



CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF THE 'NEW NORMAL'

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Abstract

Prosperity gospel is the gospel of wealth, health, success, victory over the enemies, protection and longevity of life made possible by faith in God and through the power of positive confessions. It is an aspect of Pentecostalism. It is conceived by an African in Diaspora and propagated on the African soil by Africans. However, prosperity gospel is greeted with much criticisms and dislike due to the misconceptions around the subject. Much of the claims of prosperity preachers are rooted in African cultural beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, there are identifiable problems with the prosperity gospel that can be corrected by the Nigerian church using African Christian Theology. The reality of the Covid-19 pandemic, which ravaged the human communities and brought about the current 'new normal' to the world system, makes a research in prosperity gospel a necessity. The study adopted socio-historical and African-cultural methods of research. Findings revealed that there are challenges in prosperity gospel and proposed virtues in African Christian Theology that affirm its relevance especially in the post-pandemic period. The study concluded that prosperity gospel is not hurting Africa as claimed, but it is an important message to Nigeria and Nigerians that have been ravaged by poverty, suffering, oppression and suppression heightened by the effects of the Corona Virus. The study recommended that African preachers and Christians, rather than being overly critical of prosperity gospel should maximize its numerous benefits for successful living, and employed Biblical principles for prosperity and wealth





Key Words: Prosperity gospel, African culture, Christian Theology, Pentecostalism, 'New Normal'

Introduction

The "prosperity gospel" is often greeted with sharp criticisms and condemnations both within the Christian community and at the academic parlance. Christian scholarship is replete with lots of articles on the subject, most which vehemently condemned this paradigm and insists that is constructed on a faulty foundation that do not truly represent the holistic gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The reason for such criticisms is due to the fact that prosperity gospel is one of the most misunderstood brands of Christianity (Heuser, 2016). The term "prosperity gospel" more often than not is used as a derogatory phrase against the charismatic and Pentecostal preachers who are the main proponents of the prosperity theology for their perceived emphasis on prosperity, especially wealth. Prosperity gospel is sometimes referred to as the "health and wealth gospel (Niemandt, 2017)," "gospel of success (Kent, 2008)," "seed faith gospel" and "capitalist dogma (Thomas, 2012)," "gospel of greed" and "prosperity lite (Kosh, 2009)," "commercialized gospel (Gbote, 2013)." The teaching of prosperity gospel is hinged on individual empowerment and it believes that it is the will of the Christian God for believers in him to have access to wealth, health, victory and success in one's endeavours (Kent, 2008).

While there is an ongoing research on the doctrines of prosperity gospel, prosperity preachers are making success in the belief they held unto which they equally preach to their congregations. It is no gainsaying that while many Pentecostal and charismatic movements, who are propellers of the prosperity gospel came after many years the mainline churches, majority of which are of western origin were established, they have made much impacts both in the secular and sacred institutions. Besides the fact that they are growing so much numerically (Cox, 1993), sometimes at the expense of many orthodox and mainline churches, which had made them to continually plant both mega and smaller local congregations at every nook and cranny of the country and beyond, they are equally making waves in the educational sector.

In 2021, Covenant University founded by the Living Faith Church, Nigeria was rated the second best among all universities in Nigeria, coming after the University of Ibadan, while Landmark University, a university founded by the founder of Covenant University, Bishop David Oyedepo, under the umbrella of World Mission Agency (WMA) was 9th on the cadre. Early in the year 2022, another university founded by a Pentecostal Church, Redeemer's University was rated



second among all university in Nigeria, coming again after the University of Ibadan (Tribune online) and best among private universities in Nigeria. The structural development and quality education made possible by the financial prosperity of these churches made them to be able to achieve such feats. While other institutions founded by some of the mainline churches continued to struggle financially and structural wise, the institutions founded by "prosperity preachers" had continued to excel. This reality is both within and outside of the country.

In the areas of faith healing, divine interventions and holistic success that prosperity gossellers emphasize, these movements have equally made vivid achievements that have proved not to be mirages. The yearly Shiloh programme of the Living Faith Church, all the Holy Ghost services of the Redeemed Christian Church of God and also the prayer meetings of the Mountain of Fire and Revival Ministries have witnessed many attendees coming out to testify of one divine encounter or the other that brought an end to a particular ailment, barrenness, safety from an accident that would have claimed their lives and also miracle-jobs. While there could be caricature of these by other prosperity preachers, David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church, Enoch A. Adeboye, Daniel K. Olukoya and few others have stood the test of time. These successes have authenticated their methodologies and equally given them a voice before their critics (Oyedepo, 2022). While this paper does not subscribe to the criticism that prosperity gospel is constructed on a faulty foundation, it is of the opinion that there are certain practices and conducts by some prosperity preachers and their congregations that needed to be checked and put right. This study, therefore examined some challenges and prospects of prosperity gospel in Nigeria and attempted to reconstruct its grey areas gospel using African Christian Theology.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the African cultural hermeneutics propounded by David Timothy Adamo, which presented the Bible as power (Adamo, 2003). The Bible as power approach is an "existential" and "reflective" approach to the interpretation of the Bible. The Bible as power approach started around 1980's and gradually became established in the 1990's and it much more pronounced today. African Christians, according to Nithburi and Waruta believe that the Bible is powerful and that the power of the Bible is relevant to everyday life of Africans (Nithaburi and Waruta, 1997). The Bible can be used for healing, protection and success in life (Adamo, 2021).



Prosperity Gospel and the Bible

Criticism against prosperity gospel had always been on the line of wrong theological ideology that critics believe that its proponents of such gospel operate. From previous works on the subject reviewed, no writer had out rightly posited that prosperity theology has no Biblical basis. It is the method of Biblical interpretations that prosperity gossellers adopt that are usually being faulted by critics of the doctrine. According to Sarles (1986), the method employed by prosperity gospel preachers to interpret the Bible is subjective and arbitrary and Bible verses are usually quoted out of context. Kantzer (1985) equally faulted prosperity theology and the position of prosperity preachers that material prosperity is inseparably linked to spiritual growth. The scholar went on to say that the term translated "prosperity" is a form of the Greek word *eujodovm*, which is used only four times in the scripture and it does not mean to prosper in the sense of "gaining material possessions", but rather means "to grant a prosperous expedition and expediting journey or "to lead by a direct and easy way (Kantzer, 1985)."

Soboyejo, Gbote and Kgatia (2014), Smith (2021) and other critics of the prosperity gospel believe that the doctrine is constructed on a faulty theology. There are four areas that critics have faulted the prosperity gospel: that it is built upon a faulty understanding of the Abraham's covenant (Copeland, 1973); that it is built upon a faulty understanding of the Atonement (Sarles, 1986); that it is based upon a faulty understanding of the biblical teachings on faith; and it is based on a faulty understanding of the biblical teaching on giving. One text that is believed to have been continuously used by prosperity gossellers to support their doctrine is 2 John 3. The verse is rendered in NKJV that "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things, and be in health, just as your soul prospers." Bruce Baron as cited by Soboyejo (2016) believes that John's intention of writing 2 John 3 was not to teach a doctrine, but it was simply to open his letter with greeting.

While not defending preachers of prosperity gospel of Biblical exegetical and hermeneutical errors, especially the error of eisegesis and quoting out of context, which also happen in other established mainline and orthodox churches, it is the position of this paper that there is a biblical basis for prosperity theology; prosperity gospel is well rooted in the scriptures. Both testaments are replete with passages that clearly show that God wants his children to be wealthy, healthy and succeed in all endeavours. The words "prosper", "prosperity", "prosperous", which all have the idea of God's intention for his children to live blessed lives are spread all over the scripture and in virtually everywhere the rendering of the word "prosperity" is used,



there is an expectation from man to commit himself or his possession to God as a proof of his trust in him.

It is true that the entire Bible is written to a particular audience in certain geographical and situational contexts; the 21st century readers of the Bible are not the original recipients of the message. But it has been established that the beauty of hermeneutics is applying it in the contexts of its users. This is where African cultural hermeneutical approaches are more meaningful than other Eurocentric methods (Adamo, 2021). How could an exegete interpret 2 John 3 and other passages of the Bible that have both immediate and futuristic relevance without contextualizing them? Prosperity preachers, therefore, have not committed errors in saying God's will is for his children to prosper. Besides, "a claim to the absolute truth of the Bible and its interpretation is doubtful (Adamo, 2008). The prosperity of his children had been clearly stated right from Genesis 1:28, sin had been a major hindrance to this. And in fairness to prosperity preachers, the issue of sin and immorality are not usually glossed over.

The lexical form of the word translated prosperity in Greek is *evimeria*, which means "welfare", "well-being," and "prosperousness" (wordhipo.com). It is the condition of being successful or thriving and this is not in any way at variance with the holistic message of the Bible. God wants his children to prosper. However, God's sovereignty has to be recognized in this regard. This, perhaps, is what prosperity preachers are yet to give attention to, and which is needed to give a balance to their doctrine.

The African origin of prosperity gospel

Although the western origin of prosperity gospel and theology cannot be contested, it is a clear indication that the doctrine itself is not foreign to Africa. While its source is traceable to Europe, prosperity gospel found meaning in African Christianity that saw it as something authentic to its belief system and practice. Thus, the doctrine was embraced and had gained much ground in the African continent with African Pentecostal and charismatic movements as well as African Independent Churches as its major practitioners. Omavuebe believes that prosperity gospel is a mixed theology. There have been two distinct views regarding the origin of the prosperity theology. The first school of thought sees the prosperity gospel as an American ideology imported into Nigeria, while the second ideology is of the opinion that it is holistically an African ideology which has been developed and made popular on the African soil. Omavuebe (2021), however, makes an attempt to fill the gap when he opines that prosperity gospel is a joint ideology. According to him "Nigerian prosperity gospel is a joint theology with elements of the American

prosperity gospel ideology, which has its origins in the American New Thought movement, and the Nigerian Pentecostal revivalism, which has its origins in the Nigerian indigenous Pentecostal movements (Omavuebe, 2021)"

However, Adamo had a different view. He rightly explains that prosperity gospel is a product of Pentecostalism and Pentecostalism itself was founded by Seymour, an African American preacher, who was a son of a black African slave that was captured before the slave trade was abolished (Adamo, 2021). Oliver (1999) equally opines that the growth of Pentecostalism and prosperity gospel is traceable to its African roots. Without Seymour, Pentecostalism and prosperity gospel would have remained a local movement (Fatokun, 2007). According to Adamo (2021), the black culture was not in any way lost in the lives and belief system of the slaves even when their languages, families' genealogies, and their ethnic belongings were destroyed. The prosperity gospel simply reflected the culture around it (Bowler, 2013), which is the African culture and as a result, one cannot divorce prosperity gospel from the traditional African culture.

As earlier examined, Adamo (2003) proposed the "Bible as power approach" as one of the African cultural hermeneutical approaches to the study of the Bible in Africa. He opines that the Bible can be used in everyday life of an African Christian for healing, protection and success. Interestingly, these are the major elements on which the prosperity gospel is hinged. So it suffices to say that what Adamo (2013) had proposed as a hermeneutical methodology to the interpretation and understanding of the Bible in Africa is simply "prosperity gospel". Many African Indigenous Churches (AICs) and *Aladura* churches make extensive use of psalms for therapeutic purposes, which have produced good successes. For instance, the only medicine known to Mrs. Maria Ajibola who was interviewed at the course of this study throughout the period she spent with her grandma, an *Aladura* church member, was reading a particular psalm into water and drinking same. This made her so vast in the psalter, which also influenced her prayer life; a Christian virtue she was able to pass unto her children. Also many AICs and *Aladura* churches also operate Maternity Clinics where intensive prayers are used as part of the "delivery process".

While this paper is not advocating this practice at the expense of the established medical institutions in the Nation, it emphasizes the immense contributions of maternity clinics that employ the use of the Bible and prayer mainly for treatment of patients to wellbeing of many Nigerians, especially the impoverished who patronize them. All these are propelled by the belief in the Bible as power for healing, wealth, protection and overall success – the very fundamental beliefs of



prosperity theology. It is true that some patients die while being treated in such clinics just the same way people die at established medical institutions as well. With the aforementioned realities, this paper disagrees with Soboyejo (2016) who is of the opinion that prosperity gospel is hurting Africa. Prosperity gospel is a response to the impoverished condition of the African nation (Soboyejo, 2016) and it has truly contributed to the religious, social and economic growth and development in Africa.

Reading the Bible with the ordinary readers is an approach to Biblical studies that Ukpong (2002) and West and Dube (2000) developed. The duo in their different works advocated that Biblical studies should be done with ordinary people in the community. By ordinary people they mean, the poor, the oppressed, the underprivileged and the untrained in the art of Bible interpretation. The best way to make the Bible meaningful to these categories of people is to communicate with them in their context – assuring them of hope they have in God through the Word of God. The Covid-19 pandemic was a great challenge to this method which is being used in many quarters, but with the use of technology, the challenge is being removed even in the new normal.

Africans' belief about wealth, healing, success and positive confessions

The spirit world is an established institution in Africa. Africans believe in the spiritual cause of everything. Africa Traditional Religion is perceived by its adherents to ensure fertility, abundance, longevity, wealth and success and all these are perceived as supernatural blessings (Chilongani, 2007). Long before the importation of the Christian to the African continent, Africans knew God and refer to him using different names in local dialect. God as Supreme Being in Africa is worshipped and related with through divinities and spirits. Africans venerate these divinities and spirits for power, prosperity, good health, money and attaining good success (Awolalu, 1979). Orunmila, for instance is venerated for riches, good health, power and blessings, Osun is venerated for fertility (Badejo, 1996), Ogun for protection, *et cetera*.

Looking at African religion, tradition and culture closely it would be seen that they teach divine prosperity in all dimensions. These traditional beliefs by Africans in their divinities are in a way Christianized as Africans who now believe in the God of the Bible and now see him as the source of blessing made available for man (Hock, 1995) It is the belief in African Traditional view that prosperity preachers reformed into prosperity gospel. Idahosa, a foremost Pentecostal and prosperity preacher had his theology in firm belief in



the African healing cults and an indigenous Christian tradition, which owned its content to West African religious belief (Olusuyi, 2017).

Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church (a.k.a. Winners Chapel) is another highly successful African prosperity gospel preacher. His convictions are that believers in Christ can enjoy Abrahamic blessings through the covenant God made with Abraham and also enjoy heavenly blessings and provisions as well as immunity from lack and wants (Oyedepo, 2006). He claimed that God gave him a mandate to liberate Africa from the stronghold of poverty by what he called "The Mandate" and that anyone who is saved and belongs to "the Commission" has connected himself or herself into the covenant of riches and victory. It is the opinion of Oyedepo that salvation is a means to wealth and deliverance from economic poverty and uses 2 Corinthians 8:9 as a basis for his message.

While Idahosa and Oyedepo toll the line of financial breakthroughs and success, Olukoya of Mountain of Fire and Miracles ministry took the part of deliverance through prayers. The Mountain of Fire and Miracle ministry has its roots in Christ Apostolic Church and African Indigenous Church in Nigeria founded by Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola. Olukoya, the founder of MFM acknowledged the deficiencies of the mission churches as he said that the European missionaries were not acquainted with the spiritual terrain of the Nigerian environment (Awoleye, 2020). It is no gainsaying that Olukoya's spirituality is highly influenced by African Traditional Religion that believes in the spiritual cause of everything that happens to Africans. Like other Pentecostals and prosperity preachers before him, Olukoya was not spared of the wrath of the pen of critical scholars. However, ironically, it has been seen that some of those that criticize him and his African-inspired methodology, especially among members of the mainline churches do not only patronize him, but considers his church as the first point to be visited anytime they believe an individual is being plagued by demonic oppression. Some ministers in the orthodox and mainline churches even recommend Olukoya's church to their members for spiritual deliverance.

In addition, spoken words are very important and powerful in African culture. Among the Yorubas; spoken words have mysterious elements. Adamo (2021) makes it clear that spoken words are powerful forces; they have spirit behind them in African worldview. This explains why a Yoruba man or woman would say *owo po l'owo mi*, that is "I have so much on me" (I am rich) to mean he or she is broke or *o re ota mi* that is "my enemy is tired" to mean he is tired. So to a typical Yoruba man, the admonition of Paul that "let the weak say I am strong" is understood in the light of positive confession. All these play important roles in prosperity gospel which origin is African.

Kwateng-Yeboah (2017) believes that "most of the Nigerian and Ghanaian preachers of prosperity gospel incorporate African worldview into their preaching of prosperity gospel because African religion and tradition are meant to ensure that the adherents have the blessing of fertility, abundance, and longevity, wealth and success, which are considered as signs of supernatural blessings from God through divinities." Adamo (2021) equally posits that it is important to note that Africans who were uprooted from their ancestral land grew up in the aforementioned African traditional beliefs and religious practices believe in mysterious ways of obtaining riches, power, protection, total good health and success. This is so because these beliefs have been established in their minds and it is difficult for what they grew up with to be completely taken away from them. This explains why after so many years from their ancestral land, there was a resurgence of these beliefs and practices in them. Though languages, family bonds, names and other things were destroyed in the lives of the African Diaspora, but the elements of Africa religious and cultural background and heritage never disappear from them, the very reason a black man was the founder of Pentecostalism and by implication, prosperity gospel in 1906 in America (Oliver, 1999).

Prosperity Gospel and the post-pandemic era

There seemed to be no time the gospel of wealth, health, longevity of life, positive confession and success was at its peak in Nigeria than the period of the covid-19 outbreak (Abodunrin and Ajibola, 2022). Since prosperity gospel is a product of Pentecostalism, many Pentecostal pastors expressed their faith and convictions in God who can keep them safe throughout the pandemic and they equally taught their congregations the same. David Ibiyome who is the founder and General Overseer of salvation Ministries mocked the pandemic and referred to it as a scam (Nseyen, 2020). He was of the opinion that there was not covid-19 in Nigeria, and if there was, the figures being regularly released by the Nigeria centre for Disease control was fake. He posited that the Nigeria Government merely used the pandemic to embezzle funds. Probably one of the reasons for his assertions, which attracted much criticism from Nigerians, was to allay the fear of the pandemic from his members and Nigerians generally. He wanted his audience to activate their faith and make positive confessions despite the pandemic.

Similarly, during Shiloh 2020, David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church clearly made it known they people are victims of what they feared (Agbonkhese, 2020). Though Oyedepo did not doubt the reality of the pandemic, he was optimistic that he could never be a victim and he equally charged his congregations to believe in the same protective power of God. He went further to say that despite the pandemic his

church planted 10,000 churches without raising an offering (Ajayi, 2022).

Despite the exaggerations and unguided statements made by many Pentecostal ministers during the outbreak of Covid-19, Pentecostalism through its emphasis on prosperity gospel was able to stir up the faith of many citizens of Nigeria to believe and be convinced that they can live healthy and safe throughout the pandemic and also that through the use of the Bible and prayers, the plague can be stamped out from Nigeria. While it cannot be scientifically proved that the prayers of Christians played a vital role in helping the nation to overcome the pandemic as the sitting government at that time equally praised themselves for being proactive and strategies employed for becoming victorious over the pandemic, it is clear that the predictions that Africa would be worst hit by the pandemic never came to be and for Christians, the efficacy of prayers and the effective use of the Word of God in overcoming the destructive plague and eventual healing of the land afterwards cannot be doubted. Even after the virus appeared to be completely defeated in Nigeria, and the New Normal is ushered in, it suffices to say that there is more belief in the power of prayers, Bible, and faith sayings by Christians to live victoriously in life.

Challenges of prosperity gospel

Scholars have identified lots of faults in the prosperity gospel. However, all the faults mentioned are not peculiar to prosperity gospel and prosperity preachers; they are what the Christian community regardless of location face. Kruger (1995), for instance, is of the opinion that all streams of Christianity are confronted with the temptation of commercializing the Christian Faith. And to achieve their selfish interests, preachers of the gospel could exaggerate or embark on unbiblical methodologies to have their way, which does not represent the gospel of Christ. So every Christian denomination has the responsibility of examining and reexamining their doctrinal positions and practices.

However, the height of extortion among some prosperity preachers is worrisome. While this cannot be generalized, there are many who engage in it for their selfish gains. Challenged by the successes and opulence of established prosperity preachers and not wanting to go through the pains and discipline it demands, a good number of prosperity preachers desire to make it at all cost or live large at the expense of their members. Oral Roberts, Copeland, Hagin, Oyedepo, Odukoya had all paid the price and they have written their names in gold. So prosperity preachers who desire to have a record of such height of ministry without readiness to pay the price would surely



misbehave; they will go into unbiblical practices of doing ministry and achieving success. There are evidences of this today, which is much more pronounced among contemporary prosperity preachers.

Another challenge of prosperity gospel is the freedom Pentecostalism generally and prosperity preachers have in being founders and presidents of their local assemblies or denominations, which is not so in the missionary-founded churches. This makes Episcopal system of church government to be commonest among prosperity gossellers unlike Presbyterian and congregational systems missionary-founded churches run. As a result, there is high level of lack of accountability among many prosperity preachers. Since many see themselves as the "alpha and omega" of their churches, which they started themselves, they speak "ex-cathedral" and not ready to subject themselves under any accountability partners that can check their excesses.

There is also the challenge of starting churches without being licensed. Although this is a problem with religion generally. It is an institution that is not licensed; anyone can claim he had received a revelation from God to begin a ministry and soon, a church is planted. This, however, is more common among Pentecostals and prosperity preacher, which has led to lots of abuses in Christianity. Perhaps, it's a reason some Christian folks detest anything that has to do with Pentecostalism and prosperity gospel. However, the wheat cannot be thrown away with the chaff; the right thing to do is to address the matter that is of concern at any given point. This reality has made it possible to have many who lack pastoral or theological training to be ordained as pastors and to even begin ministry. Though some of them have university training in order discipline, but they have no training for the task of pastoral ministry. This is the reason Adegbite (2022) referred to them as educated illiterates. It is very hard to be a pastor or preacher in any orthodox or mainline church without at least a diploma in theology or religious education. None of these are needed to start a Pentecostal church.

The greatest of all challenges seen in prosperity gospel is the unwillingness to understand the place of God's sovereignty, which is a key doctrine in the Christian Faith and even in African Traditional Religion. God is sovereign; he does what he likes at any given time and at no point is his authority or sovereign will unjust. It appears Pentecostal prosperity does not recognize this part of biblical doctrine or unwilling to accept it as true, which has made some of them to make comments like "it is a sin to be poor". It is true that God can heal, gives health, protection and success, but that is dependent on his absolute will – that is, if he wishes to. If he chooses to go the other way, it's still for his own glory; not necessarily because the subject is unloved or committed an unforgivable trespass. Prosperity preachers

believe that all good things of life are embedded in the salvation package and it is the will of God to heal, prosper, protect and give success to all those who believe in him. But systematic theology of the Bible has proven this wrong. There are situations where the righteous suffer and worshippers of God still go through hard times, yet it is the will of God for them to experience this at that given time – this is the experience that led to the theological subject of theodicy in theology. Yahweh is a sovereign God and prosperity preachers need to get this.

Reconstructing prosperity gospel in African Christian Theology

There is need to reconstruct the prosperity gospel after identifying some challenges in its doctrine and practices. Being an offshoot of African traditional belief, the challenges prosperity gospel and preachers are confronted with can also be handled by African Christian Theology that is born out of virtues that Africans hold tenaciously unto. There are virtues in African Christian Theology that could be used to reconstruct prosperity gospel. Two of the virtues are: the concept of *Iwa* and Sovereignty of God in African perspectives. A clear understanding of these would do much in balancing the prosperity gospel to present day reality in African Christian Theology and would also help prosperity preachers to be more realistic in the doctrinal emphasis of their message.

Iwa means character among the Yoruba of Nigeria. But much more than character, it refers to the essential nature of an individual, a summation of what makes up a person (Asante and Mazama, 2000). Among the Yoruba, good character means *iwa rere*, which could also mean good nature and a person with good character, will allow this virtue to permeate every aspect of her secular and religious life. People with such virtue are regarded as *omoluwabi*; they are gentle, accountable, shows respect to elders, works well in a team and are equally respected by the community. With the independent nature of prosperity preachers in their system of operations, conducting themselves with *iwa rere* would be great. With this virtue, all the identified shortcomings with prosperity gospel and preacher in this paper and other concerns raise by scholars would be eradicated.

This paper agrees with Fayemi and Ogunkoya (2013) who against the renderings of "iwa lésin" by different scholars conclude that "iwa l'esin" means "good character is the basis of religion." Regardless of one denominational affiliation, it is necessary to conduct oneself in a good way. With the display of *iwa rere* by prosperity preachers and by extension all ministers of the gospel of Christ, our messages would be accepted by and find a bearing in the lives of our parishioners and the entire populace.

Another doctrine prosperity preachers need in balancing their doctrine is the theological concept of the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign. His sovereignty indicates his absolute authority and power over all creation for the purpose of accomplishing his divine will (Buys, 2000). The essence of God's sovereignty is found in the fact that God is absolutely independent to do what he feels like and that which pleases him; he has absolute control over the actions of his creation. God has highest power and he is not under anyone's influence or control. This concept is well stated in African culture where sovereign rulers are considered to have overriding authority over a matter (Boaheng, 2019). This is what gave rise to the Yoruba phrase *t'oba lase*, which means "it is the king that has the final say." In African Christian Theology, this idea is applied to God as a sovereign ruler who is superior to all others in authority, power or status. Prosperity preachers need to understand this concept in bringing a balance to their doctrine. It is not about what a man does in most cases that brings him healing, wealth, success and all round protection. The place of God in all these is sacrosanct. No one can move the hands of God, even when he is venerated or worshipped it are still in his own volition that he acts.

Conclusion

Prosperity gospel is a cultural heritage of the black culture. It was conceived by an African and spread by Africans. The gospel of prosperity is well rooted in the scripture; there are scriptural basis for all its claims. As an African cultural heritage, the doctrine of prosperity gospel is connected with African understanding of deity and the world of divinities, spirits, and ancestors. Practitioners of African traditional religion worship different gods for different purposes, but ultimately to get the blessings these deities have powers to give to their subjects – such as wealth, healing, success, protection, long life, fruit of the womb and many others. This explains the claims of prosperity preachers that God is able to give everything good to his children.

However, there are certain misconceptions among prosperity preachers that are reflected in the way they carry out they propagate their gospel. While the temptation to commercialize religion and extort congregants is not peculiar with Pentecostal preachers, some of them have become greedy probably because of the material successes they are seen manifest in the lives and ministries of certain established prosperity preachers. Besides, some prosperity preachers take exaggeration to a greater dimension and claim they can move the hands of God and cause God to do what he would ordinary not do. These are at variance with the African understanding of God. However, African Christian Theology of *Iwa rere* and Sovereignty of

God can help reconstruct the prosperity gospel. In contrast to Soboyebo's assertion, prosperity gospel is not hurting Africa. It is relevant to the African society. Jesus preached the message of goodnews, freedom and liberation to the impoverished and marginalized – and what a continent like Africa, which have been ravaged by pestilences, poverty, oppression and suppression and bad governance needs in a time like this is a message of hope in the saving grace of Christ and this is the main thrust of prosperity gospel.

Recommendations

- i. African Christian scholars and preachers, rather than being overly critical of prosperity gospel should embrace it for a successful living in contemporary times.
- ii. African should continue to embrace its rich cultural values in the society and live by them as they relate with one another.
- iii. Africans should not be quick to join European scholars in condemning concepts that are of African origin.
- iv. Nigerian Christian should accept and maximize prosperity gospel regardless of their denominational affiliations in the New Normal
- v. Guiding principles should be put in place for good practice of religion and its activities in Nigeria in order to curb religious excesses and make every denominational leader accountable.

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