

Research Paper

**Essay on the Popularity of the Pentecostal or Prosperity Gospel in Africa and the Misinterpretation of the Scriptures by Prosperity Gospel Preachers (Local and American) in Africa**

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In this paper, I will explore the Prosperity Gospel Preachers' radical and often incomplete interpretation of the scriptures related to the concept of prosperity within an African context. Prosperity gospel advocates argue that prosperity stems from giving to God and following him here on earth. I will be basing my primary discussion on the Gospel of Mark (Mark 10:29-31). The hallmark teachings of the prosperity gospel include the ideas that God does not want Christians to be poor and that if you give financially or materially to the Church and if you follow God faithfully here on earth, you will be blessed financially. The prosperity gospel is a feel-good kind of gospel that has caused millions of African people, rich and poor, to flock to the churches of these preachers in the hopes of gaining more financial wealth and blessings. I will also try to reveal the true economic interpretations of scriptures like Mark 10:29-31 and I will analyze how we can apply their true economic interpretations in today's society.

The passage I will be focusing on for this paper comes from Mark 10:29-30. It reads:

Truly I tell you, Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--along with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).<sup>1</sup>

Mark wrote his gospel in Italy after his fellow brothers in Christ, Peter and Paul, died.

His text was later adopted by Matthew and Luke who revised and expanded it.<sup>2</sup>

Persecution is a prominent theme throughout Mark's entire Gospel, and on several occasions in the Gospel, Jesus issued words of warning over how his disciples would

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Huisjen, ed., *The Holy Bible (NIV)* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Sacra Pagina Commentary 2; Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2002) 41-42.

suffer various persecutions.<sup>3</sup> Donahue and Harrington suggest that Mark wrote the gospel in response to the needs of a Christian community that was suffering persecution—particularly those in Rome around the time of 70 C.E.<sup>4</sup> Historical records provide evidence that “the Christian community at Rome faced persecutions, brutal executions, and intrafamilial betrayals some time after the great fire of 64 C.E. under Nero.”<sup>5</sup> The commentary explains that the themes in the Gospel of Mark like those of persecution, betrayal, and divisions amongst Jesus’ followers “would have been especially meaningful to an early Christian community that had suffered for the name of Jesus and was expecting even more suffering.”<sup>6</sup> Mark’s Gospel was meant to encourage and challenge his readers to reflect on their own lives in light of the story of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> The Gospel of Mark narrates the story of Jesus and “weaves together diverse traditions to create a unified story of (the) saving significance of the public life, death, and raising up of Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>8</sup>

Mark 10:17- 31 deals with the themes of riches, poverty and the rewards of discipleship.<sup>9</sup> Mark 10:17-31 “is the longest sustained treatment of any ethical issue in the Gospel and it reflects Jesus’ ethic of radical discipleship.”<sup>10</sup> These verses can be split into three separate parts. The first part, Mark 10:17-22, tells a narrative about a good and pious man who feels compelled to refuse Jesus’ invitation for him to become a disciple

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<sup>3</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 42.

<sup>5</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 43.

<sup>6</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 306.

because he cannot agree to the conditions Jesus set for his followers.<sup>11</sup> When Jesus first encounters the rich young man, the young man wants to know how he can inherit eternal life and God's kingdom. Jesus tells the young man to give away his possessions, to which the young man refuses to comply. At that time, "being a benefactor won (an individual) gratitude from beneficiaries and a good reputation in society at large."<sup>12</sup> Jesus, by asking the young man to divest himself of all his goods at once, was also asking him to deprive himself of the role of a benefactor.<sup>13</sup> In fact, all of Jesus' disciples were required to leave their former lives behind in order to follow Him; being a Christian meant sacrificing worldly things that were of importance to individuals. After seeing the young man's reaction to his advice, Jesus remarks on how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, he compares the process to a camel passing through the eye of a needle.<sup>14</sup> Jesus explains that, the obstacle posed by riches is that the thought and energy given to accumulating and preserving one's riches can easily distract one from making the things of God's kingdom a priority.<sup>15</sup> The second part, in Mark 10:23-27, is a private instruction session that just involves Jesus and the disciples.<sup>16</sup> At this point in scripture, Jesus reminds them once again how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.<sup>17</sup> The third part, Mark 10:28-31, contains Jesus' assurance to his disciples that, in return for putting aside worldly goods and following Jesus, "they will be rewarded more than amply (a hundredfold) not only with eternal life in God's kingdom but also in the present

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<sup>11</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 306-307.

<sup>12</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 303.

<sup>13</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 303.

<sup>14</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 302.

<sup>15</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 306-307.

<sup>16</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 307.

<sup>17</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 307.

time.”<sup>18</sup> This promise of immediate rewards is unusual because usually the delay of rewards here on earth is a common theme that can be seen throughout the scriptures contained in the Holy Bible. The Books of Ecclesiastes and Job contain the lesson that people do not necessarily receive their just-deserts here on earth.<sup>19</sup>

The new economic situation I will be exploring in this essay is the Pentecostal movement also known as the prosperity gospel movement. I will be exploring the use and interpretation of scriptures in Pentecostal Churches in African countries like Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The prosperity gospel originates in the North America.<sup>20</sup> According to John F. McCauley, Pentecostalism began “its spread in the late 1970s, as new churches and leaders distinguished themselves from the classic, mission-based Pentecostal churches.”<sup>21</sup> In Nigeria and Ghana, neo-Pentecostal churches proclaim the message of the divine power of deliverance from disease and demonic affliction in a style similar to American Adventist and Pentecostal preaching (Ghana ppr, 19).<sup>22</sup> According to Kate Bowler in her work, *History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, critics of the prosperity gospel argue that the American prosperity gospel is a “simple example of materialism and greed.”<sup>23</sup> According to Bowler, for believers in the prosperity movement, “faith causes blessings to happen and some blessings—wealth and health, for

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<sup>18</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 307-308.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel L. Adams, *Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014) 189-196.

<sup>20</sup> Scott Schieman and Jong Hyun Jung, “‘Practical Divine Influence’: Socioeconomic Status and Belief in the Prosperity Gospel,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51:4 (2012) 738.

<sup>21</sup> John F. McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule? Pentecostalism and Patronage in Ghana,” *African Affairs* 112:446 (2012) 2.

<sup>22</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?,” 19.

<sup>23</sup> Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 798.

example—can occur in this world, while salvation will follow in the next.”<sup>24</sup>

Pentecostalism is also characterized by an emphasis on the vital role of the Holy Spirit in a Christian’s life.<sup>25</sup>

African countries, despite boasting a wealth of natural resources “typically fall toward the bottom of any list measuring small size economic activity, such as income per capita or GDP per capita.”<sup>26</sup> African countries exemplify symptoms of the natural resource curse in that the revenues from natural resources are often misused by corrupt government officials and such behavior does not promote growth and development. Despite all this, African economies of today are certainly more advanced than the agrarian economies in which the early Christians worked. As early Christianity took root, many people lived at subsistence levels. “The problem around which peasant life revolved was raising enough to sustain the family until the next harvest.”<sup>27</sup> Despite the stark differences between African economies today and the economies in antiquity, one can still draw a correlation between the scarcity of resources during the time of Jesus, and the scarcity of resources that select populations within the African context face today. Countries in the horn of Africa like Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia are often at risk of food and resource crises due to prevailing droughts.<sup>28</sup> According to UNICEF, due to “seven consecutive poor harvests coupled with chronic insecurity (in Somalia), food

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<sup>24</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 798.

<sup>25</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?,” 2.

<sup>26</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in African Contexts of Poverty: An Appraisal,” *Exchange* 40 (2011) 343.

<sup>27</sup> Richard A. Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009) 35.

<sup>28</sup> UNICEF, “Drought Disasters,” *UNICEF* (n.d.), online, <http://www.unicef.org/drought/drought-countries.htm>, accessed 10 June 2015.

stability is deteriorating, affecting as many as one million people.<sup>29</sup> Africa is considered to be home to some of the poorest individuals on earth with many people living on less than a dollar a day. In African nations there are usually two extremes existing side by side, with the extremely rich on one end and the extremely poor on the other. The causes of this poverty in Africa can differ from one country or region to the other. Some common causes of poverty on the continent that he cites include “droughts, bad governance, laziness, corruption, ethnic conflicts and civil war.”<sup>30</sup> Other people have argued that colonialism is the key cause of poverty on the continent.<sup>31</sup> Togarasei argues that, in these contexts of pronounced poverty, “Pentecostalism has found fertile ground in African communities.”<sup>32</sup> While the prosperity gospel has its origins in America, African Pentecostalism has seen recent growth and enormous vitality in African countries and it has found its appropriation in electronic media, particularly in the form of television broadcasting.<sup>33</sup> Joel and Victoria Osteen are popular Pentecostal preachers and their message of unconditional love and unending hope is broadcast out to millions of people across the United States and around the world. The Osteens’ broadcasts “can be seen in over 100 countries and on major network and cable affiliates across America.” According to the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), a Christian broadcasting network that broadcasts the messages of many other charismatic preachers like Joyce Meyers and Billy Graham, “Joel is a leading voice for a new generation of ministry leaders that believe

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<sup>29</sup> UNICEF, “Drought Disasters.”

<sup>30</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 336.

<sup>31</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 336.

<sup>32</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 336.

<sup>33</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Anointing through the Screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana,” *Studies in World Christianity* 11:1 (2005) 9.

with God all things are possible.”<sup>34</sup> To date, Joel Osteen’s recent New York Times Bestseller book entitled, *Your Best Life Now*, has sold over 6 million copies worldwide in seventeen languages.<sup>35</sup> In addition to these accomplishments, Joel and Victoria Osteen serve as co-pastors at the Lakewood Church located in Houston, Texas.<sup>36</sup> Their church is cited as the “the largest and fastest growing church in America with an average weekly attendance that has grown to over 40,000 people.”<sup>37</sup> Evidently, the prosperity gospel is no longer limited by whether someone can physically be in a church or not. TV evangelism has transformed how people hear the word of God.

According to Paul Clifford, while most churches in Africa are experiencing explosive growth, it is the neo-pentecostal churches that have been “growing most spectacularly.”<sup>38</sup> Togarasei also confirms that Pentecostalism is the fastest growing form of Christianity in Africa.<sup>39</sup> Pentecostal preachers enjoy massive followings in Africa because the message of Pentecostalism is easy to adapt to specific cultures and it also takes on oral theological forms that can easily be spread amongst various people groups. According to Togarasei, the message of prosperity is usually “delivered with eloquence and flair by enormously gifted and articulate preachers, often supported by superb soloists and choirs.”<sup>40</sup> The emphasis on prosperity in such African churches can be seen in church names like, “Victory Bible church” and “Jesus Breakthrough Assembly.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Trinity Broadcasting Network, “Joel Osteen: Joel Osteen Ministries,” *TBN* (n.d.), online, <http://www.tbn.org/watch-us/our-programs/joel-osteen-ministries>, accessed 10 June 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Trinity Broadcasting Network, “Joel Osteen.”

<sup>36</sup> Trinity Broadcasting Network, “Joel Osteen.”

<sup>37</sup> Trinity Broadcasting Network, “Joel Osteen.”

<sup>38</sup> Paul Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa: Expecting Miracles,” *Christian Century* 124:14 (2007) 20.

<sup>39</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 337.

<sup>40</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 337.

<sup>41</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 20.



Most Pentecostal churches strive to grow their congregations on a large scale and for such churches “size and expansion are tangible signs of success”<sup>42</sup> The Winners Chapel is a Pentecostal church which was founded in Lagos by one Pastor, David Oyedepo in 1983.<sup>43</sup> Winners Church has grown to boast over four hundred branches in Nigeria and it can now be found in forty different African countries.<sup>44</sup> One of its facilities located in Lagos seats 50,400 people, and is considered to be the biggest church auditorium in East and Central Africa.<sup>45</sup>

There is also a large emphasis on giving in these churches. Giving itself is not a bad thing; in fact it is encouraged in Christian circles. However, the motivation Pentecostals teach, that of giving in order to get, distorts the biblical tradition of giving. Gifford explains that the prosperity gospel is “invariably linked with ideas of seed faith or with the biblical image of sowing and reaping”<sup>46</sup> and that within Pentecostalism, tithes and offerings have become tools of prosperity.”<sup>47</sup> In Zimbabwe, the Celebration Center Church used to practice graded tithing, where people stood in different lines at offering time depending on how much they were giving to the church. Generally, in Pentecostal churches, those who give more to the church are perceived to be more faithful Christians.

In his paper, Gifford quotes one pastor, Wilfred Lai of Mombasa, who believes that “the words of the Bible have a declarative use where a prophet declares the promises given in the Bible to be fulfilled in your life.”<sup>48</sup> He also teaches that Christians “ have the blessings of Abraham, the power of Joseph, the authority of Moses, the sovereignty of

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<sup>42</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 20.

<sup>43</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 21.

<sup>44</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 21.

<sup>45</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 21.

<sup>46</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 21.

<sup>47</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 20.

<sup>48</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 20.

David, the exploits of Elijah, and increasingly the revival and restoration of Israel itself.”<sup>49</sup> In her book entitled, *God’s Will Is Prosperity*, Gloria Copeland, a popular Pentecostal preacher, explains that the idea in Mark 10:29-30 is that Christians “give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000”<sup>50</sup> (they receive a hundredfold). In such a context, Mark 10:29-30 seems like a very good deal for Christians; give and get a hundred fold in return, but of course that is not what this verse is promising. According to Donahue and Harrington, the reward indicated in Mark 10:30 is mostly fellowship with hundreds and thousands of other believers who will come to follow Christ, although the part about gaining houses suggests that Christians may also gain some material wealth in the form of shared houses and goods (inherited through wealthy individuals who become followers of Christ).<sup>51</sup> Acts of the Apostles tells us that early Christians had everything in common, and so whatever wealthy Christians brought to the apostles became the material wealth that the whole Christian community owned (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). After promising the gifts of family and material goods, Mark 10:30 also promises Christians that they will inherit persecution. It is interesting to note that Copeland does not address this part of Mark 10:30 in her book. In so doing she exhibits behavior common to prosperity gospel preachers who are notorious within Christian circles for their use of specific portions of scripture that promote the prosperity gospel. To include this part of the scripture in her text would hint that the Christian life will not always be filled with blessings and this would weaken the prosperity gospel argument that God would never

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<sup>49</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 20.

<sup>50</sup> Corrie Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses Prosperity Gospel Preachers Need to Stop Misusing,” *Faith Street* (9 May 2014), online, <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2014/05/09/ten-verses-prosperity-gospel-preachers-need-stop-misusing/32019>, accessed 10 June 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 306-309.

allow good Christians to suffer.<sup>52</sup> The following verse, Mark 10:31, provides further clarity about the nature of Mark 10, the verse states that: “But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:31). This verse encourages ordinary, obedient discipleship and it evokes a spirit of servitude and not personal gain.<sup>53</sup>

Other scriptures often misinterpreted by prosperity preachers include scriptures like Malachi 3:10 which reads, “bring the whole tithe into the storehouse . . . and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Malachi 3:10). This popular verse is used as a fundraising tool by prosperity preachers. Prosperity gospel preachers use it to manipulate believers into tithing more by preaching the message that “God will return the favor exponentially.”<sup>54</sup> D.A Horton explains that this verse has “nothing to do with individual riches; rather, it arises from a particular historical situation for Israel (when) the Israelites were robbing God by not giving enough food to the national storehouse that was used to feed the priests of Israel.”<sup>55</sup> In turn, the priests had to leave their priestly duties and take up farming in order to survive (Nehemiah 13:10-13).<sup>56</sup> In this verse, God was therefore challenging the Israelites “to test him by giving obediently.”<sup>57</sup> The promise was that “if they did, he would reward them as he did in the past.”<sup>58</sup> Another popular scripture is Isaiah 53:5 which states that “The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). This scripture is referring to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Many Christian scholars view this scripture as a prophecy “that spiritual

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<sup>52</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>53</sup> Donahue and Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, 306-307.

<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>55</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>58</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

wounds (sin) are healed (overcome) by the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.”<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, prosperity gospel preachers use it to teach that having faith in God will result in physical healing.<sup>60</sup> Kenneth E. Hagin, one of the founders of the prosperity gospel, writes that “it is the plan of Our Father God, in His great love and in His great mercy, that no believer should ever be sick; that every believer should live his full life span down here on this earth.”<sup>61</sup>

Finally, John 10:10 states that “the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). This scripture is often used to justify the argument that Christians will never have to suffer things like poverty, loss and hardships here on earth because Jesus came to give them prosperous lives.<sup>62</sup> Another good example is found in a statement shared by nearly all prosperity gospel preachers, particularly one Tanzanian preacher, Christopher Mwakasege Hasu, who was once quoted saying, “God created man (sic) as his own image; God is not poor and therefore he did not create man as the image of the poor.”<sup>63</sup> He then goes on to ask “do you think God put these things, food, clothing and soap in the world for Satan and his people? Do you think that once we are in heaven we still need food, clothing and soap? God gave these things for us to use now.”<sup>64</sup> It is evident from the examples above that the meanings of the scriptures in the Bible can be twisted and misinterpreted to fit the message of prosperity and health.

The concept of “big man rule” is a term that was coined to refer to a kinship kind of

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<sup>59</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, “Ten Bible Verses.”

<sup>63</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 345.

<sup>64</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 345.

relationship between a patron and a client.<sup>65</sup> McCauley argues that this same concept finds application in the charismatic prosperity movement in Africa. McCauley argues that the movement “creates pay-off structures that replicate the exchange of resources for loyalty central to big man rule.”<sup>66</sup> In such a context, the emphasis is usually on “the personal – sometimes almost mystical – power of the patron and the distance between leader and subject.”<sup>67</sup> According to McCauley, “the essence of the patron–client relationship is that patrons provide material resources, services – to which they as big men have access but others do not – to their followers in exchange for loyal support and allegiance.”<sup>68</sup> That relationship ensures that clients have their welfare needs met directly, and that big men enjoy the authority and legitimacy necessary to maintain power.<sup>69</sup> This kind of patron and client relationship is very common in Africa. Men of God are revered and almost worshiped by some people. To be in the presence of some of these men and women of God is considered to be a great honor. Men and women of the Pentecostal movement end up holding so much power to an extent that causes spectators to wonder how such men and women can still serve as servants of God. Prosperity gospel preachers are known to lead luxurious lives and there is much speculation that they use finances given to the church to finance their lush lifestyles. Many African Prosperity gospel preachers live in expensive homes complete with expensive cars and designer clothing. One also could argue that Jesus is also portrayed as a type of big man in the gospels. What makes Jesus a different kind of patron is the fact that he was not out to exploit

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<sup>65</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?,” 1.

<sup>66</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?,” 4.

<sup>67</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?,” 4.

<sup>68</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?,” 4-5.

<sup>69</sup> McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule?,” 19.

people for the provision of his services. One could even argue that prosperity gospel preachers of today who embody the big man concept lack the selflessness that Jesus possessed.

The concern of whether Prosperity gospel preachers really need so much luxury in order to serve God is not only limited to African countries. In the past the IRS investigated American prosperity gospel pastors on how they were using finances.<sup>70</sup> In 2007, the use of finances by six prosperity gospel ministries led by Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, Eddie Long, Joyce Meyer, and Randy and Paula White came under scrutiny by a Republican Senator, Charles Grassley.<sup>71</sup> The acquisitions that were under question included “extravagant ministry-related, and therefore tax exempt, purchases including private planes, multi-million dollar mansions, thousand dollar business dinners, and a \$23,000 toilet.”<sup>72</sup> In the past, in South Africa, finances used for public benefit activities have been tax exempt, therefore, if for example, a preacher could prove that the new car he purchased was used to minister to and to benefit the public then he did not have to pay taxes associated with the purchase of that car.<sup>73</sup> One might argue that the church leader and his jet, far from demonstrating God's faithfulness to his chosen, are just an example of the Big Man syndrome transferred onto the Christian perspective.<sup>74</sup>

People cannot seem to reach a conclusion on whether the prosperity gospel is hurting or “saving” Africa. Critics have labeled the prosperity gospel as a delusional one.

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<sup>70</sup> Kathleen Hladky, “I Double-Dog Dare You in Jesus’ Name! Claiming Christian Wealth and the American Prosperity Gospel,” *Religion Compass* 6:1 (2012) 82.

<sup>71</sup> Hladky, “I Double-Dog Dare You in Jesus’ Name!,” 82.

<sup>72</sup> Hladky, “I Double-Dog Dare You in Jesus’ Name!,” 82.

<sup>73</sup> South African Council of Churches, “Churches and Taxation in South African,” *South African Council of Churches* (1 July 2002), online, <http://www.sacc-ct.org.za/taxbook2.html#church>, accessed 10 June 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 23.

One Nigerian academic by the name of A.O. Dada wrote an article in 2004 entitled, “Prosperity Gospel in Nigerian Context: A Medium of Social Transformation or an Impetus for Delusion.”<sup>75</sup> After interviewing members of ten Pentecostal churches for his paper, he notes how, “although many Pentecostals were attracted to the churches by the gospel of prosperity, their economic statuses had not changed.”<sup>76</sup> However, he also noticed that the same churches had become rich, some to the extent of even establishing universities.<sup>77</sup> While many may see this as greed on the part of the churches that amassed wealth, some “cited such occurrences as an example of the churches’ contribution to social transformation leading to poverty alleviation through creation of employment and educational opportunities.”<sup>78</sup> I found this very interesting and I think this is a good example of how a church can promote economic development by educating the people of a nation. Despite coming across conflicting perspectives occasionally, Dada reached the conclusion that adherents to the prosperity gospel are deluded in three ways: they believe that individuals should patiently wait for the day when wealth will manifest, that individuals lack prosperity in their lives through sin and that the failure to sow seeds of prosperity by giving to the church for example leads to poverty.<sup>79</sup> I believe that people do not always get what they deserve. Scriptures in the books of Psalms and Job show time and time again that sometimes the wicked prosper here on earth, while the righteous suffer.

Another critic, McKnight, argues that the prosperity gospel “makes God a vending

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<sup>75</sup> A. O. Dada, “Prosperity Gospel in Nigerian Context: A Medium of Social Transformation or an Impetus for Delusion?” *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 36:1-2 (2004) 95-105.

<sup>76</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 342.

<sup>77</sup> Dada, “Prosperity Gospel in Nigerian Context,” 95-105.

<sup>78</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 345.

<sup>79</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 345.

Machine in which believers put in faith and out comes blessings money, homes, cars, beautiful spouses, clever kids and plush vacations.”<sup>80</sup> He also argues that in light of biblical greats like Abraham and Paul who obeyed God but did not live pampered with excess material blessings, “the gospel of prosperity (is) hogwash.”<sup>81</sup> The gospel of prosperity is also criticized for its focus on individualism, which goes against the idea that Christians are selfless servants of God who have mutual obligations within a community. The prosperity gospel is also accused of being a form of “this-world theology” because it emphasizes the receipt of rewards by the righteous in the lifetime here on earth.<sup>82</sup> The prosperity gospel is hurting Africans in several ways. It feeds pride and it works against the formation of christian character.<sup>83</sup> Church members are continually urged to sow financial seeds so that they can reap bigger and bigger rewards and in Africa; entire conferences are dedicated to collecting offerings in order to achieve wealth. This is not the type of life Jesus intended for Christians.<sup>84</sup> In fact, during his time on earth, Jesus taught that his kingdom was not of this world and that His followers needed to separate themselves from citizens of this world (John 18:36). This gospel also keeps people in poverty.<sup>85</sup> Most people today in African countries live on less than \$1 a day, yet their Prosperity gospel leaders have been known to buy fleets of cars and huge plots of land with money that was given to the church by many people including those

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<sup>80</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 343.

<sup>81</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 343-344.

<sup>82</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 29.

<sup>83</sup> J. Lee Grady, “5 Ways the Prosperity Gospel is Hurting Africa,” *Charismamag.com* (13 November 2013), online, <http://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/19113-5-ways-the-prosperity-gospel-is-hurting-africa>, accessed 10 June 2015.

<sup>84</sup> Grady, “5 Ways the Prosperity Gospel is Hurting Africa.”

<sup>85</sup> Grady, “5 Ways the Prosperity Gospel is Hurting Africa.”



who continue to live on a dollar or less a day.<sup>86</sup>

Gifford argues that the theology of success preached by Pentecostals is not sustainable “in the face of circumstances in which so many (people) obviously cannot prosper.”<sup>87</sup> One incident that occurred at Winners church in Nairobi on New Year's Day in 2007 generated tension when prophecies by one pastor did not come true. At the gathering “worshippers were urged to buy Winners bumper stickers for their cars and other stickers for house windows, and to prophesy over the stickers every day in order to get a car in the year ahead.”<sup>88</sup> The pastor of the church told his congregation that “if you want to own ten cars, buy ten stickers, and prophesy over them every day.”<sup>89</sup> Logic suggests that most of the people who attend that church in Kibera, Africa's biggest slum, would not own one car and much less ten cars by the end of 2007.<sup>90</sup> Such scenarios generate a genuine tension that comes from hope falsified. The pastor tried to address this tension by telling his congregation that “everyone should rejoice at the end of 2006 because at least they were alive to celebrate the new year.”<sup>91</sup> This was a means of diversion from the reality that the preacher’s prophecies had not been realized.<sup>92</sup> Such occurrences leave believers in the Pentecostal context in a sort of dilemma where what their promised in Church often goes unrealized.

Togarasei believes that the Prosperity gospel has the potential to empower women because he argues that “God who works for the good and prosperity of the believers

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<sup>86</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 29.

<sup>87</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 24.

<sup>88</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 24.

<sup>89</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 24.

<sup>90</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 24-29.

<sup>91</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 24.

<sup>92</sup> Gifford, “The Prosperity Gospel in Africa,” 24.

should be a God who also works for the good and prosperity of women.”<sup>93</sup> He also acknowledges that a “sufficient number (of Prosperity gospel Christians) must succeed for the movement not to be discredited.”<sup>94</sup> Overall, Togarasei’s argument partially convinces me that message of Pentecostalism does have a place in Christianity, however I believe that it should not be the sole focus of the message of Christianity.

I have reached the conclusion that Pentecostals, in attempting to explain scriptures, do not always preserve the ethical messages of scriptures like Mark 10:29-30. I find it ironic that scriptures like Mark 10 are used to argue that God will bless us financially if we give to him and to the church when the whole point of that passage of scripture was to draw audiences away from material riches. I think that Mark and other gospel authors would be appalled at how scriptures are being misused by Pentecostals today. Despite the negatives of the prosperity gospel, I like the fact that the prosperity gospel is instilling hope in African people; however, I believe that preachers can instill hope in people without tying that hope and the receipt of blessings to the concept of giving financially to God and to the Church. If the preachers of the Pentecostal church really want to follow God’s will then they can pool all the resources they receive from congregants and distribute the wealth equally amongst church members, while doing all they can to accommodate individuals who are in genuine need.

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<sup>93</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 349.

<sup>94</sup> Togarasei, “The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity,” 349.

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