

# Nigeria: The Corrupting Influence of Prosperity Theology (ii)

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## Bytony Nyiam

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Lagos — A great number of Nigeria's best and brightest owe their formative education to the generosity of the churches. In a very crucial sense, Nigeria's intelligentsia was nurtured largely on the mother's milk of Christian mission schools.

Figures like Wole Soyinka, the Ransome-Kutis, Yakubu Gowon, among many others, were relations and children of actively Christian parents. General Gowon's parents were committed to the promotion of education in Zaria, as were the Kutis in Abeokuta. They could have, in each of these cases, been owners of the equivalent of private jet airlines. They instead were leaders of churches which chose to educate the children of the poor with academic potential. There was the example of the reputable late Professor Ishaya Audu, the pioneer Vice Chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria, who benefitted immensely from the Wusasa, Zaria Church Missionary that Missionaries Papa and Mama Gowon sacrificed their lives for.

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This begs the question: what percentages of the new Churches' sometimes expensive schools or universities are the children of the poor? Is it forgotten that so many children of the poor were assisted up the social mobility class ladder by the education they received free of charge from Christian schools? A good example of this is our immediate former President, Chief Aremu Matthew Obasanjo who came from very poor (materially) parenthood. So was the late Chief MKO Abiola. Abeokuta Baptist Grammar School was not alone. There is the human development work done in Ekiti by Christ School, Ado-Ekiti, not to talk of the pioneering one by the great Hope Waddel College in Calabar. How about Christ the King College (CKC), Onitsha and the great Catholic schools - St Gregory and Sacred Heart in Obalende, St Finbarrs - Lagos, St. John - Kaduna, Stella Maris - Port Harcourt, the Mary Knoll, College -Ogoja, the Pacelli School for the Blind, Lagos, etc, to mention but a few.

Another area where the contribution of the Church has been invaluable is in the provision of health facilities. The Eye Clinic in Kaduna, through whose operations many Nigerians have regained their sight, or corrected visual impairments, has relied mainly on church support. There are also many Christian hospitals all over the country. The foregoing points to a tradition of social welfare ministry by the Nigerian churches, a tradition which is increasingly being vulgarized by the materialistic and flashy lifestyles of some preachers. Pastor Adeboye has always seemed immune to this lavishness. Recent events show that things may be about to change. We pray this does not happen to a pastor who has, in the past, done much for the body of Christ.

The irony of those who are attracted to Prosperity Theology is that they go to God only when in trouble. Such exploitation of churches and mosques cannot be said to be faith. Generally, at times of prosperity, we Nigerians forget God. This is exactly what many political office holders do immediately after the general elections. Immediately after the fanfare of their inauguration and thanksgiving ceremonies the politicians, except for a few, start showing signs of not keeping the promises they made to God and their people. The Bible captures this aptly when it cautions as follows: "Because you did not serve the Lord Your God joyfully and glory in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends you" (Deuteronomy 28:47-48).

Advocates of Prosperity Theology ignore what is taught in the Holy Bible about not needing earthly prosperity if one has Christ. These are the type of clerics that Micah alluded to when he wrote that "the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money" (Micah 3:11). In many of their congregations, the focus has shifted from seeking salvation to seeking for the triple roots of all evil - money, power and fame. Once the associated pleasures are tasted, they become addicted. According to Paul, one finds amongst this kind of flock "perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness". Thus we are cautioned: "from such withdraw thyself" (1 Timothy 6:5). And, as highlighted in the opening paragraph, our Lord Jesus taught us to: "seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

As a student of the holistic school, I am much more inclined to heed the warnings of the Holy Bible and the Noble Koran on the dangers of the love of money. A good example of this is the Pauline warning that: "Love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:10). In other words; why go for the shadows when

Christ is the real substance of prosperity that is casting the shadows. Our men of God are increasingly becoming like the Pharisees to whom Our Lord Jesus pointed out that a fault of their religion was to 'major on minor issues'. Secondary objectives, such as Miracles Healing and Prosperity Theology, have been allowed to get in the way of the real mission of Christianity. This is why Apostle Paul advised Timothy: "O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, where unto thou art also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

One is tempted to agree with those who observe that some of our men of God sell the prosperity gospel primarily to justify their extravagant life-styles. The life-styles of these avant garde pastors are bringing the church into disrepute. Church expansions are derogatorily said to have emerged as one of the fastest growing businesses in an otherwise stagnant Nigerian economy. Some of our clerics are accused of being steeped in religious fakery and revelling in religious excitation. Some of our clerics are said to be vainly invoking the name of Jesus to defraud their unsuspecting flock.

Business marketing-like soundbite prayers, such as 'my God is not a poor God', 'poverty shall not be your portion, in Jesus name', etc, are used to sweeten the pill. These are examples of the Holy Bible's references to prosperity being, for self-serving reasons, narrowed down to its most limited aspect of material prosperity. Closely related here are the fame-seeking clerics who are sometimes described as funky pastors. This is why, Paul blessed with the foreknowledge of the possibility of human beings getting drawn into worldliness, prophesied that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

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