

Evaluation of Prosperity Teachings among Pentecostal Churches in Gombe Metropolis

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Abstract

Earlier studies on the prosperity gospel has focused generally on Nigeria without specifically examining the ideology at the state level by identifying the unique ways the phenomenon has had influence. This is especially vis-a-vis the hypothesis that prosperity gospel is exploiting Christians through its advocates who boisterously acclaim an assurance of 'a heaven on earth' solution to varied challenges. Since this issue has raged generating varied commentaries, this paper consequently examined the subject matter among the Pentecostals in Gombe State's metropolis to identify the components of prosperity teachings, means of accessing prosperity and the effects of the teachings on Pentecostals in Gombe Metropolis. 260 questionnaire were circulated among pastors and members of some Pentecostal churches, while 250 copies were retrieved. Interviews were conducted with selected Pentecostal leaders and members. Data was analyzed using percentages and simple descriptive methods. In Gombe metropolis, the components entail the "God is wealthy, healthy, powerful and atop of every situation" notion and that Christians ought to exhibit same. The means include teaching about hard work and innovation, paying of offering, tithes, sowing seed, and making positive confessions. The effects include heightened consciousness for turning opportunities into successes, increased awareness about the ethics of hard work, enhanced aptitude in learning and crafts of survival in a harsh economy, and improved faith in God than man or the government of the day. Outcome of an ideology may vary from place to place due to different influencing factors. The paper recommends that, prosperity should be perceived in a holistic perspective other than monetarily as a way forward.

Key Words: Evaluation, Prosperity Teachings, Pentecostal Churches, Gombe, Metropolis.

Introduction

Scholars have alluded to the fact that the relationship between religion and society has always been very close (Ariel Durant cited in Nwabueze 255). This shows that man has a deep relationship with his society such that they cannot be separated. Also, every religion that exists does so to solve existential problems of its adherents. Religion can also be commonly perceived as concerned with the supernatural, and it usually is; but the deepest roots of religion lies in the earth, and in man's experience of the social and moral community that religion everywhere provided in one form or another (Nisbet 70). This is very true of the Christian religion. According to Iorkyar, Christians who believe they have a purpose in God and a definite mission on earth are fueled with the zeal to establish God's purpose for their lives (35). He goes further to state that, "Besides evangelizing the soul (change in human behaviour), a holistic evangelistic approach involves combining different aspects of family life, economic empowerment, and improved living conditions to bring a 'wholeness' about development in people and communities" (35).

Norman Shields corroborates the above stating that, "the obligation of the fourth commandment is strongly endorsed where industry is widely commended and laziness is roundly condemned..." (250). Again, the theology of Divine Providence teaches that, God has given the earth to all His children. This

again shows why the various religious traditions in our land recognize God as the Father of all men and women. So, the universal fatherhood of God is undoubtedly a further basis for the motion of justice for all his Children. For it cannot be the will of God that any of His Children be deprived of the basic necessities of life, while the few of those children have superabundance of these same advantages (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria 104). This is exactly the point at which the Pentecostals in Nigeria and everywhere have taken to the emphasis on prosperity teaching to avail their members with theological substratum on which to grow prosperously in spirituality and physical well-being. The aim of Norman and the writers of this paper therefore focuses on the fact that, while indolence produces poverty, diligent work leads to a satisfying income (Proverbs 6:6-11,24:30-34, Isaiah 28:24-26) (250). Earlier on Max Weber (1864-1920) was particularly interested in investigating the relationship between religious beliefs and practices on the one hand and such other secular activities as economic growth. His interest was to find out if beliefs in supernatural being and the religious practices associated with them affect in any tangible and measurable way the economic behavior of individuals (Igbo 19). The result was that, religion could be one of the critical causal factors that can determine the path along which a society will develop (20).

This paper also examines the Pentecostals' "Prosperity Theology" or "Prosperity Teaching" and its deployment to encourage prosperity. The research also studies the criticisms associated with this theology such as the doctrine being misappropriated for the selfishness of the operators, that is, pastors and founders of Pentecostal churches (cited in Komolafe 170).

A Brief Description of Gombe Metropolis

Gombe metropolis is the capital city of Gombe state, north-eastern Nigeria, with an estimated population of around 450,000. The major spoken languages in Gombe are Fulfulde and Hausa ("Gombe State History, LGAs", n.p.). Eleven wards make up the city of Gombe namely, Jekadafari, Ajiya, Bolori-West, Bolori-East, Kumbiya-kumbiya, Pantami, Shamaki, Dawaki, Nasarawo, Herwagana, and Bajoga ("Wards in Gombe LG Area" www.manpower.com.ng). It has a land mass of about 52km² (20sqmi). In another source the estimated population of the city is about 280,000(2006 Census), and 446,800(2022 Estimates). The city of Gombe which serves as the capital of Gombe state "is a hub of commercial, cultural, and political activities inhabited by ethnic groups like Fulani, Tangale, Tera, Waja, and Hausa among others, including a rich cultural diversity ("Gombe State Subdivision" www.citypopulation.de).

In relation to religious affiliation data of the populace, Gombe metropolis has the Muslims and Christians as the dominant religious sects with Mosques and Churches spread across the length and breadth of the city. No official statistics could be quoted at the moment. However, a random assessment could suggest that Muslims are more than Christians in number. There is little or no astonishment therefore that, religious skirmishes occur at distant intervals because of religious differences both in terms of truth-claims on the nature of the Ultimate Reality and with each of these religious groups based on their own evidences (Atoi 1)

Origin of Pentecostalism and Pentecostal ideals in Nigeria

There are multiple submissions to the origin of the phenomenon of Pentecostalism in Nigeria. While presenting some of them, it must be underscored that the essential motive of the establishment and or extension of this brand of Christianity was based on the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to Freston (5), the origin of Pentecostalism in Nigeria had a political motive. Pentecostal political activism originated with the founding of the Christian Student's Social Movement (SSM) of Nigeria in 1977. The emphasis of this early activism was on the spiritual forces that govern politics and on bringing about reform through prayer (<https://www.pewresearch.org/histo>). Gudaku in Adega informs that Pentecostalism was an incognito in the Religious Studies, Department of University of Nigeria before 1970 (108). Kalu Ogbu then stated that: The advent of Pentecostalism in Nigeria could be forced to the Naked Faith People (hence NFP) who are the precursors of *Aladura* (3). In a similar vein, Achunike Hilary Chukwuta noted that, the origin of modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria can be traced to the NFP (15).

The historical line of the origin of Pentecostalism in Nigeria further goes that, the Christ Apostolic Church and the Church of the Lord Aladura traced their roots to Faith Tabernacle which also had link with NFP. Even Pastor Williams Folorunsho Kumuyi, (the General Superintendent of the Deeper Life Bible Church) was a beneficiary of this apostolic wellspring of the NFP who were the precursors of both *Aladura*

and Pentecostalism in Nigeria. They were even the first to confirm faith healing and faith-word experiences of people in Nigeria. The NFP believed that faith entailed total reliance on God to heal and supply all human needs (15) just like their godson (the Pentecostals in Nigeria do believe after it was inaugurated).

But beyond this, Pentecostalism ideals in Nigeria are robustly all encompassing the mainstream Christian beliefs (except the ONENESS movement), which does not accept the TRINITY doctrine of Christianity highly cherished in Nigeria and elsewhere (<https://pewforum.org> 48). Pentecostalism is therefore a form of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. Pentecostals believe that faith must be powerfully experiential and not something found merely through ritual or thinking. Pentecostals believe they are driven by the power of God moving within them. Pentecostal movements stress the importance of conversions that amount to a *Baptism of the Spirit* whereby those baptized are filled with the Holy Spirit, which gives them the strength to live a truly Christian life. This direct experience of God they say is revealed by gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing (<https://www.bbc.co.uk>>subdivisions; Komolafe 171).

Maria Woodworth corroborates the above and adds that, Pentecostals emphasize teaching of the "full gospel". They also emphasize the reliability of the Bible and the need for the transformation of an individual's life through faith in Jesus (38). Summarily therefore, Pentecostals ideals emphasize biblical supremacy, speaking in tongues (*Glossolalia*), prophecy (also appreciated by protestant churches: *Sola Scriptura*), healing and prosperity theology (cited in Adega 109).

Components of Prosperity Teachings among the Pentecostals

Looking at the Pentecostal ideals discussed from the foregoing, the teaching and belief about prosperity forms one important item among the many ideals to which they believe. According to them, prosperity theology portrays God as a God of everything who does not lack. They also reason that if God is good, just, and fair, he cannot make some rich and others poor except those who do not know how to claim his numerous benefits and gifts (Adega 114). They also are also acclaimed for ministering relevantly to the needs of the people and provide solutions to daily challenges of public life like sickness, joblessness and poverty (Komolafe 173). Some Pentecostal pastors are acclaimed to promise good health and wealth to those in need of them (Adega 115), with slogans such as "our portion is not that of poverty but riches" "I see you receiving whatever you ask for in Jesus name after administering the anointing water"; and that by applying the anointing water you are placing yourself in a special position of favour, mercy, healing, deliverance, blessing, prosperity and fruitfulness (Mbachirin 144).

According to Goka Mpigi, the themes or components in prosperity teaching or theology includes: Health and Wealth; Seed-Faith (seed sowing); and The Hundred Return. His ideas of health and wealth tallies with the above explanations as highlighted by the other authors. He however supplied the bible quotes that support these teachings namely III John 2 which says "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health even as thy soul prospereth" Others includes Deuteronomy 28:1-4, Psalms 1:3, 84:11 as back up texts for the propagation of prosperity theology, (37). A summary of Prosperity theology as seen by Atoi et al includes the following:

- i. Presumption that material poverty is of the devil and that, the phenomenon of poverty befalls a man as a result of his sins, which is the consequence of the fall of man;
- ii. Presupposition that material wealth is a compulsory gain of salvation bequeathed to believers by Jesus Christ, and that anyone who is in Christ does not experience socioeconomic hardship and suffering of any kind because Jesus had already paid the price;
- iii. Assumption that donating munificently to the church through tithing, seed sowing and offering enables a believer to reap bountifully;
- iv. Surmise that the death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary is a guarantee of divine unfailing health for believers;
- v. Supposition that exercises of positive confession is a necessary condition to obtain God's blessings of abundant wealth (115).

Put simply, prosperity gospel is a re-reading and interpretation of certain verses of the bible in which God and the atoning death of Jesus Christ were understood to have promised a state of well-being,

abundance of money and materials to meet the needs of Christians so that they live a life of spiritual and material abundance in the world (<https://ab31b.org/the-pr>).

Misconceptions associated with the use of Prosperity Teachings

Several scholars have tried to unearth some illegalities inherent in prosperity gospel advocacy (Atoi 115). In an attempt to evaluate prosperity theology in Neo-African Pentecostal Churches, Kalu (256) has shown that, some of the criticisms have been prolific and others vitriolic. Prolifically, Folarin in Mpigi (38-39) opined that prosperity gospel had produced very positive influences that could be further explored. For him, the messages have influenced the practices of older denominations indicating that prosperity gospel or theology should be taken seriously and that demonizing it can be counter-productive to the church. His assertion followed a survey he conducted which demonstrated a remarkable ignorance of the meaning of the concept. This is because most respondents to the survey simply defined the prosperity theology on financial breakthrough premise and material possessions but not in relation to salvation from sin.

Analyzing Folarin's on this position, Mpigi finds a deficiency in the assessment of the prosperity theology by Folarin first because he failed to cite a particular preacher or ministry as an example. Secondly, that his assessment could further encourage more debates on this subject matter which is actually positive for furtherance of research in this area (38). Mpigi affirms: "it is clear that nearly all the biblical references to prosperity as interpreted by prosperity theologians are taken out of context." (38-39). He made reference to Wale Oke's work titled: *Precious Blood of Jesus* (1998) where the author showed that the blood of Jesus was shed from the five major parts of his body: his back, his head, his hands, his feet, and his side. That the blood that flowed from Jesus' hands when nails pierced them as he was hung on the cross. Clearly therefore, the significance of the blood shed from Jesus' hands lies in the symbolic role of hands as the means of acquiring wealth (39).

Mpigi in his analysis and assessment of Folarin's thesis that the hand is the means of wealth acquisition stems from the basis that the hand is that part of the body of a human that is used to engage in work. Mpigi alleges that this notion cuts across many cultures including Nigeria where Wale Oke comes from, and can also be found in some Old Testament readings. Mpigi concludes: "...to say that Jesus' hands were pierced so that believers' hands may be blessed seems quite unnecessary in his interpretative bid, for it does not build up his argument" (40). For the researchers it is simply a syncretic practice amounting to what Aben poses a "...syncretism conflicts with orthodox Christian theology" (99).

Another syncretism posture of the Neo-Pentecostals has to do with the significance of their political theology in their affirmation of mother Africa and the emphasis on the empowerment of the black race. Komolafe (179) mentions Otabil Mensa of Ghana, Guti and Tudor Bismark of Zimbabwe as examples of Neo-Pentecostal leaders who forcefully espouse pan-African ideas in their theologies. For the Neo-Pentecostal theologians, "prosperity of individuals is marked by prosperity of the nations." (179).

Yet, there is this lapse where Kalu citing *Time Magazine* points to the fact that Neo-Pentecostal prosperity theology engages God in a spiritual *quid pro quo*; that lurches toward full-blown American materialism. By emphasizing this notion tends to make God little more than a celestial Automated Teller Machine (ATM), a means to an end instead of the end itself. Scholars who have criticized this type of prosperity theology (which tilts on the brink of heretical, ethical and theological errors, have downplayed the implications of the fall of man (sin, pain, death), Jesus' atoning sacrifice, and the importance of repentance. Such a theology has refused to focus on worldliness and its repercussions (256). Positivism or logical positivism sees materialism above idealism and denies the existence of God. Their scientific outlook does not believe in anything outside of empiricism as essentially essential. Prosperity theologians are therefore likened to this logical positivism because of their major concern with material acquisition, of health and wealth.

Mbachirin corroborates the above with his submissions that, Neo-Pentecostal pastors have developed slogans such as "God has not created us to be tails but heads"; "God gives only those who give"; "our God has everything so there is no reason why His people should lack anything" (143). Atoi points to the insufficiency of the above claims where he posits that,

"... the belief that material wealth is a compulsory gain of salvation and that all who believe in Jesus Christ do not experience hardship and suffering is a misconception of fact because it fails to elucidate the reason why early disciples of Jesus Christ, namely apostles Peter and John and their

other colleagues who had one on one personal relationship with Jesus Christ were materially poor" (Acts 3:6) (116).

Adega adds that, some Pentecostal ministries emphasize good health and wealth; but often these emphases have been perceived to be controversial before the sick and the lame who believe they will be cured. He continued that the ministers smile to the banks with cool money made from crusades, and they live in opulent houses and swim in stupendous wealth even as their members struggle to make ends meet, surviving on less than ₦150.00 a day (115-116). Donatus Pius Ukpong directed his searchlight into the healing, deliverance, dream, vision, and special knowledge and prophecy manifestations in Pentecostal churches. He decries that, for some priests and pastors, there is nothing sacramental about healing and deliverance, but simply a ministration of a personal power by an individual, against the Christian faith than the manifestation of the power of Jesus in everyday life. This according to him is generating into a superstitious Christianity, where experience is separated from doctrine. He concludes, "The emphasis given to these phenomena in Africa can easily lead to a conclusion that there is an emergence of Neo-paganism in the guise of Pentecostalism today" (41).

Daniel Ude Asue prolifically states that there is no doubt the Pentecostals have some positive values which traditional Christianity could tap from. However, he sarcastically confesses that, they often misfire by going wide and proposing too simple solutions to complex questions of human existence (27) Citing Jurgen Moltman and Karl-Josef Kuschel, he pointed out the positive values of Neo-Pentecostal ideas as creating a new awareness of community; healing the sick and driving out of demons, speaking in tongues and prophecy, spontaneous prayer and the baptism and the experience of the Holy Spirit. However, making reference to the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and visionaries, Asue informs that, today in our Neo-Pentecostal churches, the workings of the Holy Spirit is mistaken because in normal theological discourses, the Holy Spirit blows on what it wills. The contrast is that today you see people commanding and controlling the Holy Spirit instead of the Holy Spirit controlling them (30). The list is endless on how Neo-Pentecostals have been perceived to have deviated, mushroomed and depleted the orthodox and gospel's doctrine and precepts.

Contemporary Economic Challenges in Gombe State

At the very beginning of the expository discourse on the contemporary socioeconomic challenges facing Gombe people, it is good to state that, a discourse on the socioeconomic challenges facing Gombe people could be likened to a macro-cosmic and micro-cosmic relations where what is happening at the national level affects that which is occurring at the state level. That is, the socioeconomic challenges have been stepped-down from national to state issues.

There is little or no wonder that Onyeiwu Stephen's submissions are apt to this assumption. He says: "many of the contemporary socioeconomic challenges Nigeria faces were inherited from the previous administrations. But since the current administration has failed to turn things around, Nigerians continue to grapple with an era of misery, disappointment and uncertainty" (<https://theconversation.com/niger...>) Onyeiwu laments further that, at the start of 2022, Nigerians hoped that, with less than two years to the end of the previous administration, the government would ramp up its efforts to reduce poverty and unemployment. However, socioeconomic conditions have since deteriorated. Budget deficits have ballooned to nearly 50% of GDP, more than the 3% recommended by the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2007. So given Nigeria's abysmal revenue generation of about 9% of GDP, over 40% of Buhari's 2023 budget is expected to be financed by debt (<https://theconversation.com/niger...>). Onyeiwu goes on to say that the Nigerian economy rebounded after the difficult years of COVID 19, growing 3.5% in the first three quarters of 2022, and the recovery has wrought more hardship on Nigerians. This is because the main drivers of growth in Nigeria-oil production and services-don't usually benefit most Nigerians in terms of job and business opportunities (<https://theconversation.com/niger...>). In this current administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, it appears that many people look not to have seen the positive changes they desire.

Looking at Gombe State, Babayo and Usman have alluded to the fact that, "poverty is a phenomenon that is affecting our society negatively as its scorch keeps biting harder despite the rate at which revenue is rising in Nigeria" (707). They explain further that Gombe state is one of the poorest states in Nigeria and as such poverty is affecting the socioeconomic and political well-being of the state

in many perspectives. This is largely because poverty has been caused by poor government's macro and micro economic policies and that poverty in Gombe state has reached an unbearable index of 72.6% in January 2013 (713). They also mentioned that the National Bureau of Statistics ranked the state the third poorest in the country in 2015 with a percentage of 74.6% (713). In a similar vein, Yusuf Auta, a Protection specialist, UNICEF Bauchi Field Office, announced that, in the figures captured in the social protection policy document recently, developed by the state, Gombe State is one of the top ten poorest states in Nigeria and "current statistic shows that 74.6% of Gombe state residents are living below poverty line".

In a meeting with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) in Gombe, it became evident that the governor of Gombe State Inuwa Yahaya Muhammadu regretted that his administration should have been "achievement-based and infrastructural development driven that has a direct impact on the people as a guiding consideration". He pointed out further that, "as in every human endeavors, me and this administration might have committed errors. I request the gathering to forgive and chart a new course for continued development of the state" (Vivian Chime, thecable.ng/i-mic). This clearly attests to the lack of underdevelopment of the socioeconomic upliftment of the people by the government in many ways.

Again, Babayo and Usman have shown that, poverty in Gombe State is caused by several multiple factors top among which are absence of well-designed programme genuinely targeted for social investment and welfare; bribery and corruption of the public office holders; poor policies; mismanagement of public resources; low level of opportunities; poor attitude of laziness; lack of productivity of the youth particularly and low level of education especially technical and vocational education for self-reliance. According to them, their informants further disclosed that lip-services from politicians without corroborating it with action is another problem (<https://www.academia.edu/povert...>).

This research then used questionnaire to ascertain the practical experience on ground in Gombe on the contemporary economic challenges in Gombe State.

Table 1: Summary of Respondents' views on Socioeconomic Challenges in Gombe State

S/No A	Contemporary Economic Issues on People in Gombe Metropolis	Agree	Disagree	Not Decided
1	My salary at the end of the month is enough to take care of my needs	40 (16%)	200 (80%)	10 (4%)
2	I take care of my family responsibility	114 (45.6%)	117 (46.8%)	19 (7.6%)
3	I need to borrow to take care of my family	70 (28%)	170 (68%)	10 (4%)
4	Prices of goods and commodities becomes expensive everyday	230 (92%)	20 (8%)	0 (0%)
5	It is quite difficult to be employed by the government in Nigeria	240 (96%)	10 (4%)	0 (0%)
6	People are poor because they are not gainfully employed	120 (48%)	120 (48%)	10 (4%)
7	I pay my tithes and offerings as at when due	220 (88%)	20 (8%)	10 (4%)
8	Peace and security challenges have reduced the capacity of Gombe people from making money	70 (28%)	170 (68%)	10 (4%)
9	Corruption has brought hardship because of non-implementation of economic and safety growth nets	230 (92%)	10 (4%)	0 (0%)
10	Laziness could increase the level of poverty among Christians	240 (96%)	10 (4%)	0 (0%)
11	Insufficient avenue to skill acquisition reduces access to money	170 (68%)	60 (24%)	20 (8%)
12	Gombe people lack access to agricultural input	80 (32%)	140 (56%)	30 (12%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Additionally, the interview respondents who were interviewed supported the above views of the questionnaire respondents in their different submissions. They are of the opinion that poverty in Gombe

State is caused by several factors such as inflated prices of goods and commodities; unemployment especially for the poor; corruption due to non-implementation of economic and safety growth nets; laziness on the part of the populace, and insufficient avenues for skill acquisition.

Prosperity teachings among the Pentecostals in Gombe Metropolis

Previously, it was shown that prosperity teachings or prosperity theology implied portraying God as a God of everything and because God is good, just and fair, he makes others too rich except those who do not know how to access the riches. In addition, prosperity theology is also perceived as the belief that God will grant the wishes of believers in accordance with their financial contributions to the church, especially wishes involving material wealth and good health (Atoi, Babale and Olowoyeye 105). In Nigeria, prosperity theology emerged and spread as a result of the unfavourable socioeconomic conditions of the 1980s and the long military administration of the country (Atoi et al 107; Kalu and Hofmeyr 40). Hofmeyr analyses the impact of the implosion of the state that challenged the churches: "the failure of the states produced the rash military coups and regimes, abuse of Human Rights and economic collapse...Militarization of the society intensified ethnic conflicts and civil wars" (cited in Kalu and Hofmeyr 40).

Dada in Atoi et al (108) then posits that, it was in this atmosphere that the prosperity gospel had the opportunity to flourish in Nigeria. They added that, those who could not make it in the political terrain ran to the church for their own share which prosperity preachers promised. Now to the responses of interview respondents in Gombe metropolis, about how prosperity gospel has been used. A respondent, Pastor Isaac Ibrahim Sarauta pointed out that while preaching about tithes, seed sowing, offering and thanksgiving, Pentecostals are encouraged not to be lazy but to do something with their hands to grow economically so as to live well and healthy. He even quoted 2 Thess. 3:6-15 where Paul warned against laziness and said "if a man will not work, he shall not eat" (vs 10b) (Oral Interview).

Similarly, Pastor Thomas Ejisola Ejiniyi said, he preaches prosperity by advising members of his church to acquire the knowledge of the economic growth and investment mentality. That in his church there is programme mounted for the economic growth of members called "Small Business Development" mounted by Global Discipleship Alliance from United States of America as partners. People are taught the doctrine of work and how they can do business. Facilitation is done by giving members an initial set-up capital ranging from ₦10,000 to ₦100,000. Local pastors in the church are also encouraged to do business and teach church members to do same (Oral Interview).

The same was said by Apostle Copeland Integrity Abraham. He said while offering is accepted from members of his church as part of the attraction of God's blessings on them, there is an establishment of the church known as Ecclesiastical Gospel Centre Business Empowerment Programme (EGCBEP) where grants are made available for the church members. According to him, members are told not to idle away but start up something that is not beyond their means. So because of this ₦20,000 is given to members to start small scale businesses. Mention was made of one Precious Richard who has grown economically as a result of the grant she accessed which enabled her to open a tailoring business centre and she equally sells shoes to the general public. Another member Elder Delton Bako was given a small amount of money and he has turned it into a big poultry farm that is supplying for the church and the public (Oral Interview).

Rev. Christopher John Godobe, the founder and General Overseer of God's Tabernacle Witness equally emphasized sowing of seed, tithe, and offering as part of the prosperity message and God's blessings. Like the other pastors, concrete efforts have been made to grow materially citing Job 8:7. Members are taught to transform their lives from their small scale businesses and blossom. He said "Work is what God 'wired' from creation". (cf Akwaki and Fidelis 14). Godobe has written a book titled: *Breaking the Yoke of Smallness* where he has lavishly provided the knowledge of growth in very many realms. He blamed Nigerians and indeed Africans for having a hunter's mindset (kill and eat) mentally and have refused to use their knowledge to grow economically leading to laziness and or idleness. He concluded that getting to the peak of productivity is having a product. People according to him are poor because they have a poor mindset and this leads to poverty (Oral Interview).

A set of questionnaire were used to determine the practical experience of the Pentecostal Christians in Gombe metropolis. A summary of the responses are as follows:

Table 2: Summary of Respondents on Prosperity Teachings in the Hands of Pentecostals.

S/No B	Prosperity Teachings in the Hands of Pentecostals	Agree	Disagree	Not Decided
13	Prosperity Teachings gave hope to the hopeless by providing knowledge for survival	250(100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
14	Church teachings that insure members against poverty and sickness may be more important than assurances from the government	220 (88%)	10 (4%)	20 (8%)
15	To be prosperous does not only mean having abundance of wealth but also being spiritually stable	240 (96%)	10 (4%)	0 (0%)
16	To be healthy is to be wealthy	230 (92%)	10 (4%)	10 (4%)
17	Prosperity could be derived through forgiveness and renewal of a broken relationship	220(88%)	10 (4%)	10 (4%)
18	Prosperity teachings encourage hard work, preservation and good management culture	240 (96%)	0 (0%)	10 (4%)
19	Prosperity teachings that focus on vocational training in churches are helpful towards reducing poverty	240 (96%)	0 (0%)	10 (4%)

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Most responses tally with that of the questionnaire respondents' that prosperity teachings give hope to the hopeless by providing knowledge for survival and that such church teachings braces members against poverty and sickness. Pentecostals by this fully that to be prosperous does not only mean having abundance of wealth but also being spiritually well because to be healthy is to be wealthy. Further, Pentecostals through these teachings understand that prosperity could be derived through forgiveness and renewal of a broken relationship with God. In addition, they could decipher that prosperity teachings encourage hard work, preservation and good management culture. The respondents added that prosperity teachings that focus on vocational training in the churches are helpful towards reducing poverty among the Pentecostals in Gombe State.

The last set of questions beginning from 20-22 were directed towards the validation of the fact of one fundamental claim of prosperity theology which according to prosperity gospel preachers is primary: "supposition that exercise of positive confession is a necessary condition to obtain God's blessings of abundant wealth" (Atoi et al 115, Komolafe 178, Mpigi 36). Mpigi categorically states that, "God's abundant goodness will be enjoyed and utilized" by those who discipline themselves and become decisive, bold, adventurous, believing, daring, risking and determined" (36). Though this belief has been challenged on the ground that it is mere positive verbal confession hinged on a faulty premise of anthropocentric view that humans are in God's class, making prayer request unnecessary (Atoi 119). However, through the responses of the respondents, it may be deduced that Pentecostals through their positive confessions derive numerous advantages such as fulfillment of expectations and hope for fulfillment. The data below demonstrates this deduction:

Table 3: Elements of Prosperity Teachings in Scriptural "Faith Declarations" of the Pentecostals

S/No C	Elements of Prosperity Teachings in Scriptural "Faith Declarations" on the Pentecostals	Agree	Disagree	Not Decided
20.	I believe in the "I can't die" slogan of the Pentecostals	170(68%)	50(20%)	30 (12%)
21.	"I can't be poor" means every Christian is not supposed to lack	160(64%)	60(24%)	30(12%)
22.	The declaration "I see my future; I shall get there" presupposes that the future holds prosperity and that Pentecostals must receive the fulfillment	170(68%)	60(24%)	20(8%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Interview respondents are also of these views. While digging deeper into the meanings of these assertions, respondents inferred that the "I can't die" slogan means for them that they will not perish at the end of their journey in the world, but in heaven. This is because of what the Bible says: "And he said unto them, verily I say unto you, that there be some of them who stand here, which shall not taste of death" (Mk.9:1, La.9:27, Mt.16:28). They also acclaimed that it means that they will not die prematurely, miserably and tragically, such as being killed through accidents or through the operations of witchcraft and malevolent forces. These declarations are somewhat difficult for others to fathom but is widely believed among the Pentecostals to be potent. Again, there are other prosperity theology slogans such as "I can't be poor" as well as "I see my future, I shall get there." Pentecostals believe so much in basing their assertions on faith. While it may be possible that some of those who make these assertions don't seem to see them fulfilled in their lives, there are others who claim to have seen them coming to pass. It may appear on the surface that there is no rationality in these claims, the fact still remains that there are still many that believe and claim that these statements of faith are effective since there are testimonies in Pentecostal churches in Gombe in affirmation of them.

Another way to look at this revolves round the negative implications of these declarations on church members who do not receive fulfillment of these claims at the end of the day. It usually ends up casting aspersions on the leadership/clergy of the church and other churches. This may go a long way to cause sensations in the society, especially in the media. This is more especially if financial commitments have been made by the members under whichever guise. Kalu defines that when members are motivated by church leaders to contribute financially to a cause under the guise of these slogans, it is "motivational recipes designed to inspire people and restore hope" (256). If such hopes could not therefore be realized and it becomes a public debate, it could lead to a mess of unimaginable proportion. In an interview with Pastor Sarauta, he said, most pastors do interpret the Bible with selfishness and not according to gospel realities (Oral Interview).

Prospects of Prosperity Teaching in solving Economic Challenges in Gombe, Nigeria

One of the encouraging signs of the prospects of prosperity teaching in solving economic challenges in Gombe State is the fact that, some Pentecostal pastors have started small- and large-scale efforts to provide alternative ways of doing businesses. It is heartwarming to see plans for some churches to encourage their members to apply ways to change their living standards to be able to fend for their families, support the churches and help the less privilege around them. Some of them now engage in penning down their assumptions and feelings about topics that fascinate them. Rev. Godobe John Chris wrote one titled: *Breaking the Yoke of Smallness*. This appears to be a means of teaching to break loose from poverty.

Individual members in Neo-Pentecostal circles now think of addressing their poverty levels by becoming very resourceful by beginning to invest in businesses after collecting tokens (money consecrated in the church to be returned into their businesses) from their churches. Some have already started well. Some Pentecostal churches have also provided workshops, training and business skills acquisition lessons for enhancing and motivating members to be hardworking. This also includes the civil servants among them. In some of these churches, women leaders have provided skills for the production of soap, pomade, baking, and tie and dye cloth design. This has been perceived to have enhanced women do small businesses to support their families.

According to Pastor Godobe, teaching church members the biblical perspectives of business ethics as could be seen in Mt. 25:14-30 can go a long way in promoting what is given to them by the church to start-up business or trading practices. Such practices encourage honesty, responsibility, accountability, and business stewardship (Dzurgba 75-76). The Pentecostals have also started to unseat the political instability and the militarization of the society so as to save people from vulnerability, insecurity and hopelessness, Pentecostals are creating new empowerment tools of hope and new sources of security by being Christ-like. The sermons of Pentecostal are premised on God's assurances against poverty and sickness (Kalu 213). This also goes beyond material efforts to embrace such matters as spiritual renewal of the relationship between God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, the rebuilding of all forms of brokenness, the provision of health, and the reversal of economic desolation as well as the political and social well-being of individuals and communities (213).

Conclusion

This study evaluated prosperity teachings among Pentecostal Churches in Gombe Metropolis, revealing a predominant emphasis on material wealth and financial success. However, a critical analysis of these teachings highlights the need for a more balanced and biblical-nuanced understanding of prosperity. Such an understanding should prioritize spiritual growth, holistic well-being, and social responsibility, rather than solely focusing on material wealth. By adopting a more comprehensive and biblical-grounded approach to prosperity, Pentecostal Churches in Gombe Metropolis can promote a healthier and more sustainable understanding of Prosperity that benefits both individuals and the broader community.

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Personal Communication

S/No	Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Place Of Interview	Date Of Interview
1.	Rev. Dr. Florence Leke	F	60yrs	Pastor/General Overseer Hepzibath Discipleship Ministry and Chairperson PFN Gombe State	Federal Low-Cost, Gombe Town	25/03/2023
2.	Pastor Isaac Ibrahim Sarauta	M	50yrs	Pastor/General Overseer and Founder Christ Cosmopolitan Gospel Centre	Yalenguruza Yalewan Bogo	10/09/2023
3.	Pastor David Inusa	M	40yrs	Pastor: Light Bearers' Assembly	Tumfure	12/09/2023
4.	Pastor Thomas Ejiniyi Ejisola	M	54yrs	Christ-Light Ambassador International	Barundi	12/09/23
5.	Apostle Copeland Integrity Abraham	M	47yrs	Pastor/Founder: Ecclesiastical Gospel Centre	Longel-Tumfure	13/09/2023
6.	Rev. Godobe John Christopher	M	51yrs	God's Glorious Tabernacle Witness	Behind Hakimi's Palace, Adjacent Tumfure Primary School	13/09/2023
7.	Adamu Ibrahim	M	40yrs	Civil Servant	Higher Ground Believer's Assembly Tumfure	14/09/2023
8.	Mrs. Faith Sarauta Isaac	M	42yrs	Women Leader Christ Cosmopolitan Gospel Centre	Yalenguruza Yalenwan Bogo	10/09/2023

9.	Barr. Zerubabel Hassan	M	64yrs	Lawyer/RCCG Legal Adviser	Federal Low Cost, Near Shinani Lodge	16/10/2023
10.	Mr. Tony Agoro	M	52yrs	Teacher/ Youth Minister	Living Faith Hasidu Estate, Off Bauchi Road	16/10/2023
11.	Madam Blessing Paul Igbangi	F	32yrs	Nurse/House Wife	Deeper Life Bible Church Tumfure	17/10/2023
12.	Mrs. Paulina Moses Manta	F	40yrs	House Wife	Deeper Life Bible Church, Opposite zuma Royal Tumfure	16/10/2023
13.	Mrs. Funke Joshua	F	57yrs	Business woman	The Gospel Faith Mission International, Labour Quarters.	17/10/2023
14.	Dr. Chris Laima	M	47yrs	Clergy/Medical Doctor	Reconciliation Christian Centre, Hasidu Estate.	17/10/2023