand it. All of these "instruments" reinforce a common vision of Christianity as promoting victory first and foremost in the life of the believer.

Anointing with oil is believed to provide "immunity against any form of evil . . . it is able to raise up any dying business, resurrect any collapsing career, and reverse any ancestral family curse. It makes a way for the plan of God for your life to find fulfillment" (2006: 101). Oil is referred to by Oyedepo as an "all-purpose drug for any ailment of life" (2006: 113). Oyedepo refers to the power of the oil with terms familiar practitioners of African Indigenous religious traditions, particularly those accustomed to receiving magic potions capable of bringing luck or curing disease.

Oyedepo's second biblical instrument is the practice of washing one another's feet, as was demonstrated by Jesus washing the disciples feet in the bible. Some Christian traditions maintained the tradition of washing one another's feet, though traditionally the practice had been used as a ritual of humility—to instruct believers through demonstration and experience that they are to live as humble servants of God. Oyedepo's interpretation of washing one another's feet is drastically different, linking the practice to his general theme of victory. "As your feet are dipped into the water you are empowered to walk in

the realm of dominion” (2006: 147). Footwashings are ceremoniously performed to empower its participants. For believers, the ritual “provides access into [their] enviable inheritance.” Oyedepo elaborates, “And what is this inheritance all about? Mysterious dominion for mysterious triumphs” (2006: 149). In some cases footwashings are accompanied with a stress on the biblical verse, Joshua 14:9, which states, “Whatsoever your feet tread upon shall be given unto you for a possession.” This interpretation of the ritual is meant to give one more assurance of obtaining or owning property.

The third “biblical instrument” Oyedepo promotes in his book is “the blood of Jesus.” Traditionally understood in Christianity as that through which Christians attain salvation, Oyedepo draws attention to the “power” of the blood—not particularly for salvation from hell—but rather so that believers may “live a glorious life” (2006: 131). This is done by “invoking” or symbolically claiming the triumph the blood of Christ represents. His language is ubiquitous with triumphant imagery. “Power is available to you by the blood, so you do not have to be a weakling anymore” (2006: 131). “Through his blood, we are presented holy, unblamable, and unreprouvable in His sight. And by that placement, all things come under our authority. All things that are under His authority automatically come under us” (2006: 125).

Power is available to you by the blood, so you do not have to be a weakling anymore... Pharaoh surrendered power after the Passover blood came on the scene. Then God gave Israel favour, and they spoiled the Egyptians. The Israelites were decked with riches at the expense of the Egyptians... by the blood, the wisdom of God is available for us in every conflict of life . . . the blood is able to give you instant, on-the-spot deliverance from any form of sickness and disease . . . the blood of Jesus has justified you, so you can live a glorious life. . . . You have been restored back to blessing, which makes rich with no sorrow added to it. . . . We have access to greatness through the blood of Jesus. (2006: 131)

This particular rendering of the symbolic power of the blood of Christ is deliberately directed away from the story of Jesus’ sacrifice as atonement for sins and instead focused on the power of invoking the blood of Christ in earthly matters, such as overcoming sickness and achieving wealth. Though the crucifixion of Christ has carried a theme of victory within various Christian traditions, this is generally understood as “victory over sin.” Oyedepo makes a point here to steer the concept of victory away from the spiritual and toward the physical world in which people live.

Even the central ritual of Christianity, the Eucharist, is interpreted to fit this message of abundance, success, and prosperity. In Oyedepo's understanding, the Eucharist "is designed for strength, health and longevity... It swallows up everything that is tying down your system or ravaging your body" (2006: 63). The Eucharist, like the anointing oil, has an almost magical consistency. Oyedepo says, "After an encounter with the blood of Jesus in the miracle meal, none of the diseases ravaging the world will ever be able to follow you... It is the seal of our covenant exemption from all satanic assaults" (2006: 71). "Every zero sperm count, dead womb, dead ovaries, whatever is called dead will be quickened back to life by the power in the blood contained in this miracle meal" (2006: 73). Interestingly, Oyedepo's understanding of the substances consumed during the Eucharist, usually bread and grape juice, is one that the substances take on a supernatural character once consumed, similar to the Catholic belief of transubstantiation. However, Oyedepo does not elaborate on what the bread and juice become, but rather on what effect they have, which is identical to the effects of his other "biblical instruments:" victory, healing, abundance, and wealth.

Oyedepo's last innovation is his description of "the mantle." He cites Elijah (II Kings 2), Aaron (Ps 133:1ff.), the woman with issue of blood (Mt 9:20) and Paul (Acts 19:11) to show that "any material that has come in contact with the anointed of God carries with it the unction" for dominion (2006: 155). The mantle described by Oyedepo is that which sanctions spiritual authority, particularly with regard to blessings and divine favor. "It is a mantle for exploits. It is the end-time prophetic mystery in the hand of the carrier, for amazing results, signs and wonders. It is a carrier of divine energy and heavenly virtue" (2006: 158). Oyedepo, naturally, considers himself among those chosen by God to carry the mantle and therefore possesses a form of spiritual authority ordained by God and capable to bless those who follow him. He claims, "God gave me this mantle for the liberation of mankind" (2006: 158) though the liberation he speaks of is a liberation from negative occurrences in one's life, most of which people would just call bad luck. Essentially it is liberation from being a loser, to being a winner. The practical application of Oyedepo's mantle is experienced through ritualistic practices common in African Indigenous religious practices. For example, a handkerchief touched by Oyedepo can be expected to produce the miraculous.

#### *Word of Faith Movement and Global Networking*

Oyedepo's Christianity has undeniable ties with the Word of Faith movement, a prosperity inclined form of Evangelicalism originating in the United States. Oyedepo does not shy away from these links, but rather admits his indebtedness to such pastors as Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth and Gloria Copeland. He cheerfully admits, "[My] commission is clearly a Word of Faith ministry" (2006: 25). He acknowledges his debt to Oswald J. Smith, to Smith

Wigglesworth and T. L. Osborn. He hosts at headquarters preachers like Mike Murdock and Myles Munroe, of whose gospel he obviously approves. Others in their testimonies (with his evident support) link him to Joyce Meyer (399), John Avanzini (331), Ben Carson (417), and the London-based Nigerian Matthew Ashimolowo (2006: 539). The global influence of such (mainly North American) Pentecostal luminaries is often not just acknowledged in Africa but trumpeted. Pentecostalism is a global phenomenon, and in Africa its global character is accentuated. Globalising processes have tended to bypass Africa; Africa is the one part of the world which has experienced globalisation as marginalisation. Pentecostalism is one of the few global phenomena in which Africa can participate as an equal. Oyedepo proudly takes his place at crusades, conferences, conventions with his peers from other continents, and has no difficulty in bringing them to his celebrations. His media productions are screened with theirs. Oyedepo is one of the African Pentecostal superstars who can demand a place on the global stage. These influences culminate into a focus on victory in finances. This is evident in Oyedepo's account of his commission from God. His experience is obviously modeled on the call of Moses, but whereas Moses in Midian was commanded: "Go and set my people free," Oyedepo in the United States was simply told: "Get down home quick and make my people rich" (Oyedepo 1995: 51).

#### *Victorious Living through Generous Giving*

To become rich, Oyedepo obviously believes in work. Introducing a number of testimonies in a chapter entitled "Miracle Jobs," he says as much: "There is no substitute for hard work" (2006: 433). "As a redeemed child of God, you have no other option but to work. Idleness is a self-inflicted curse. Unfortunately, it's the bane of the African man. Our culture has created room for many idle people, as they will still eat, whether they work or not, since other family members and friends will always come to their aid" (2006: 433). The Bishop even holds himself up as a model, working eighteen hours a day. "Hard work is the key to distinction. Without hard work, your destiny will decay. So, go and work!" (2006: 436).

Yet it is striking just how little or seldom work features in Oyedepo's writings and his services. The very first testimony in this section of the book is not about work at all; it is from a man who increases his tithes, and "to cut the story short, I am now a General Manager of a company, with over 200 staff under me... This was a job I didn't apply for!" (2006: 440). A few pages later, we have the same logic. One "believed God for a mega bank job," and submitted his CV to a bank. The Bishop called for another sacrificial offering for Covenant University. People are encouraged to bring their possessions in addition to whatever cash they can offer.

I wanted to pledge 40,000 naira [approximately \$310 USD in 2006] but . . . I did not have that amount, but I had a CD three-changer in my room, which I laid on the altar as my Isaac. After my morning devotion, I was thanking God for all this grace in my life and my career throughout 2004. At about 9.30 am a call came in from the bank, saying I should come for my appointment letter! This is my turning-point proof. I don't know anybody there; and I'm starting with a supervisor post, without any experience in a banking set-up. I don't merit it, but God made it possible. (2006: 445)

Testimonies such as these represent the overwhelming majority of testimonies in Oyedepo's book and consequently dismiss the work ethic as the main ingredient to financial success, and reinforce the notion that victory is attained through the miraculous, as a result of sacrificial offerings.

Another had read Oyedepo's 1995 book *Breaking Financial Hardship* (which stresses seed-faith). As a result, he testified, "[I gave] all that I earned that month to God despite all the enormous bills I had to pay. Immediately after I dropped that money I got an invitation to be interviewed for a Chief Executive job" (2006: 212). Another reports that "the first day I came to church, the Bishop preached on sacrificial giving. After the service I asked my wife the meaning of sacrificial offering, and what we could give. . . . My wife then advised that we give our television and video set . . . and I willingly agreed . . . and dropped them in church as our sacrificial offering. And from then, my situation turned around!" (2006: 326). Oyedepo is not shy about what he plans to use their sacrificial offerings for, as one testimony describes:

When the Bishop made a call for the aircraft seed [to buy the bishop's private jet], I looked around for what to give as a sacrificial offering, as almost everything in the house had packed up; the radio and television had to be knocked on the head before they started working. I decided to give the video player that was at least in a fair condition. It was after that offering that things started to change. (2006: 329)

As we have seen, most victory stems from giving, but testimonies also attest how important Oyedepo's specifics are. Victory comes from the use of oil, blood, or impartation (the latter a ritual to access the Bishop's anointing). Consider the case of oil. The Bishop insists that "When the oil touches just the mirror of your car, it becomes immune to accidents and scratches. When you anoint the gates of your house, no devil, burglar or armed robber will dare come near it"

(2006: 112). Testimonies make the same point. Thus, one woke one day to find his video player gone. “He anointed the space where the video player used to be with the anointing oil, and called back his video player. It was restored, along with the thief, in a matter of weeks” (2006: 106). Another anointed his TV set that had long broken down: “He turned it on, and the television showed clear pictures and produced a clear sound!” (2006: 107). Another applied anointing oil to her farm instead of fertiliser. “To the glory of God, that same year, she harvested the biggest tubers of yam ever, bigger than those of her colleagues” (2006: 108). Another man “whose business was slow in yielding profit anointed his signpost, and thereafter people started flooding into his office” (2006: 111). Another, realising that though God was blessing him, he was still borrowing, testified:

[I] got angry, grabbed my bottle of anointing oil, poured out a handful and made some dangerous scriptural pronouncements [viz., dangerous to enemy forces]. I then splashed the anointing oil where we normally kept our money in anger, casting out whatever the devil had placed there. From that day on, we began enjoying a ceaseless flow of abundance! We have paid up all our debts, bought some new household items, and are living in supernatural abundance. (2006: 331)

This “sweatless success” refrain indicates precisely that success is not a product of human effort, or any process of rationality. This applies to the healing of infirmities as well. Oyedepo frequently overrules doctors’ reports (535), because doctors deal in facts, not in truth (2006: 521). In that sense science is “an enemy of faith” (2006: 518). This complicates the CDE comparison between Pentecostal attitudes and Weber’s “Protestant Ethic” which was necessarily situated in “a context of a world view free of magic and superstition” (CDE 2008a: 12).

#### *Oyedepo’s Role*

Oyedepo is not just a teacher and exemplar. He is the quintessential prophet, claiming crucial significance in the victorious living of his followers. His ministry actually brings this about. He is explicit:

The Holy Ghost has sent me to open a new chapter to this generation. He has sent me with the powerful Word of Faith, and has also delivered into my hands mysterious instruments that have been used over the years to raise the dead, destroy HIV/AIDS, dissolve cancers, establish liberty, provoke success, and command favour, all for the uplift of Zion! We

are grateful to God for counting us privileged to know these things which hitherto had been hidden, but which are now revealed to us by His Spirit. God has delivered into our hands divine instruments for victory, Through their use, the lame have walked, withered limbs have been cured, the mad have been restored back to sanity, and the barren have become joyful mothers of children. It's been signs and wonders galore! (These) biblical instruments of power ... were delivered (to me) purely by revelation. (2006: 58)

God has spoken to him clearly (2006: 152). What God has revealed, Oyedepo can pronounce and actually bring about. The implications of such a claim cannot be exaggerated: "Prophetic verdicts are divine verdicts; they are heavenly verdicts. They are God's commands given expression to through mortal lips. . . . Every time the prophet says, 'Thus saith the Lord,' it is actually the Lord Himself speaking. He is only using the prophet's vocal system as a microphone" (2006: 153). Oyedepo also claims to have "creative breath." "The Father has creative life in His breath, so does the Son. And because the Son says He has sent us as the Father sent Him, therefore, I have creative life in my breath also" (2006: 161). He immediately recounts that he breathed on a child with polio, and "instantly, the legs straightened out." He also claims to have healed many of HIV/AIDS this way (2006: 161).

By superimposing himself as an essential pathway to achieve the victorious living that he promises through God, Oyedepo creates a congregation dependent upon his presence. Though Oyedepo does provide a disclaimer, saying that he is indeed a mere mortal and all the power displayed through the miracles of these testimonies belongs to God, the testimonies themselves overwhelmingly point directly to Oyedepo. Rarely do testimonies attribute the miraculous only to God, but frequently to "the God of Bishop Oyedepo" (2006: 518). This is not the same message of Pentecostalism as reported by the CDE, the message of "you can do it;" this is the message of "Bishop Oyedepo can do it for you." This is undeniably the key point: Oyedepo's presence, word, action can effect any desired transformation.

Some scholars have used the term "primal" of a Christianity that finds spiritual causality everywhere, one that finds spirits, demons, curses, spells pervasive, in a kind of "enchanted" Christianity (see, for example, Bediako 1995: 95-106). There are touches which reveal the "enchanted" religious worldview, such as family curses and spells, (Oyedepo 1995: 102, 342, 460, 559), but the word "witchcraft" seems studiously avoided. Oyedepo himself can reverse curses, a procedure in which the curse intended for a victim is turned back on the curser. However, these testimonies are carefully constructed to avoid overt references to

indigenous beliefs. Where the parallels are evident, the testimonies are largely peripheral. It seems that the Christianity of Winners' Chapel works in a manner that is attractive to those familiar with elements of African religious beliefs, yet fiercely rejects those same beliefs as witchcraft. This is not an "enchanted" Christianity in which witchcraft and evil spirits are pervasive. Satan, the Western construct, is far more prominent in Oyedepo's Christianity than the spirits of Africa's pre-Christian religion.

## Conclusion

To say that David Oyedepo represents African Pentecostalism would be inaccurate, but to exclude his brand of "Health and Wealth" Christianity from a study of Pentecostalism in Africa is to misrepresent African Pentecostalism entirely. While David Oyedepo may not be a typical African Pentecostal leader, he certainly is not atypical either. The enormous variety of Pentecostalism in Africa prohibits any one person or congregation to qualify as "typical." The particulars of every Pentecostal and Charismatic ministry differ on a wide-ranging scale. However the "victorious living" motif is a common theme running through a large section of African Pentecostalism, and it continues to grow. We have already discussed the growing numbers of Prosperity Gospel adherents on the continent, and even where Pentecostal congregations would resolutely reject the Prosperity Gospel we still find a focus on "victorious living." Oyedepo's own influence on African Pentecostalism is quite staggering—there are currently eight Winners' congregations in South Africa alone. Winners' Chapel proposes many challenges for the CDE study on Pentecostalism. The CDE claims that Pentecostalism promotes a "quasi-Calvinist pattern of deferred gratification, leading to an improvement in financial security and material conditions in the family," and "that 'tithing' acted as a spur to deferred gratification, financial planning and discipline in handling family and personal finances" (2008b: 71). Yet the overwhelming theme related to finances evidenced by testimonies presented by Oyedepo is that the giving of tithes and offerings should be spontaneous and more than one can really afford. One believer is praised for giving so much of his finances that he was forced to "borrow some money to feed [his] family that month" (Oyedepo 1995:187).

There is no doubt that the message of victory, as preached by Oyedepo, is one that inspires and motivates adherents to the message. The CDE report illuminates this inspiration and motivation as a catalyst for hope and determination in poverty-stricken areas. In addition, Winners' Chapel strongly encourages and fosters entrepreneurship. Lastly, churches similar to Winners' Chapel do carry a code of morality that likely has a positive benefit for the economic and social situations many believers find themselves in. Alcoholism, infidelity, and



domestic violence are just a few of the issues that are often reportedly resolved as a result of the church.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned characteristics (the last of which is certainly not exclusive to a Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity), it is difficult to see Winners' Chapel through the lens presented by the CDE. The testimonies of people giving beyond their means to the church and relying on God for food for their family or money to pay rent certainly would appear out of place in the CDE report—the logic of the seed-faith motif is far from the mechanics of capitalism. It is hard to relate this to Weber's ideas; nor is it immediately obvious how Oyedepo's "Christianity of covenant favour" will usher in a new economic dispensation. A vital part of Weber's thesis was that Protestantism had adopted (or rather been usurped by) rationalism, which made for the perfect marriage between Protestantism and capitalism. Oyedepo's Christianity proudly rejects a rationalistic approach when it comes to the methods of attaining success and financial abundance.

Perhaps even more challenging to the CDE study is the critical role that charismatic figures play in the lives of their followers. Oyedepo's ministry is one example of many that are dependent upon a personality with a near supernatural identity that welcomes and even promotes a certain dependency by their followers. Oyedepo has been enormously successful, as attested in the size and spread of the church. Moreover, his influence extends far beyond his own church, through his media productions, both books and television. His very success has also made him a paradigm, a model to be imitated by others.

Winners' Chapel is unashamedly about victory (and financial victory in particular), and even though one can find elements in their message of motivation, entrepreneurship, practical morality and even organizational skills, its primary emphasis is on sowing (money) in faith and prophetic declaration. While acknowledging that "the prosperity orientation is general" and noting that it comes in different forms, *Under the Radar* hardly gives it the significance it merits (CDE 2008a: 24, 26, 30). This prosperity element is so pervasive, we conclude, that the CDE report does not adequately present the Pentecostal phenomenon.

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