

Penteco/charismatic worldview of prosperity theology

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the penteco/charismatic concept of material blessing (material prosperity) using the Circle and Chorkor branches of Perez Chapel International of Ghana and the clergy of 7 other charismatic churches in Ghana. This is of particular interest in this contemporary era considering the fact that today the emphasis on prosperity gospel by many Penteco/charismatic clergy is dwindling the spirituality of the flock. Methodological triangulation was used in data collection. Twenty clergy from ten penteco/charismatic churches were sampled and interviewed. Questionnaires were also administered. The thematic analysis started by looking for patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data and harnessing them into meaningful coding schemes or groups. This was followed by sorting the different codes into potential themes and interpreting them. Findings among others are: the Holy Spirit is an indispensable factor in material wealth creation; God is the sole architect of a good prosperity; material prosperity is meant to be used for God's glory. It was also found out that many of the penteco/charismatic church members are materially poor and this is contrary to the prosperity theology of the churches in question.

Keywords: Church, penteco/charismatic.

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INTRODUCTION

Prosperity theology, sometimes referred to as the prosperity gospel, the health and wealth gospel, or the gospel of success is a Christian religious doctrine that financial blessing is the will of God for Christians, and that faith, positive speech, and donations to Christian ministries will always increase one's material wealth. Proponents of material prosperity teach the laws of faith (Robins, 2010:81) and the laws of divine reciprocity ('give and it will be given back unto you'). To them, if humans have faith in God, He (God) will deliver His promises of security and prosperity to them. Confessing these promises to be true is perceived as an act of faith, which God will honor. Normally, Penteco/charismatic churches are encouraged to speak positive statements about aspects of their lives that they wish to see improved. These statements, known as positive confessions, are said to miraculously change aspects of people's lives if spoken with faith (Brown 2011, p.88). Penteco/charismatic churches encourage people to "live without limits"(Walton, 2009) and cultivate optimism about their lives (Omri, 2011:45). T. D. Jakes, pastor of the Potter's House non-denominational mega-church, has argued in

favor of prosperity, rejecting what he sees as the demonization of success. He views poverty as a barrier to living a Christian life, suggesting that it is easier to make a positive impact on society when one is affluent (Clifton, 2009:199).

Hunt (2000:332) posits that prosperity theology asserts that Christians are entitled to well-being and, because physical and spiritual realities are seen as one inextricably intertwined reality, this is interpreted as physical health and economic prosperity. Wealth is interpreted in prosperity theology as a blessing from God, obtained through a spiritual law of positive confession, visualisation, and donations (Wilson, 2007:141-142). This process is often taught in almost mechanical terms (Coleman, 2000:28). Kenneth Copeland argues that prosperity is governed by laws (Coleman 2000:30), while other teachers portray the process formulaically (Hunt, 2000). However, poverty and illness are cast as curses which can be broken by faith (visualisation and positive confession) and righteous actions (Jenkins, 2006). Leaders of the movement view the atonement (reconciliation with God) also as providing for the

alleviation of sickness, poverty, and spiritual corruption (Hunt, 2000). Coleman (2000) maintains that proponents of the doctrine emphasize personal empowerment, promoting a positive view of the spirit and body. They maintain that Christians have been given power over creation because they are made in the image of God and teach that positive confession allows Christians to exercise dominion over their souls and material objects around them. There are, however, some prosperity churches which seek a more moderate or reformed paradigm of prosperity (Brown, 2011). Joel Osteen's teaching is often described as a moderate form of prosperity theology (Chu and Van, 2006). However, the teaching of Kenneth Hagan has been described as the most orthodox form of faith prosperity teaching (Brown, 2011:152).

Walton (2009) holds the view that the prosperity theology teaches its adherents positive confession; that is, (the doctrine that believers may claim whatever they desire from God, simply by speaking it) emanate from its proponents view of Scripture. The Bible is therefore seen as an evidence of contract between God and believers. It is within the Bible that God has promised prosperity for believers, whereby God is seen to be Honest and Just, so believers must satisfy their part of the contract in order to receive God's promises.

Believers satisfy their part by expressing their faith in God and making positive confession that is, speaking in faith what God has already spoken about them. Positive confession is practiced to bring about what is already believed in; faith itself is a confession, and speaking it brings it into reality.

Patterson and Rybarczyk (2007) in their prosperity theology argue that biblical promises of blessings awaiting the poor have been unnecessarily spiritualized, and should be understood literally. Prosperity theology casts itself as the reclamation of true doctrine and thus part of a path to Christian dominion over secular society (Coleman, 2000). It contends that God's promises of prosperity and victory to Israel in the Old Testament apply to New-Covenant Christians today, and that faith and holy actions release this prosperity (Coleman 2000:28).

Cotterell (1993:3) holds the view that prosperity is not biblical but rather associated with the new age movements. He says, 'It is gnostics; it claims esoteric wisdom which is not found in other strands of Christianity and some 'element of charismatic movements along with other parts of evangelical church, through their disdain of scholarship have become permeated with it'. McConnell (1995) had demonstrated with irresistible scholarship that the roots of prosperity theology with all its manifestation are to be found in the teachings of Kenneth Hagan of Rhema Bible Institute in Tulsa – Oklahoma.

African Penteco/characteristic churches attempt to appropriate the pentecostal understanding of Christianity against the background of African spirituality (Onyinah,

2006). In many parts of Africa, there is still the strong belief that material prosperity or curses are etiologically supernatural, that is, material prosperity is a divine blessing which results from obedience to God, faithful payment of tithes, giving to the poor, working hard, walking in humility, being a responsible family person and so on and so forth Larbi (2001). Again, they believe that the skilful use of one's gifts and talent can all contribute to one's prosperity. However the key to unlock the supernatural blessings of God is living holy life and paying one's tithes. Penteco/charismatic churches believe that healing, liberty, freedom, happiness, peace, long life are components of salvation. So as soon as one receives salvation in Christ, one is privileged to have these blessing if other principles are followed. Larbi (2001) quotes Pentsil, the foremost Bible teacher of the Church of Pentecost: 'God's will is to prosper His children (Phil. 4:19, 3 Jn. 2) but this is contingent to the following factors:

- (i) Obeying God's Word (Deut. 38:1-2)
- (ii) Faithful tithing (Mal. 3:8-10, Luke 6:38)
- (iii) Giving (Acts 20:35)
- (iv) Prayer (Phil 4:6-7)
- (v) Working hard (2 Thes. 3:10-12)
- (vi) Partnership with God (1 Cor. 3:9)

Although the book of Malachi is seen as fundamental for addressing the message about the Messiah, proponent of prosperity theology frequently draw attention to its descriptions of physical wealth, Jenkins (2006). Malachi 3:10: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (KJV).

Hunt (2000) affirms that the scriptures supporting the need for the Christian to prosper include: Philipians 4:19: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus". Coleman (2000) in support to the above position quotes 3 John 2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (KJV), Matthew 25:14–30: about the Parable of the talents, and John 10:10: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (KJV).

Penteco/charismatic churches place strong emphasis on the importance of giving and leaders often bestow a specific blessing on the money being donated, some have even been reported to instruct worshipers to hold their donations above their heads during the prayer (Klassen, 2009:133).

Justification and research objectives

The distinction between Christian prosperity and material

prosperity is not clear. Christian prosperity is perceived to be Christianisation of worldly materialism and the Holy Spirit (or God) is used to endorse and solidify modern vulgar individual materialism in the name of theology of prosperity which is given biblical justification. It is very dangerous to equate material prosperity with salvation which is essentially spiritual although it has a material dimension. This paper seeks to suggest the urgent need for the Penteco/charismatic leadership to open up for collaborations, calibrations and mutual learning and action to regulate and streamline the overstretched prosperity gospel delivered from the pulpits in order to avert the dangers associated with it. This paper aims to address the weaknesses in prosperity gospel by Penteco/charismatics leaders and re-orient the church members with the knowledge that prosperity is a gift from God and must be used for the course of the kingdom of God's business as opposed to amassing wealth for personal aggrandisement and thus making the believer materialistic which is opposed to Christian ethics and detrimental to his/her salvation in Christ.

METHODOLOGY

The type of study was longitudinal comparative study with the use of a different case. Methodological triangulation was used. Triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in findings. It is one of the several rational for multi-method research. An early reference to triangulation was in relation to the idea of unobtrusive method proposed by Webb et al. (1966), who suggested, "Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement process, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced. Denzin (1970) extended the idea of triangulation beyond the conventional association with research methods and designs. He distinguished four forms of triangulation: Data triangulation - which entails gathering data through several sampling strategies so that sources of data at different times and social situations, as well as a variety of people, are gathered. Investigator triangulation: refers to the use of more than one researcher in the field to gather and interpret data.

The meaning of triangulation may also include the combined use of quantitative and qualitative research to determine how far convergent findings are arrived at. For example, the use of structured interviews and focus group discussion (Hughes et al., 1997). Triangulation adds utility in terms of adding a sense of richness and complexity to an enquiry; a devise for enhancing the credibility and persuasiveness of a research account.

Generally, a qualitative design employing unstructured interviews was used since that permits a means of generating a rich comprehension of how the Penteco/charismatic believer interprets and provides feedback to prosperity issues commonly understood as prosperity gospel, but may in actual fact be open to alternative interpretation. Questionnaires were also used. Badu-Nyarko (2011) cited in Kumekpor (1995), define questionnaire as a form of document containing a number of questions on a particular theme, problem, issue or opinion to be investigated. It helps researchers to be able to generate numbers, percentages and graphs to boost interpretation of data generated.

At the Perez Chapel International of both the Circle and Chorkor branches, nine clergy were face-to-face interviewed. In addition, five members of the nine were engaged in focus group discussions. Four questions were asked namely: What is your churches concept

of the believers' material prosperity? What is the source of material prosperity? How is material prosperity to be used? and what are the role and functions of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Pentecostal/charismatic believer.

In addition, 200 questionnaires were administered to 200 members of the Perez Chapel International. All the questionnaires were completed and retrieved. It was distributed over the two branches of the Church in question namely: Circle branch and Chorkor branch and the clergy of both branches. The circle branch was selected because that was where the church first started in Accra (Ghana) and also was the headquarters of the church before it was later relocated to Dzorwulu branch. In addition, it was a growing church with a population of about 600 in the year 2003 when the research was conducted. Also, proximity to the base of the researcher was considered. 140 questionnaires were administered to the members and 10 to the clergy. The Chorkor branch was chosen because I wanted to find out whether a church located in a poor environment could influence the perception of the people about the role of the Holy Spirit and material prosperity. For example, the Chorkor environment was characterized by illiteracy, poverty and social vices. The units of analysis were intentionally selected because of the above characteristics. The Chorkor church members were sixty (60) in number and questionnaires were administered to 50 members of the church. All the questionnaires were completed and retrieved.

The questions revolved around how they view the role and functions of the Holy Spirit in the following areas: i). moral and spiritual transformation; ii) healing, deliverance and protection; iii). Prosperity and felicity; iv) Leadership direction; v) Evangelism and prayers; vi) knowledge and guidance, and vii) Operating spiritual gifts.

Besides, the aforementioned interviews and questionnaires which were administered to only the said branches of Perez chapel international in the year 2003, I conducted interviews in 2013 among a set of eleven (11) charismatic clergy (enrolled in Central University College) in relation to their views on blessing/prosperity. Their ages range between twenty years and fifty years. Three of them were within thirty years and eight of them above thirty. Eight of them were married and the other three unmarried. Five of them were reading Church Administration course and six of them reading theology in the University. Four of them were pastors in the Central Gospel Church and the other seven were pastors from one of the following churches: International God's Way Church, Ringway World Vision Charismatic Liberty Chapel, Sacred Action Chapel, Well of Salvation Ministry, Lighthouse Chapel and Throne of Hope Gospel Chapel, all in Ghana. The age of these churches range between four to twenty five years. The churches are located within Accra, Kasua, Kibi and Volta region in Ghana.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to develop themes from the interview responses. This method of analysis is used to identify, analyse and report patterns within data as well as interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006). One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility and can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data collection and analysis were interconnected, inextricably linked dialectical function, which is insightful, convenient and helps in building theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The thematic analysis started by looking for patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data and harnessing them into meaningful coding schemes or groups. This was followed by sorting the different codes into potential themes. Themes were finally refined, defined, logical connections established between them and interpreted. Data from questionnaire administered were also analysed using descriptive statistics; the use of numbers,

percentages and graphs. The use of this instrument is for its relative confidentiality and convenience.

RESULTS

When I interviewed nine charismatic clergy (senior pastors, over twenty years experience in ministry) of the Perez Chapel International and 11 clergy enrolled in Central University College on their concept of material blessing, source of material prosperity, how material prosperity is used. The following themes were derived for analysis:

Theme 1: Conceptualising prosperity

Theme 2: Agency of prosperity

Theme 3: Functionality of prosperity

Conceptualizing prosperity

At the Perez Chapel International- formerly The Word Miracle Church, participants (the clergy) expressed their views on prosperity as illustrated below:

“it is biblical for the believer to live a prosperous life because prosperous life gives glory to God and so the church members should not live a life of mediocrity but live the life of abundance and be thinking big all the time” (Clergy 1).

Another participant in the same church corroborated thus:

“The church is a militant church, that means, it is a strong church; strong in all dimensions including financial strength. For the church to engage in social responsibility activities like making donations for charity purpose, taking care of the poor and the needy, building clinics, hospitals, schools in addition to building chapels and mission houses, organizing crusades and international conferences and many other activities, the church must necessarily be rich; not only spiritually rich but also materially rich”.

Some of the participants differed on a popular opinion that the more spiritual a person is, the less likely he or she will be in pursuit of material blessings thus resulting in poverty. For example in the opinion of clergy 7:

“It is perceived by some people that the more spiritual one is, the more he/she does not think about material blessing or does not need material blessings. So to such people, closeness to God necessarily makes one poor and to such people that is ‘spirituality’. This is seen to be erroneous and unbiblical theology which must be frowned at and rejected by all believers (clergy 7).

Other participant echoes the view as expressed below:

‘People think that sound spirituality is characterised by poverty and that people say Jesus did not have a place to lay His head during His ministry on this earth; and so prosperity has nothing to do with Christianity. People who think that way are myopic in their analysis in that they skip over an occasion in the Bible where Jesus invited the disciples of John the Baptist to His home (His dwelling place)’. Also, they are ignorant about the fact that Jesus sometimes organised His meeting in the upper room- relatively the best place. Jesus could feed 5000 of people with 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes with 12 basket collected from the crumbs. This indicates Jesus’s power over material blessings. In addition, Jesus could just instruct one of His disciples to go to the lake and take a gold from the mouth of any of the fish that he reaches his hand to so that they could pay their tax. And that was done (clergy 5).

Another participant still from the church in question indicated that:

Although some argued that Jesus did not use any car in His time, it is counter argued that such people never considered the issues of time and development. In Jesus’ time there was no vehicle. Technological development has so improved overtime such that it has become convenient and comfortable to use some of these products of development to enhance work performance work today When Jesus had to use a donkey for the triumphant entry, he used the one that no one had used it before. Jesus believed in big things.’ (clergy 6).

It is from this view that Penteco/charismatic think that Jesus who wields control over wealth, could equally bestow material blessings on His following.

Results of 11 clergy interviewed at Central University College

Table 1 shows the 11 clergy at Central University College on how prosperity is measured and experienced.

On the question: What is a blessing? A participant responded:

‘Blessing is seen as a divine favour, materially or spiritually given to a believer so that he/she can have a purposeful, comfortable and successful life and be a blessing to others in order for God to receive the glory; this blessing could sometimes be marked with suffering or persecution or affliction (Interviewer 1).

When they were asked to mention some blessings, all of

Table 1. Views of 11 clergy at Central University College on how prosperity is measured and experienced.

Items	Respondents	Those who live them	Percentage (shortfall)
Houses	11	3	72
Cars	10	1	90
Money	9	4	56
Children	9	4	56
Good wife	6	5	16.6
Health total	6	5	16.6

them – eleven of them (11) mentioned owing a house. Ten (10) of them mentioned owing a car(s). Nine (9) of them stated having children and money. Six (6) of them mentioned good wife and good health. So they measure blessings by the number of houses, cars, money, children, good wife, good health that one has. *None of them stated a spiritual blessing.*

On the question: Are blessings for some special people? All the interviewees (11) believed that blessings are for all believers. However, a participant remarked:

‘some may be more blessed than others based on one’s faith level, knowledge of one’s position in Christ, relationship with God and commitment to task or duty’ (Interviewer 2).

In percentages terms, 72%, 90% and 56% and another 56% of the respondents lacked ownership of house(s), car(s) and adequate money and children respectively. So it means many of them are poor, lacked material blessings. This is inconsistent with their prosperity theology preached. However, 83.4% of them indicated good health and have a good wife. *The findings depict that after 10 years had elapsed (between 2003 and 2013). Penteco/charismatics churches still have similar behavioural characteristics and experience about their views on prosperity and the challenges in living it.*

From the results, we may reflect on some few things: Could their lack of prosperity be attributable to disobedience, unbelief or ignorance of how to appropriate material prosperity? Is it also possible that their time for material breakthrough is not up? Could it also be that God may be testing their faith so that when they pass, He will let them realize their blessing or is it a means to keep them from the temptation of arrogance and pride of this life? Or is it also possible that they have not prepared themselves to receive God’s material prosperity? Is it also God’s means to let them suffer so that He could prove His sovereignty in order for His people to give Him glory by the testimonies they give? Or could it be a curse that must be broken so they will be set free and be blessed?

When they were asked to mention ten things that are not a blessing, 92% of the respondents asserted that

sickness is not a blessing; 82% and 55% also maintained that poverty and premature death are not a blessing. The question to ask is, are they curses? if sickness, poverty and premature death are curses then all Christians plagued with any of them or suffering from any of them, need to go through deliverance in order to experience blessings. Gifford (1998) asserts that a Christians’ progress and advancement could be hindered by demons who maintain some control over them despite their coming to Christ. They may not be aware of the causes of the hindrances and it may be through no fault of theirs that they are under the sway of a particular demon. Larbi (2001) quoting Addai Mensah in an interview said, ‘the necessity of deliverance goes beyond being born again and speaking in tongues. He quotes John 11:44 where Lazarus was called to life but was still bound and must be loosened (delivered). Owusu Tabri cites a biblical example, Luke 16: 19-31 to support the above position. In that story, Lazarus reached heaven but Abraham who received him was very materially blessed when on earth (Genesis 24:1), while Lazarus had a miserable life. Tabri therefore pointed out that all believers must be blessed like Abraham but that must be possible after going through deliverance (Larbi, 2001).

On the question, Will God allow curses to befall His children, a respondent commented:

‘God would not intentionally place curses on His children but may allow unpleasant things to befall them when they consistently disobey Him. However, when they continue to trust Him, He will come to their aid and deliver them’.

The case of Job was cited. One of the interviewees said yes:

“ if God’s children walk in disobedience, sometimes misfortunes will come upon them as a consequence of their bad deeds”. Again, another interviewee said, ‘ yes - because sometimes God uses that to show His sovereignty to allow His children have great testimonies or test them to draw them closer to Him’.

One respondent said, “no!. God does not allow us to go through suffering resulting from curses because Jesus paid for the suffering so that believers do not have to go through sufferings. Under the dispensation of grace, God will not place curses or wilfully allow misfortunes or evil to afflict His people or allow evil spirits to torment them unless they consistently disobey Him. Even in a case like this, God will not allow the evil spirit to just continue to afflict His children if they quickly realise their mistakes and repent of them and ask His forgiveness and deliverance. However, if His children are consistently obedient to Him, walk carefully, He may allow the devil to afflict them temporarily for a purpose while providing them with grace to endure and eventually restore them with double portion.

Job’s case was cited as an example. In this case, God provides strength to His people so they could endure and overcome the enemy. Rewards beyond measure are then given to such children of the Lord. It is also important to point out that suffering must not be decoupled from Christian life. Although, suffering is opposed to God’s beneficence, He sometimes permits it in the life of His children so that He could deliver them and promote them based on the lessons they gain from the suffering. This means, if a Christian goes through suffering at certain times in his/her life that does not necessarily mean, God has denied him/her of blessings. Again, that may not also mean necessarily that he/she has sinned or lacks faith and that is why he/she is under a curse or suffering.

Agency in prosperity

This theme examines the participants’ views regarding the role of certain spiritual agents in the process of acquiring material blessings. I examined their views on the Divine (e.g., the Holy Spirit, God and prophecy from a man of God).

Participants of Perez Chapel International maintain that the Holy Spirit plays a very significant role in the believers’ efforts to acquire material blessings. This means the Holy Spirit guides, encourages, helps and reveals to the believer what he/she ought to do in order to prosper materially. The voice below expresses it:

‘Certainly, the Holy Spirit plays very significant role in our material prosperity (clergy 1). Another participant indicated, “With regards to Christians, prosperity is hard work plus the Holy Spirit” (clergy 2). A member of the group discussion also said, ‘I have been taught by the Holy Spirit in terms of what business to enter into, the tricks of the trade and when I obeyed, I have prospered tremendously (clergy 3).

One of the participants also remarked:

“The Holy Spirit has been good to me as a clergy,

in fund raising. He discusses an event, ‘One day I had a clear-cut check of the Holy Spirit to organise a crusade, which was captioned “Mega Crusade” I did not doubt the voice of the Spirit but obeyed and organised the crusade. At the end of the day, the programmes was really great, and people were asking how could this small district organise such an expensive crusade and I answered them, ‘it was the work of the Holy Spirit.’ He added, ‘sometimes, the Holy Spirit reveals to me things which are yet to come. One of the things the Holy Spirit has been doing is that He drops a big vision into my heart and then He outlines strategies that I should employ to realise the vision and normally, the results have been fantastic”. He continued: “During one fund raising event, the Holy Spirit specifically told me to select a certain person to lead the programme and at the end the day, millions of cedi were raised from just a few people around”. Simply put, it is the Holy Spirit who provides the need of the church of Jesus Christ (clergy 4).

The findings also revealed that participants attribute their material prosperity to God. This means etiologically, God is the originator, the maker and the distributor of good wealth, material blessing to His people. As could be seen from the participant’s narrative below:

‘God has planned prosperity for us as shown in 3 John 2 where John admonishes that he wishes above everything that we will prosper and be in good health as our souls prospereth (clergy 5).

One of the clergy also said,

‘even though we believe that God has planned prosperity for us, we see it as ‘conditional’ in that one’s prosperity level depends on the extent that he/she serves God’ (clergy 4).

Corroborating this, clergy 6 said,

‘it is by this reason that God saw in advance to prosper us if we are obedient to Him and work hard’.

Quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 clergy 7 said,

‘...God gives us power to make wealth. Not wealth to chase after women or to live a selfish, luxurious life, but for the propagation of the gospel.

Obviously, this prosperity will reflect in the day-to-day life style of the believer too (clergy 7).

Clergy 8 also narrated:

“Bible talks about prosperity so I also believe God

Table 2. Results from questionnaire administration on the role and functions of the Holy Spirit in the lives of members and pastors of Perez chapel International.

The Holy Spirit's role the believers' lives	Chorkor branch (%)	Circle branch (%)	Pastors (%)
Moral and spiritual transformation	21	24	26.1
Knowledge and guidance	18	26.3	21.7
Healing, deliverance and protection	17	14.2	26.1
Operating spiritual gifts	12	13.1	4.3
Evangelism and prayers	12	3.3	8.6
Leadership direction	10	12	13.0
Prosperity and felicity	11.6	6.6	0
Total	100	100	100

is the source of blessing, which also extends prosperity to His church today. Upon studying issues concerning prosperity of God's Kingdom, I came to realize that God wants me to prosper; I have seen God's prosperity in my life in terms of finance; I was working somewhere in Nigeria sometime ago and God brought me His divine favour of prosperity and now I am a prosperous person" (clergy 8).

During a focus group discussion (with 5 clergy of the circle branch of Perez chapel church) on the source of prosperity, one respondent said,

'For the unbeliever, prosperity is equal to hard work (that hard work brings prosperity). And even some consult the occult for material prosperity. But to us, apart from God who is the source of good prosperity, others who are not believers think and believe that man's hard work and also consulting the occult for wealth, bring prosperity. But it is the prosperity from God which is a true prosperity that humanity may have to ask the Lord for.

A prophetic word from a man of God was also viewed as a major agent of prosperity by the participants. For example, one participant said:

At Perez Chapel International, I met one who came into the church without a job or car to mention a few but now God has so blessed him. The man received a prophetic word from the Bishop (the founder of the Perez International Chapel) in 1999 about a car and within no time, God gave it to him (clergy 8).

On the question of whether they have to work for their material prosperity or God has to give it to them, all the clergy interviewed at Central University believed that God was a key factor in their blessings.

A respondent said,

'I did nothing at all to receive the blessings.

Another participant said although I work very hard, it is God who will prosper me'.

From Table 2 (findings), with regards to the views of the members and pastors on prosperity and felicity, 11.6%, 6.6% and 0% were registered at Chorkor branch, Circle branch and the pastors, respectively. The question to ask is what is used to measure prosperity/ material blessings? Is it the number of cars, houses, buildings, companies that one owns, money in one's bank account, and number of children? This is a significant question because although members at Chorkor branch appeared poor: did not own their own vehicles, did not dress gorgeously, did not live in expensive homes, were not in big time business, yet in terms of percentage contribution, they responded positively the evidence of the divinity in their material prosperity more than those at Circle branch and for the clergy where the researcher saw them wearing very expensive dresses and also observed over 60 vehicles parked during every Sunday service. Again, there appears to be inconsistency regarding the pastors who preach the theology of prosperity and yet recorded 0% for prosperity and felicity when it comes to where they see the evidence of Holy Spirit in their lives. However, we can also explain this to mean that although they may be financially alright they value other areas they experience the work of the Holy Spirit activity more than the subject of prosperity and felicity. Again, ranking prosperity and felicity among seven (7) items were the Holy Spirit could be experienced in the life of the members, prosperity and felicity placed sixth (6th) position at both Chorkor and Circle branch and seventh (7th) position, (last) among the clergy as shown by the Table 1 findings. These findings are paradoxical, diametrically opposed to their concept of prosperity.

Functionality of prosperity

Participants have the impression that the extent to which the church prospers financially determines its ability to engage in various outreaches and soul winning

programmes.

In other words, lack of funds can stifle the church's evangelistic activities and successes. The narrative below reflects the above position:

'Bible records that it is through prosperity that the work of God will spread abroad.

A typical example is when Bishop Agyin Asare had a crusade in Ukraine as far back before 2003 where the host church had to absorb all the cost for air ticket (for about 10 Reverend ministers), hotel bills and other costs. It was clear that a poor church would not have been able to organise a programme like this. Another example is the cost incurred for Matthew Ashimolowo to organise a conference in other parts of the world including Ghana. For example, some years ago, he organised one at Kaneshie complex (in Ghana) and many souls were blessed at the expense of very huge financial spending (clergy 6). In fact, churches that are poor are not making headway and it applies to individual Christians who are poor. For instance, churches like Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, The Church of Pentecost, International Central Gospel Church and some others are prosperous; and that is why they have been able to build schools including universities, hospitals and other social amenities (clergy 6).

During a focus group discussion (with 5 clergy at Perez chapel) on the issue of the uses of material prosperity, all of them maintained that, while the unbeliever uses his/her wealth for worldly things, the Christian's wealth must be used to glorify God as expressed by clergy 12 thus:

"it is God who has given it (prosperity) to us and so we have to use it for His glory" (clergy 12).

Another clergy said,

"we are accountable to God in all things and so we must use the wealth he has given us wisely for His glory".

One clergy a student of School of Theology and Missions among those interviewed said,

'because God is rich, he has made us too rich so that we use it for His glory'.

Another participant from the same school also narrated:

'God is prospering us so that we can lead a descent life here on earth'.

DISCUSSIONS

From the issues raised above, it could be established that

the penteco/charismatic believers have strong belief that God's package for His children is prosperity. This notion reflects in certain commands from God where He commands the Christians to bring their tithes to the church so that He will open the windows of heaven to bless them until they have no place to accommodate them (Mal. 3). Christians have been commanded in many areas of the Bible to give to people who are in need and more especially towards God's work so that God will be so moved to bless the work of their hands. From the literature and field work information gathered, we see that the charismatic church members believe in the prosperity gospel. Paul Gifford summarises the essentials of this gospel: 'The essential point of prosperity is that prosperity of all kinds is the right of every Christian. God wants a Christian to be wealthy. True Christianity necessarily means wealth, it inevitably brings wealth. Conversely, poverty indicates personal sin, or at least a deficient faith or inadequate understanding (Larbi, 2001 cited in Gifford 1990)'. Gifford sees prosperity gospel as abundant life gospel which includes financial blessing, fertility, health, protection, good wife and children, long life.

A few questions could be raised with regards to Gifford's statement above. Is material wealth the goal of Christianity? or it is meant for one to improve his/her relationship with his/her creator on daily basis? Does true Christianity mean no sin at all? Or does God look at one's sin to deny him of blessings or permit the devil to harass his business or work life? Is it the level of one's faith that causes him/her to be poor or rich? Or what faith level will qualifies one to attain riches and how can that faith be measured since faith is an intangible element?

In actual fact, God desires and plans for the prosperity of His children but the realisation of this although, man plays a good role, is actually God's will for man that prevails.

For instance, if God sees one a good candidates to be able to manage wealth according to His purpose then He will give it to him/her; but this does not mean one leaves other principles like faithfulness and honesty, generosity/giving, hardworking and the use of wisdom to grow the wealth, undone. This means, if a Christian is not rich or wealthy in material sense it does not mean he/she has a sin problem or lacks faith or lacks understanding of the Scriptures per se. We have genuinely good Christians – living in holiness, who pay their tithes, have faith in God, and are not prosperous at the moment. God does not also necessarily make one rich just because he/she pays tithes correctly. Besides, becoming a Christian does not automatically usher one into material blessing. Material blessings are not the goal of Christianity. There is also a dimension of blessings that is spiritual, not tangible that the Christian must pursue. Lack of knowledge of this has caused others to be frustrated, disappointed and depressed in the church. I argue that prosperity has more spiritual connotation and value than physical and until believers really realise the purpose and

the goal for God prospering His children, some who are blessed materially will abuse them and those who are not yet prospered may also be frustrated, jealous and envious of others. Despite this caution, several Penteco/charismatic leaders have forcefully pushed forth the prosperity message to their adherent.

Larbi (2001) quotes Michael Essel concerning his views on prosperity:

‘the blessing of God came upon Abraham and made him rich! The Bible did not say Abraham became rich spiritually; you see, when God blesses you, that blessing will show in every aspect of your life, even as far as material possessions are concerned. Listen! The times are changing! The time when believers were looked down upon, considered as downtrodden and nobodies in society are past and gone! The time has come for people to look at believes and look at them twice! God is blessing His people, and that blessing is causing them to prosper. Prosperity has powerful effect of transforming an individual who is poor to become rich (Prov. 10:32). God wants above all things to prosper us and be in good health even as our souls prosper 3 John 2. If God did not want us to prosper, why should He teach us how to prosper? God want us to proper in our marital life, child upbringing, profession, business and any other part of our lives’ (Larbi, 2001).

It is against this background that the former president of the Ghana Pentecostal Council, S.B. Asore, in 1989, cautioned the clergy to be careful of the prosperity gospel which was eating into the Christian belief of the charismatic. He asked that this must be regulated in order to maintain the nobleness of the task of the clergy (Larbi, 2001). Again, it is due to the overstretch of property gospel that , mainstream evangelicalism has consistently opposed prosperity theology; and prosperity ministries have frequently come into conflict with other Christian groups, including those within the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements (Coleman, 2000). Prominent evangelical leaders, such as Rick Warren, Ben Witherington III, and Jerry Falwell have harshly criticised the movement, sometimes denouncing it as heretical. Warren proposes that prosperity theology promotes the idolatry of money, and others argue that Jesus' teachings indicate a disdain for material wealth. Other critics of the movement assail promises made by its leaders, arguing that the broad freedom from problems they promise is irresponsible (Coleman, 2000). Church leaders are often criticized for abusing the faith of their parishioners by enriching themselves through large donations. Prosperity theology has been opposed for not adequately explaining the poverty of the Apostles. The life and writings of Paul the Apostle, who is believed to have experienced

significant suffering during his ministry provides a conflict between Christian suffering and prosperity theology (Ciampa and Rosner, 2010).

The Lausine Theology working group however, in its evaluation of the prosperity theology does recognize... ‘that there are some dimensions of prosperity teaching that have roots in the Bible. We do not wish to be exclusively negative and we recognize the appealing social realities within which this teaching flourishes the measure of hope it holds to desperate people. However, while acknowledging such positive features, it is our overall view that the teaching of those who most vigorously promote the prosperity gospel are false and gravely distorting the Bible, that their practice is often unethical and unchristlike, and that the impact on many churches is pastorally damaging, spiritually unhealthy and not only offers no lasting hope, but may even deflect people from the message and the means of eternal salvation. In such dimensions it can be soberly described as a false gospel (Kasera, 2012, cited in Kubsch 2010:3)

Asamoah (2004) also maintains that some quarters of the Christian circles, the Holy Spirit or God is being used to endorse or solidify modern vulgar individual materialism in the name of theology of prosperity which is given biblical justification. It appears the distinction between Christian prosperity and material prosperity is not clear. Christian's prosperity is perceived to be Christianisation of worldly materialism. It is very dangerous to equate material prosperity with salvation which is essentially spiritual although it has a material dimension. Evangelization and Christian worship as commitments to Christ our Saviour cannot be equated with those enticed by miracles and prosperity. How many will remain in the church if there were not material prosperity? Love for, reverence for and adoration of the world and its mammon appears to be given justification as blessing from salvation. It is important that this view is regulated and rather believers be more prepared and oriented toward the life beyond, which is spiritual and eternal. Nevertheless, it is God's will that believers prosper; and this is to be used for God's glory and purpose but not to satisfy one's personal interest or for self glory (Asamoah, 2004).

Jones and Russell (2011) have characterised in their book *Health, Wealth and Happiness*, the ‘prosperity’ doctrine as ‘poor theology’. They suggest that righteousness cannot be earned and that the Bible does not promise an easy life. They argue that it is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus and propose that the central message of the gospel should be Jesus' life, death, and resurrection (Jones and Russell, 2011). Jones and Woodbridge see Jesus' importance as vital, criticizing the prosperity gospel for marginalizing him in favour of a focus on human need (Jones and Russell, 2011).

It is also important to mention that although the church believes in and teaches about blessing, prosperity, and some even claim to have experienced it through the

power of the Holy Spirit, yet practically, most of the members do not see prosperity being made manifest in their lives; others do not rate prosperity as a priority.

Although working very hard is an important principle in getting blessed, it is important for all believers to realise that whatever blessings they acquire it is not from their hard work but God's grace. Thomas (1998) cited in Onyinah (2006) has shown that grace in 2 Corinthians is that which the Lord gives to believers in order that they can benefit from Jesus' redemptive sacrifice for their sins (2 Corinthians 5:21), minister to others financially (2 Cor. 8:1-7, 0:14) and be provided with those things they need (2 Cor. 9:8).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The paradigm shift from preaching salvation message, healing the sick and driving out demons to prosperity gospel by Penteco/charismatic in order to help them improve their standard of living, leads to distress as church members might struggle to acquire more wealth in life which may not be achievable.

With its ostensible unsophisticated message that puts strong emphasis on material, divine health and happiness made possible through faith, positive confession, faithful tithing and giving to the man of God (Kasera, 2010 cited in Gifford, 2007), it appeals to various groups of people. Thus it also draws non-Christians who believe that they stand a sure chance of becoming successful in life if they were first to take the step of believing in terms Christ (Kasera 2012, cited in Piper, 2007). On the other hand, Chacko (2010) criticises the prosperity theology for its theology and hermeneutics, and while he is pleased with the humanitarian acts of some of its components, he dismisses their methods of raising funds as unscriptural and unethical. The Institute for Global Engagement believes that prosperity theology growth cultivates a commercial style of faith and serves as a platform for propagating the destructive consumerism, and capitalism of the Western societies. MacArthur (1992) calls us to reject this kind of theology because those who promote it are false teachers and make promises that are not taught in scripture. There is much that is already ours, spiritual triumphs to enjoy for which we give unending thanks. But there is also much that we do not yet possess, blessings that are referred for the age to come. This is not always easy to discern. When should we by faith confidently claim our inheritance and when we should, in humility embrace the weakness of living in a fallen world? (Kasera, 2012 cited in Storms, 2007).

The Scriptures indicate that God promises He would bless His people materially if they walk in obedience to His Word. However, He would discipline them, reducing them to very poor status if they keep disobeying Him (Deut. 28). The Jews believed that riches were a sure sign of God's blessing for man. So the Jews attached

importance to prosperity as an indication of God's blessing. In Christ's day, the highest goal in the life of a Jew was to amass wealth. However, in accumulating treasures on this earth, there is the danger that one will love what is accumulated here on earth instead of God. There is therefore the danger that while one becomes material wealth inclined; he may be deemed sinful from biblical perspective. Christ therefore taught that it is impossible to serve two masters. Meaning, if one is pursuing material things with all his heart, he cannot concurrently pursue after God. The opposite is also true.

However, if the believer serves God diligently, he cannot be enslaved by material blessing, and this is the point where God wants material blessings to abound on His children (Matt. 6: 19-24). A strong desire for materialism is unethical because it depicts self centredness and lack of faith in God. This means if anyone craves for wealth, he may not see the need to trust God to provide hi/hers needs now and the future. This may be an indictment to God's character (Matt. 6: 25-29). Again, material gains may be lost to attack by thieves, moths, destruction and rust. It is therefore prudent for one to store up treasures in heaven, where it could be secured permanently and eternally. Christians today must be cautioned consistently not to pursue after material wealth; rather must be motivated to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. In addition, believers must engage in an intimate relationship with God and seek Him in-depth, and then based on His will, He may prosper some of the believers beyond measure. However, this prosperity must be seen as God's resources entrusted with the believer that must be managed with much care and used prudently for the course of the kingdom business.

This work captured only a small sample of Penteco/charismatic Clergy of the Perez Chapel International and other clergy who were having theological training at the Central University College in Accra. Future studies should include the clergy from other Christian strands such as Historic mission churches and the Neo-prophetic ministries. Future studies should also consider the perspectives of other faith and religious group leaders such as the Yoga, Buddhist and Islam regarding their perspective of prosperity and what they teach their followings.

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