

**NIGERIAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES AND THEIR PROSPERITY MESSAGES:
A SAFEGUARD AGAINST POVERTY IN NIGERIA? 1980 – 2014**

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Abstract

One can argue that the growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria owes a lot to the rising spate of poverty and squalor in the country. When individuals began to seek spiritual solutions for their physical problem, Pentecostal churches with their prosperity messages logically appeared as anchor point. Pentecostalism - a term which describes the set of Christians who believe so much in the help of the Holy Spirit for overcoming life challenges – both spiritually and physically readily became a bastion of hope for a vast number of Nigerians who have had to struggle for an existence in the ailing Nigerian economy. The nexus between the claims and testimonies of the adherents of these Pentecostal churches and the social conditions in Nigeria appear not to have fully caught the attention of social historians. Simply put, are prosperity messages by Nigerian Pentecostal Churches a safe guard against poverty? This study attempts to find answers to these questions. Information for the study was derived from primary sources and secondary sources. The historical research method which emphasizes thematic analysis of information was employed. The salience of the study is inherent in its modest contribution to this seemingly under - studied social aspect of Nigerian history.

Introduction

Religion, writes Karl Marx is “the opium of the masses”.¹ Marx appeared to have been persuaded that religion primarily worked as a solace for the toiling masses, in that it promises things often beyond practical obtainability. Whether in fact, religion is a utopia or

otherwise, has been the subject of seemingly endless debate amongst philosophers, theologians and religious pundits; rarely does this engage the attention of social historians. What is perhaps more important to the historian is the role religion plays in the socio-economic forces that determine the history of societies and peoples².

Humans are essentially religious beings. Indeed, they are haunted by the vastness of eternity and there appears to be a consensus among scholars that the systematic ordering of the cosmos and the universe compels humans to believe that there must be a transcendental being who must have made the universe and all that it contains. Clearly, belief in a Supreme Being has been one of the distinguishing features of humans and thus, Christianity and a host of other religions subscribe to this. In the Christian fold, there are many sects and denominations. One of these sects refers to themselves as Pentecostals. Pentecostalism is said to “a renewal movement within Christianity which places a special emphasis on a direct personal experience with God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and more often than not, manifested in speaking in tongues.”³

In Nigeria, Pentecostalism was an off shoot of Protestantism which had rejected the colonial encrustations on Christianity. It was not, however, until the 1970s that Nigeria began to experience what may be considered as classical Pentecostalism, and since then the movement has grown in leaps and bounds⁴. Today, Pentecostals are known for amazing testimonies of wondrous works of God. Importantly too, are these churches’ messages on prosperity which tend to give hope and succour to a vast number of toiling Nigerians. The question to ask however is: are these Pentecostal messages on prosperity a safeguard against poverty in an ailing economy such as we have in Nigeria? Providing answers to the above question forms the central thrust of this study.

For ease and convenience, the study is divided into six sections. This introduction is followed by the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The third section essays on the history and growth of Pentecostalism and its consequent spread in Nigeria. The fourth section overviews the various perspectives of the prosperity gospel and the influencing factors in Nigeria; section five discusses the prosperity messages of Pentecostal Churches and the poverty question in Nigeria. The study is concluded in the sixth section.

Conceptual Clarification

Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism refers to a renewal movement within Christianity which places emphasis on a direct personal experience with God through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The term is derived from ‘Pentecost’ – the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks⁵. It was on a certain Feast of Pentecost that the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples of Jesus Christ and thus, the group of people in the Christian fold who subscribe to the theology of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as the true basis and foundation of Christianity adopted the adjective -‘Pentecostal’ for themselves. In this regard, E.A. Livingstone conceptualises Pentecostalism as “a moderate religious movement (within Christianity) whose adherents share a common belief in the possibility of receiving the same experience as the first Christians did”⁶. Pentecostal Churches, therefore, refer to all the Churches that uphold the belief that all Christians should seek a post conversion experience called baptism of the Holy Ghost which is believed to be accompanied by a sign- the gift of tongues or speaking in tongues (which could be in form of *Glossalalia* – speech in an unknown language or *Zenoglossia*-speech in a language known to others but not the speaker)⁷. This act of speaking in tongues among other things marks Pentecostal Churches out among other sects in the Christian fold.

Prosperity Messages

Prosperity gospel or message is one of the most controversial themes in today's Christianity. It is the gospel or message popular among Pentecostals that advocates financial blessing, good health and wealth as irrevocable plans, programmes and desire of God for men. David O. Oyedepo one of the pioneer preachers of the prosperity Gospel in Nigeria avers that God takes pleasure in the prosperity of his people since no father is happy to see his children in lack. He reasons:

Why then do you think that your lack excites God? Which father is excited to see his children begging all around? Have you ever heard somebody give a testimony, saying, "I thank God, two of my sons are beggars"? Your children's children will never beg! I want you to know that the prosperity God has planned for you has nothing to do with your profession, your career or your family background⁸.

Prosperity preachers, therefore, proclaim that it is the will of God that people should prosper and giving is sometimes taken as a precondition for this blessing. Finally on these conceptual explanations, poverty is denoted as the state of not having enough money to take care of basic needs such as food, clothing and housing. Poverty is also conceptualized as the denial of choices and basic opportunities to live a tolerable life materially, politically, economically, psychologically, socially and culturally⁹. Poverty has unarguably remained a major concern in Nigeria. In fact, by 2007 more than 70% of Nigerians were recorded as living in poverty¹⁰. It is thus, this anomaly that provides the fertile ground for Pentecostal prosperity preachers. How far these prosperity messages have helped to combat poverty in Nigeria forms the crux of this study. In other words, the study attempts to investigate whether prosperity messages are a safe guard against poverty in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of a theoretical framework this study adopts two theories and adapts their basic prepositions to underpin its arguments. These theories are the Empirical Theory of Divine Intervention and the Marxist Theory. The Empirical Theory of Divine Intervention was propounded by Thomas Aquinas and several other scholars who have left imprints on the original theoretical conception of Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas sets forth in the theory not only to explain the existence of God but to also prove that God intervenes in the affairs of humans¹¹. Aquinas' theoretical propositions are to be found in the first part of his book, *Summa Theological*. In this book, he developed five central arguments for Gods existence and divine intervention in the affairs of men. These arguments according to Brian David are grounded in an Aristotelian ontology and make use of the infinite regression argument¹². First, the theory argues that whatever that is in motion must be put in motion by another thing. So there must be an Unmoved Mover. Aquinas proceeded to argue that God is the Unmoved Mover who moves and influences the affairs of men. Again, the theory argues that it is impossible for a being to cause itself to be (because it would have to exist before it caused itself) and that it is impossible for there to be an infinite changing causes which would result in an infinite regress. Therefore, there must be a first cause, itself uncaused. Furthermore, the theory states that since all beings are contingent (meaning that it is possible for them not to exist); there must have been a time when nothing existed as things exist now. The theory thus, contends that there must exist a being with necessary existence regarded as God¹³. In all, the Empirical Theory of Divine Intervention claims that apart from the existence of God, He intervenes directly and indirectly in the business of men¹⁴. The

importance of this theory for this study stems from the fact that it gives a philosophical and theological basis for prosperity messages, since God intervenes in the affairs of humans.

The Marxist theory on the other hand, derives from Karl Marx and Frederick Engels ruminations on human societies. They believe that the history of all societies from time immemorial has been conditioned by struggles between two contending classes – the exploiters and the exploited¹⁵. Accordingly, Marx and Engels posit that this class struggle is based on nothing other than the quest for control of material conditions, what Marx and Engels referred to as dialectical materialism. They wrote:

In the earlier epochs, the freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journey man, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended in a revolutionary reconstitution of society or in the common ruination of the contending classes¹⁶.

Marx and Engel, therefore, contend that in the present epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, human society is split into two great, hostile classes, directly facing each other – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. According to them, capitalism is pervasive and erodes societal norms and values – all for the sake of private gain. In their words, “the bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe”¹⁷. The Marxist theory thus, sees the panacea to the ills of capitalism in a communist revolution where private gain would be a thing of the past¹⁸.

The Marxist theory has received several criticisms and several other scholars have also risen to defend it. However, its relevance for this study derives from the fact that it helps us to factor and situate in proper context the several anomalies observable in the Church. As indeed, preachers are not exempt from the corrosive and avaricious influence of capitalism. In any event, these two theories help to solidify the recurrent themes of this present study.

History of Pentecostalism and its Spread in Nigeria

The Pentecostal movement appears to have grown out of the holiness revival of the second half of the 19th century¹⁹, the first Pentecostals in the modern sense appeared on the scene in 1900 when Charles Fox Perham (1873 – 1929), a former Methodist minister, opened the Bethel Bible College in Topeka- a city in north-western Kansas, and the capital of Kansas, United States of America²⁰. Upon establishment, about forty (40) students were known to have enrolled into the college with the bible becoming their only textbook. Subsequently, the students were given an assignment by Perham to discover some certain evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit- one of which was concluded to be speaking in tongues²¹. Consequently, December 31, 1900 being a prayer day, was set aside as the expectation day for this evidence. The evidence was eventually experienced the following day (January 1) following the speaking in tongues of a female student, Agnes Ozman (1870-1937), when she was prayed for by Perham. With this development, Agnes Ozman became to be known as the first in modern times to speak in tongues²².

In 1903, during the preaching of Perham (especially the one held at the Holiness missions in Kansas and Missouri), there were myriads of experiences associated with speaking in tongues, and healing. Subsequently, in a movement regarded as the “Apostolic Faith”²³, a plethora of people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Perham also extended his preaching activities to Texas where he began a Bible College in Houston. There, he came in contact with an African American preacher, William Joseph Seymour (1870 – 1922)- a

son of freed slaves- who would later emerge as the leader of the movement. The movement was to assume an international dimension under his leadership²⁴.

As the leader of the Pentecostal movement, Seymour (in 1906) received an invitation to preach in Los Angeles, at a Black Holiness Church, where he laid hands on people and they spoke in tongues. His sermon on tongues was accepted with hostility leading to the latching of the church building against him. Consequently, he moved with his members into an old and dilapidating building of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Azusa Street, Los Angeles²⁵.

The revival in Azusa Street during this period became the centre of Pentecostalism- a development which lasted for a short period. There were noticeable waves of immigrants from all over the western world to the street of Azusa with the aim of acquiring personal experience of the new trend as well as to be baptized in the Spirit. Reports from the press during this period contributed in promulgating and consequently, internationalizing the spiritual activity in Azusa Street, leading to the birth of other Pentecostal missions²⁶. The report of Allan Anderson on the influence of Azusa Street revival movement on the present-day Pentecostalism evidenced the above assertion. According to him,

Twenty-six different Pentecostal denominations trace their origins to Azusa Street including the largest, the Assemblies of God. People went there from Europe and other parts of North America and went back with the "baptism", and Pentecostal missionaries were sent out all over the world reaching over 25 nations in two years.²⁷

This new movement spread to several other parts of the world including Africa and Nigeria. In the specific Nigerian case, Rimamsikwe Habila Kitauseand Hilary Chukwuka Achunike write that Pentecostalism is a major religious and social movement in Nigeria that is part of a growing world-wide movement²⁸. It is a diverse movement that has penetrated all areas of society such as education, business, health, social media, social development and even the highest levels of government in any country of the world.

Historically, the root of contemporary Pentecostalism in Africa is traced to the struggle against European imperialist encrustations. Thus, Pentecostalism was partly an internally motivated socio-religious phenomenon in Africa. The movement emanated from the missionary Churches and evangelical spirituality. It is a paradigm shift amid the new developments in African Christianity. It is one of the ways that Africans responded to the missionary structures and appropriated their message. However, the character of modern African Pentecostalism changes in every generation, indeed, in every decade. Inspired by the success of the early socio-religious movements of the late 19th century, charismatic wind blew through the African continent in the pre-World War period. Certain prophets emerged to till the soil on which modern Pentecostalism would thrive. These prophets were people groomed in the missionary Churches, Protestants and Catholic, but they were closer to the grain of African culture in their responses to the gospel and so felt the resonance between the charismatic indigenous worldviews and the equally charismatic biblical worldview. Between 1910 and 1918, a C.M.S. catechist of the Niger Delta Pastorate, Garrick Braide, launched an indigenous prophetic movement that later becomes the Christ Army Church (CAC)²⁹. Following an influenza epidemic in 1918, revivals flare within the mission Churches and the CAC led to the formation of prayer groups and Churches to cushion the effect of the influenza³⁰. During the 1930s and 1940s, a revival led by Joseph Babalola broke loose resulting to the establishment of Christ Apostolic Church. It was during this period that classical Pentecostal Churches including the Assemblies of God Church and Foursquare

Gospel Church among others began to arrive in Nigeria³¹. The 1950s saw the founding of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and other Churches.

This epoch also witnessed rapid expansion of Christianity to Northern Nigeria. 1960s-1970s register a wave of revival among Charismatics ministries in tertiary institutions in Nigeria which eventually metamorphosed into Pentecostal Churches like Benson Idahosa's Church of God Mission, Benin and Williams Kumuyi's Deeper Life Bible Church, Lagos³². From 1980s up to the present time there has been an explosion of Pentecostal denominations in Nigeria.

Perspectives on Prosperity Gospel and some Influencing Factors in Nigeria

There are two broad perspectives on the prosperity gospel in Nigeria. The first perspective sees prosperity gospel as a way through which bourgeois clergymen extort money from their naïve and unwary congregation. Those who oppose the prosperity gospel as enunciated by contemporary Pentecostal preachers argue that one of the fundamental teachings of Christianity is detachment from material possessions in lieu of heavenly realities: this means that the vision of Christian life is living this earthly life in a way that will guarantee admittance into the heavenly kingdom. Dominic Umoh in line with the above, posits that "earthly realities are not ends in themselves, rather they are means to an end – proximate ends. Proximate ends are means to ultimate ends which according to their very name are of ultimate importance"³³. Therefore, practising the virtues of poverty and modesty as regards earthly wealth are imperative and paramount for authentic Christian living. Furthermore, F. Obiora agrees with Umoh and goes ahead to contend that "the early fathers were paragons of this virtue – most of whom died having nothing. Poverty runs like a golden thread in the entire teachings of the Church"³⁴. Those who are given to this perspective about Christianity are inclined to see prosperity messages as running contrary to the essence of good Christian living. Again, these proponents believe that it is not out of place for God to bless one materially as indeed, Abraham was blessed of God and became very wealthy in livestock, and in silver and Gold. However, those who share this view point aver that Abraham's focus was not on what he could get from God, but what he could give to God.

On the other hand, another school of thought defends the prosperity gospel and argues that those who condemn it do not understand God's purpose for man and are too blinkered with traditional religions to understand the purpose of God for those who believe in him. D.O. Oyedepo a staunch proponent of the prosperity Gospel believes and argues that "the end time Church is programmed to prosper exceedingly but then we need the blessings of God to make the blessings a reality"³⁵. These supporters and proponents of the prosperity gospel back their arguments up with several scriptural passages such as that found in Haggai 2 verse 8 where God says "the silver is mine and the Gold is mine" and also in Zechariah 1 verse 17 "...My cities through prosperity shall yet spread abroad..." thus, prosperity gospel proponents proclaim that God wants to prosper His kingdom through the prosperity of his people³⁶.

Additionally, those who support this viewpoint claim that critics of the prosperity gospel are mistaken in that; they often regard the prosperity Gospel as involving only financial and economic prosperity alone. To them, this is not only a mistake but inconsistent with the position of the scriptures such as found in 3 John 2, where it was written "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou *mayest* prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospers" and also that found in Deuteronomy 28 verse 11 which stated thus: "And the lord shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of the body and in the fruit of thy cattle and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the Lord *sware* unto thy fathers to give thee".

In the light of the on-going, proponents of the prosperity gospel proclaim that the prosperity gospel does not only stress financial blessings but indeed, all round blessings from God. Whether in fact, these two contending perspectives of the prosperity gospel are right or wrong, are not the problem of this study and affect this study only to the extent that it impacts on the poverty question in Nigeria. It is, however, crucial to note that in today's Nigeria, the prosperity gospel has become very popular and has indeed grown in leaps and bounds. The remaining part of this section attempts to explicate the growth of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria.

Primarily, the popularity as well as the growth of prosperity messages in Nigeria owes a lot to the poverty situation in the country. It is undeniable that poverty and deprivation is on the increase in Africa and other parts of the world. Clearly, the deep – seated poverty in Nigeria accounts for the growth and popularity of prosperity gospel. Timothy Bamgbose writes that “prosperity gospel is likely not going to dwindle and lose its flavour because of its appealing ideology to the poor everywhere in Nigeria”³⁶. This present study argues that as far as poverty remains rooted in Nigeria and Africa, prosperity messages are going to continue having a field day. The fact of Africans deplorable state and their likely tendency to patronize the gospel of success is justified by I. Phiri and J. Maxwell when they document that “A religion of hope gleams brightly against the bleak backdrop of African poverty. Currently, about 315 million sub-Saharan Africans live on less than a dollar a day”³⁷. This authenticates the high level of poverty in Africa.

In Africa, around 20,000 people perish each day due to extreme poverty and one in three Africans suffers malnutrition. That is, a total of 852 million people in Africa are chronically or acutely malnourished³⁸. Where poverty holds sway, the probability is high that people would tend to quickly adopt the Pentecostal prosperity gospel than missionary Christianity. As can be deduced, poverty is a contributory factor for the thriving of the prosperity gospel in the world today and this according to R. H. Kitause and H. C. Achunike “may probably go on unabated for the next thirty years”³⁹. It is probably for the above reason that many Africans, especially, Nigerians would want to escape poverty by all means through the embracement of prosperity gospel. Not a few Nigerians have equally been inspired by prosperity apostles to aim high, work hard and avoid vices capable of ruining their future. Furthermore, R. H. Kitause and H. C. Achunike maintain that:

There is no doubt about the fact that the standard of living of most Nigerians have greatly improved through their embracement of prosperity gospel. This seeming benefit enjoyed by prosperity believers is probably a catalyst towards the expansion of prosperity gospel in the world today. It is being projected that prosperity gospel may probably see the light of the day in the next three decades in Africa and beyond⁴⁰.

Prosperity Messages of Pentecostal Churches and the Poverty Question in Nigeria, 1980 – 2014.

Poverty as stated earlier appears to be endemic in Nigeria and often seems like an intractable challenge. The material conditions of a people undeniably affect their life chances and opportunities and thus, their history. It was as a result of the pervasiveness of poverty in Nigeria that caused the prosperity gospel and by extension Pentecostalism to become popular and has since the 1980's grown in leaps and bounds.

As posited in the introductory part of this study, there is certainly a nexus between poverty in Nigeria and the growth and popularity of prosperity gospel or messages in the country. Put differently, the question is asked: is the prosperity gospel as preached by the

Pentecostal clergy a safeguard against poverty? In other words, in what ways has it impacted on the socio-economic life of Nigerians with regards to the poverty question? The task of finding answers to the above question as stated earlier gave the impetus to this study.

A total of 57 Nigerians selected from Awka in Anambra state, FESTAC Town in Lagos state and Owerri in Imo State were interviewed and their opinions and insights together with extant studies on the discourse have provided the basis for the following observations. Primarily there are some persons that see the prosperity message as espoused by Pentecostal preachers as a misnomer. For example, Oge Abodike believes that

The prosperity messages by the Nigerian Pentecostal Churches are not and will never be a safeguard against poverty. The Bible says that Christ became poor that we might be rich- this is for a set time and anything short of it is going for the crown before the cross.⁴¹

Part of the reasons why these people are skeptical about the prospects on the prosperity gospel is the fact that some Pentecostal clergymen manipulate their congregation into contributing money for Church and personal projects and basing their arguments on the fact that “givers never lack”. In this regard, Oge Abodike argues “that the prosperity messages are not adding values to the hearers rather; it is adding values and enriching the pockets of the preachers. This is because you see the big pastors cruising in a private jet, living in big mansions, training their children in the best schools abroad and establishing schools where the average church member cannot afford to send their children /wards”⁴².

Accordingly, critics of the prosperity gospel submit that the prosperity gospel does not improve the lives of the Nigerian poor, rather it helps to pauperize them the more. In the light of the foregoing, Samuelson Inyang notes that “today, some Christian steal from their employers and then come to Church to pay fat tithes and offerings simply because they are taught that the higher the offering and tithe, the higher the blessing...these people eventually get fired from their places of work. Does this help them?”⁴³ Again, those who view the prosperity gospel as not helping the poverty situation in the country reason that, the prosperity gospel retards spirituality or spiritual prosperity which is the essence of Christianity. H. O Alukwe believes that “there is undue emphasis on prosperity and in most cases to the exclusion of spiritual prosperity which is what God is more concerned about...”⁴⁴ These opponents are thus, inclined to believe that the neglect of spirituality even enhances and deepens poverty in Nigeria because, when God is unhappy with a people, he may allow misery and poverty to befall them.

The import of the foregoing notwithstanding, there appears to be a large number of people who testify that prosperity messages serve not only as a safeguard against poverty in Nigeria but also as a bastion of hope for many despairing Nigerians. Adebisi Oladipo for example, avers that prosperity messages have helped people change their mind-set. She submits that people are mostly poor because of poverty of thought and that of mind-set⁴⁵. In her view, if prosperity messages have only helped in changing the people’s poor mind-set, it would have contributed immensely in the fight against poverty in Nigeria. In line with the ongoing, Joseph Shittu submits that “poverty of the mind is the most destructive form of poverty and since prosperity messages help people to think properly and take charge of their lives, it seriously contributes to the fight against poverty”⁴⁶.

Furthermore, several respondents for this present study are inclined to see prosperity messages as helpful in the struggle against poverty in the country. More importantly, R.H Kitaushe and H.C Achunike who appear to have done extensive studies on

Pentecostalism and the prosperity gospel reveal that to a considerable extent, prosperity gospel has more positive than negative values for the toiling Nigerian masses. Specifically, in their illuminating study, *The Future of Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria*, these scholars posit that many Nigerians have had life - changing opportunities by way of the motivational values and contents of the prosperity gospel.

The desire of most under privileged people of the world to get over their predicaments of lack and backwardness lure not a small people to think positively of embracing a gospel that offers them such opportunity. To probably have more of such opportunities of listening to prosperity messages and to search out for other alternative means of livelihood, many African rural dwellers are now trooping to major cities of the world. Although there are other reasons for peoples migration to urban areas, but they may not all be unconnected and far from the desire to get better off...it is said that as people migrate these messages help them brush up against poverty...⁴⁷

Additionally, Okwudiri Okereke noted that prosperity messages affect the Nigerian society positively, especially, its listeners by positively redirecting the mind of an individual. According to him, "if a man's mind is fed with prosperity messages, it gives one a sense of hope, direction and reassurance that the life they live can get better if they can only apply certain principles"⁴⁸. There abound many testimonies amongst those who see the goodness in prosperity messages of how God has through these messages rescued people from poverty. The authenticity of these testimonies and miracles is considered outside the scope of this present study. But suffice it to note that since the 1980's there has been an incremental growth of these Pentecostal Churches who preach the prosperity gospel. One would, therefore, reason that either these messages are working for those who believe in them or there are more than meets the eye in these Churches. In any event, some of the principles espoused by these prosperity preachers are time-tested principles of wealth creation and good living. Thus, they are bound to produce result when carefully applied. Therefore, to a considerable extent, one can submit that prosperity messages serve as a safeguard against poverty in Nigeria only by psychologically goading and propping Nigerians to overlook the kleptomania of their political leaders and thread on the paths of self - help and individual wellbeing.

The above notwithstanding, there appears to be a lot of fake and avaricious preachers of prosperity messages who harp on the poverty situation in Nigeria to extort money from their unwary congregations. The activities of these charlatans, therefore, tend to cast a bad light on the genuine ones and thus, create a lot of bad impression about Pentecostal Churches and their prosperity messages.

Concluding Remarks

This study undertook to examine how far the prosperity gospel as preached by Nigerian Pentecostal clergy men helps the poverty situation in Nigeria. Among other things, it was observed that there is still a sizeable number of Christians who are skeptical about the claims of prosperity preachers. These people do not see the prosperity gospel ever serving as a safeguard against poverty in Nigeria; rather they believe it is a pretext by which bourgeois and avaricious Church owners extort money from their congregation. However, there is also a growing public knowledge that prosperity gospel is not just about money and immunity to witchcraft, curses and other problems. These supporters claim it has helped equip a lot of Nigerians with the right mind-set and goaded them into taking charge of their lives thereby becoming success stories in their own rights. For example, P.L Sinitiere concluded that "millions of believers choose this message (prosperity message) every Sunday because it uses

a Christian framework to remind them that God cares about the details of their lives”⁴⁹. True to its claims, prosperity Pentecostalism which seems to be “explicitly individualistic and implicitly communal or social”⁵⁰ adapts itself to the local indigenous societies of most people and is apparently “growing amidst the poor and the marginalized people of Nigeria, providing communal support in situations of social disintegration, and living as a true “Church of the poor” seeking both spiritual and physical empowerment to free themselves through God’s power from oppression”⁵¹ Moreover, there are copious testimonies of how God supernaturally transformed despairing people into wealthy men. Even though, this claim may not stand up to rigorous scientific tests, it is nonetheless provable that prosperity messages excites and motivates its hearers into doing something about their unpleasant conditions. This alone appears to be no mean feat.

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