

Prosperity Gospel in Kenyan Urban Centres: Come, See, Pay and Receive Your Miracles and Healing

Prof. Jude J. Ongong'a

Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya.

Email: jude.ongonga@yahoo.com

Prof. Stephen I. Akaranga

Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Email: drifedha@yahoo.com (Corresponding author)

Abstract

In this part of the 21st century, the impact of 'New Age' religions created by secularization have exposed the western Christianity to several challenges which seem not only divergent to biblical doctrine but tend to give new image to God. Even here in Kenya, we are not foreign to these challenges. Some of which include; ordination of women, gender mainstreaming, marriage of the same sex, sex scandals of celibate clergy, leadership struggle, corruption and prosperity gospel, to mention but a few. This paper investigates the impact of prosperity gospel, an offshoot of neo-Pentecostalism in Kenyan urban centres with emphasis in Nairobi. This Christian social phenomenon teaches that true Christian faith results in material wealth and physical well-being. It claims that the Bible teaches that financial blessing is the will of God for Christians (vide Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia). That is, instead of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, the centre is occupied by miracles and the improvement of the quality of life, along with temporal blessings from God (Anssi Simojoki, 2002: 272). This explains why the churches associated with prosperity gospel are popular in the eastern side of the city of Nairobi. The main question is whether the prosperity gospel is authentic Christian theology that satisfactorily improves the lives of the faithful? To facilitate our discussion, we have discussed the following four objectives: the origin and background of prosperity gospel, its teachings and impact, to make possible recommendations. The collection of data included both primary and secondary materials. We administered 250 oral interviews. Ninety members from the churches associated with the phenomenon, seventy students from both Kenyatta University and University of Nairobi and ninety adults outside the two categories.

Key words: Prosperity/gospel, Pentecostalism/charismatic, Miracle, Interlocutors, Hermeneutic

1.1 Introduction

Religion, in ways both obvious and subtle is reshaping the world's social and political landscape. Policy makers concerned with schools and educational strategies, crime and punishment all have a need to pay serious attention to the religions in their midst, the values, priorities and ethical obligation can hardly be realized outside the religious influence. This may be more so today when there is tension between Muslims and Christian West, due to breakdown in aspects of human rights and when violence, invasion and wars are looming all over the globe (see Hinnells 2010:12). 'Doing the right thing' is emotionally vital which commonly involves religious belief and practices even for those who do not consider themselves religious (Spiro et. al 1996, Howarth and Jupp 1996, Irish et al. cited by Hinnells 2010:12). This is probably why, despite predictions of religion's demise since the late 1970's, we are witnessing the growing power of religion in shaping people's public identity.

Discussions on "secularization" and of "post-religious" society have given way to a renewed recognition of religion's influence in people's social and political lives (Luis Lugo 2006:6). There seem to be moments in life when sensitivity relating to religious and cultural values is of greatest significance. For instance, the occasion of death and bereavement. The need for 'a good death', the proper treatment of the body and support for the bereaved, all tend to matter highly to people of any culture (Hinnells, 2010:13). Here in Kenya, the multiplicity of Roho Churches under the banner of Neo-Pentecostalism Christianity is not only a powerful proof of the impact of religion but a rapid change of the expressions of Christianity from what we originally inherited from the 19th century missionary influence.

The cerebral spirituality of Western missionary Christianity which is home-centric has given way to traditional prone forms of worship which underscore divine healing and deliverance, speaking in tongues, baptism of the Holy Spirit, charismatic preaching, dreams, visions, attainment of wealth and success. The Christ of Pentecost is believed to be victorious in that, he does not only heal the sick, cast out demons, raise the dead, but also gives

food to the poor and needy. Kenyans feel “at Home” with him because, he is within the African primal world view and triumphs over all its spiritual entities (Clifford R. Clarke 2006: 20; cf. Anssi Simojoki 2002). The spread of a growing liberalism and a fall in the cost of the mass media have significantly facilitated the growth of Neo-Pentecostalism impact and success in Kenya. Posters and television footage with expressions such as “come and receive your miracle”; “come for healing”; “come and experience the power of Jesus”, “come for solutions to your problems”, announcements of praise, and weekly meetings for miracles are common phenomena in Kenyan Urban centres.

Job seekers, women longing to have children, business people, politicians queuing to campaign for parliamentary seats, the sick, candidates for examinations and the vulnerable, all flock to these Neo-Pentecostal miracle meetings. And, to successfully find solutions to one’s own problem, an amount of tithe is readily expected by the preachers. Some preachers have been quoted as saying that the more one pays, the quicker the solution to one’s problem as we shall soon discuss below. It is this pecuniary aspect that inscribes neo-Pentecostalism directly to “the theology of prosperity” which in itself is linked to North American Pentecostalism where wealth is viewed as a sign from God, just as poverty is a sign of sinfulness.

In actualizing our research, we relate the prosperity gospel to the social and economic life of the people. Two theoretical frameworks are hereby briefly analyzed in order to contextualize the role of prosperity gospel as a contemporary social phenomenon. First, is Karl Marx’s (1978) [1844] class conflict theory which is rooted in philosophical materialism. In positing this theory, he emphasized that it is the material existence, especially the economic gain which makes an individual prosper in life. While Max Weber’s (1946) [1915] theory on idealism explains that, the more wealth an individual accumulates, the closer he or she is to the kingdom of heaven. The believers are advised not to spend carelessly. Instead, they should save, invest, gain more and accumulate leading to capitalism. Max Weber was definitely influenced by Calvinism which associated material wealth with God’s blessing and choice of those destined to heaven; one of the current justification for prosperity gospel. This Nevertheless, economic disparity in income can lead to the creation of social classes among the believers. Karl Marx further notes that the poor members in society are likely to save the little that they have in order to pay tithe or help in church development activities. In this way, the poor are impoverished, while the clergy grow richer and live lavishly. The questions which arise are: should the faithful members of the church become poorer in order to inherit the kingdom of heaven? And, should the church ministers get richer at the expense of the laity? This certainly is the trend of today’s variety of Christianity that we refer to as prosperity gospel. But, what then is the origin of this apparently new form or trend of Christianity?

1.2 The Genesis and locale of Prosperity Gospel

In this paper, we prefer to use the term “Neo-Pentecostalism” instead of “traditional Pentecostalism” or “Charismatic”. The term “Pentecostal” refers to the biblical feast of Pentecost which in Judaism was the harvest festival that took place fifty (50) days after Passover. In the New Testament, in the Book of Acts, it is reported that the followers of Jesus who had gathered for the festival, were said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit”. Today, “Pentecostalism” may be defined as that stream of Christianity which emphasizes personal salvation in Christ as a “transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit (Asamoah Gyadu, 2012:1). Following upon the initial experience of the followers of Jesus’ pneumatic phenomena such as speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, healing, miracles and signs and wonders are evidence of the active presence of God’s Spirit (Asamoah Gyadu, 2012 :1). Even though Neo-Pentecostalism is akin to traditional Pentecost, they part ways in that the latter emphasizes the need for sanctification, that is, the forgiveness of sins; whereas the former is preoccupied with miracles and improvement of the quality of life along with temporal blessings from God (Anssi Simojoki, 2002: 272). “Charismatic” on the other hand refers to Christians who have experienced the “in-filling” of the Holy Spirit but who are not members of Pentecostal denominations. “Charismatics” are a more loosely defined group who share many of the experiences that are distinctive to Pentecostalism but remain members of mainstream Protestant, Catholics or Orthodox denominations (Luis Lugo 2006:7). In this way the term “Neo-Pentecostalism” is somewhat a more accurate description of the religious tide that is currently making an impact in Kenya (cf. Anssi Simojiki, 2002:272).

Pentecostalism originally had its root in the Protestant evangelical tradition that goes back to the 18th century revival movement known as the Great Awakening (Robbins, 2004). Earlier forms of evangelical Christianity are associated with the Methodists and Baptists. At inception, these Church affiliated groups emphasized conversion in which believers were not born into a faith, but they voluntarily and emphatically chose their faith. Such choice

created a point of departure in a person's life; the experience often known as being 'born again'. This occurrence, however, became a binary signpost for believers (Saska Sassen, 1998:6).

Although there is a connection between Pentecostalism and European Christian denomination, Neo-Pentecostalism as we know it today originated from North America in 1906 when William Seymour (1870-1977) an African American preacher opened a ministry in a church located on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. In that meeting, for the first time, notwithstanding racial segregation, blacks and whites assembled to worship together ignoring the 'colour line' in the name of revival (vide Michael G. Moriarty 1992:21). It is Seymour's teachings and the Revivalist doctrines that are acknowledged as the precursor of neo-Pentecostalism (cf. Robbin, 2004). Here, at Azusa Street the present common characteristic of Neo-Pentecostal liturgy was for the first time realized and whose mode of worship has been described as follows:

Men and women would shout, weep, dance, fall into trances, speak in tongues and interpret their messages into English. In true Quaker fashion, anyone who felt 'moved by the spirit' would preach or sing. There was no robed choir, no hymnals nor order of service, but there was an abundance of religious enthusiasm (Synan 1971:98).

As this revival movement spread, it became associated with the term 'Pentecostal'. But, the general term today includes; evangelical, charismatic, and fundamentalist as we have pointed above. But, here in Kenya, the common terms include: Pentecostalism, Assemblies of God, Fellowship of God, Faith Churches and Healing Ministries (vide Saskia Sassen 1998). What really makes Pentecostals unique and perhaps controversial is their emphasis on speaking in tongues as the evidence of a second definite work of the spirit available to every believer (Michael G. Moriarty, 1992:20). But how did this North American Neo-Pentecostal movement become a part of Kenyan Christian population?

Like in other parts of Africa, Neo-Pentecostalism may be described as the third wave of Christianity in Kenya (vide Meyer, 2004). The first wave was associated with the missionaries that accompanied colonial administrators. This period lasted almost until the beginning of the First World War. The second wave was marked by African Independent Churches/African Instituted Churches which drew many Kenyans away from established missionary churches during and after both World Wars. It lasted until 1970's and was characterized by indigenization of established churches. Under such local leadership, elements of syncretism began to creep in as parts of African Traditional Religious practices were mixed with the Christian doctrine, especially in the 1960's. But gradually towards the 1980's, the second wave gave way to the third wave. One of the most significant preparatory stages for this third wave Christianity was the arrival of East Africa Revival (EAR) which came to Kenya from Rwanda through Uganda. It drew many Protestants towards evangelical and charismatic Christianity, putting more emphasis on the experience of conversion rather than on religious instruction. This revival made itself more accessible to the illiterate and the poorly educated. Even more, its hymns (and notably the *tukutendeleza* song that gave the East Africa Revival its local name) gathered tremendous success and were often integrated in the ceremonies of other churches. Again, its success depended on the fact that it accorded the lay person an authoritative position (especially women who until now, are freely elected to manage the group (Maupeu, 1998b quoted by Yvan Droz, IFRA-Les Cahiers). Otherwise, the third wave of Christianity here in Kenya, characterized by Neo-Pentecostalism is akin in meaning to claims made by some 19th century projectionists about the function of religion as a social phenomenon.

Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim and even Karl Marx argued that the uniqueness of religion as a cultural and social force was to placate the human suffering, explain misfortune, justify misery and promise a blessed future. That is, religion exists as a remedy for all that ails and makes life uncomfortable. And, since Africa is believed to be a continent of crises and suffering, Neo-Pentecostalism is indeed suited to the African situation (Maxwell 1998). The ills in Africa are not imaginary. They are common and the list is long. They include abject poverty, famine, frequent wars, diseases, displacement, political instability and high level of insecurity and corruption. Africa is one of the continents in which the natives become refugees in their own country. Here in Kenya, internally displaced people (IDP) are an existential reference to political failure. Today, it is estimated that 20 million sub-Saharan Africans are infected with HIV/AIDS and the number is constantly rising, not to mention the constant threat from malaria, cholera, typhoid and yellow fever. In such unstable situations, the populace becomes a captive audience for Prosperity Gospel with its promise of a supernatural intervention for immediate solution and or consolation.

In fact, Kenya's interest in North American Neo-Pentecostal movement was confirmed in 2006 when American Neo-Pentecostal preacher, T.D. Jakes visited Nairobi and drew nearly one million people to Uhuru Park (Economist 2006 quoted by New Forum on Religion and Public Life 2012). Our next further question is what makes prosperity Gospel a centre of theological attraction in the Kenyan Church history?

1.3 Teachings of Prosperity Gospel Advocators

As we indicated already, Neo-Pentecostal Christianity within which the prosperity Gospel is associated was born in North America, so too, the discussion of prosperity must start from the American perspective. Kenneth Hagin (1983) observes that as American culture continued to flourish economically after the great depression era; some began to emphasize material blessing and prosperity as the privilege. Even the Christians who understood the contents of such blessings were not left behind from the belief. The term Prosperity Gospel however appears to be a transdenominational doctrine that God wants people to be prosperous, especially, financially (Bradley A. Koch, 2009). This term is expressed differently by various people. Some refer to it as "The Health and Wealth Gospel", "Prosperity Theology", "Faith Theology", "Prosperity Teaching", "Material Prosperity" and "Financial Prosperity" (Van Biema and Chu 2006, cited by Koch 2009, vide Russell A Morris 2012). But the majority refers to it as earthly life of health, wealth, and happiness as the divine inalienable right of all who have faith in God and live in obedience to his commands (Starnier, 2006:393).

In support of this fact, there are several Biblical passages which are commonly used by interlocutors of prosperity teaching even though hermeneutically the interpretations are not conclusively agreed upon. First, 3 John 2 states, "dear friend, I prayed that you may enjoy good health and all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well (NIV). This verse from John to Gaius has become a constant proof for the prosperity preacher's Gospel. They consider this as God's will for every Christian to have material prosperity. Granted, there is no scriptural evidence that the Johanne community advocated a theology of prosperity. Second, since for prosperity teaching, faith is of paramount importance, Hebrew 11:1 says: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (NIV). The preachers interpret this text to mean material substance. Third, Mark 10:29-30 states, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age" (NIV). This passage is often used by prosperity teachers to prove that Christians are guaranteed one hundred remuneration, not only of spiritual blessings, but also in material and even monetary blessings. Fourth, John 10:10 is equally used by the interlocutors of prosperity Gospel where Jesus said: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full" (NIV). According to Prosperity Gospel proponents, this text is interpreted to affirm the provision of financial prosperity and entrepreneurial success (vide Liroy, 2007:44) for all believers. Here, the full life is understood not as righteousness, peace and Joy through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 11:17) rather it is understood in terms of material abundance (Russell A. Morris, 2012:253).

The frequent use of these texts explains in part why the Neo-Pentecostal movement is associated with prosperity teaching. The interlocutors and believers in prosperity gospel often encourage their congregations to sincerely pray and even demand from God "everything from modes of transportation (cars, trucks, even aeroplanes) [to] homes, furniture and large bank accounts" (cf. Pilgrim 1992:3, quoted by Russell Alexander Morris 2012:162). Robert Tilton (1983:6) adds, "I believe that it is the will of God for all to prosper because I see it in the word, not because it has worked mightily for someone else. I do not put my eyes on men, but on God who gives me the power to get wealth". Russell Alexander Morris (2012:162) quotes Dake (1949:217) as saying, "poverty, sickness and unhappiness...should not exist (because) ...God wants you to be prosperous". As indicated already, a common problem with these selective texts is the hermeneutical authenticity of the doctrine.

We cannot end this part without reference to Oral Roberts who seems to be one of the fathers of televangelical preachers and is closely connected to prosperity teaching. Several authors on the subject have made various remarks about his role and influence on prosperity teaching. Hillinger (1997:21) remarked that because of his strong belief in prosperity, Roberts devised a "Blessing pact", that promised financial blessing for people who give \$100 to his ministry. And, because of the same teaching, such expressions as "God is a good God", "expect a miracle" and "seed faith" have become common expressions of prosperity preachers (Vide Perriman, 2003:64). Here in Kenya, most preachers have followed Robert's example and as they preach, some not only give the Mobile telephone M-Pesa account number for tithe payment, but explain that those who send more cash as from Shs.1000 have a better chance of having their problems solved almost instantly the moment the preacher lays his/ her hands on the money. This is akin to what Russell Alexander Morris (2012:163) has said about John

Avanzini who claims that while ministering in Nigeria, God entered his hotel room and gave him a message of Biblical economics. The message given by God, writes Avanzini (1989:15) is “when you lay your hand on the offering, I will multiply it back to them one hundred fold” (vide Mark 10: 29-30a).

From the fore going, it does not seem very difficult to acknowledge the argument that the key tenets espoused are an indication of the increasing secularization of religion, which is directed towards the world and material gain (Stephen Hunt, 2000: 332). One may wonder who is superior to the other? Is it God or his worshippers? We cannot force God to do and fulfill our intention. We can only worship and petition him to extend his mercy to us according to his divine priority. Emphasis is made when we read Philippians (4-:19) which says “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches of glory in Christ Jesus”. However, this cannot justify the impression given by Prosperity Gospel preachers that through faith, believers can reduce God’s power to a spiritual force which can be tapped by various formulae in order to appropriate material benefit (cf. Hunt 1998). And as we end this part, we refer to Michael G. Moriarty’s well thought summary of Neo-Pentecostal healing revival’s teaching as being characterized by:

- Sensationalism. The Gospel message was subverted by bizarre healing claims and exaggerated announcements of supernatural intervention.
- Cult like figures. Jesus Christ was not the focus of the revival meeting, rather the man who performed the “miracle” took centre stage.
- Exaggerated views of deliverance. The revivalists not only falsely treated all sickness as the result of demonic activity, but often healings that allegedly occurred under their ministries.
- Scandalous fund-raising. Gimmicky techniques and prophetic manipulation (“God told me you need to support this ministry”) were viewed by denominational churches as a subtle form of religious blackmail.
- False faith. Revivalists likened faith to “a force” with which believers could move God to do what they desired. This type of faith theology appeared to depersonalize God, since he was treated like a force whose will was subservient to the appeals of overzealous believers.
- New revelations as a way to obtain spiritual truth.
- A growing distrust of the mind being used to obtain and evaluate spiritual truth (Michael G. Moriarty, 1992: 41- 42).

These teachings are somewhat selectively chosen to ensure the achievement of the preacher as we shall further explain in the following part of this paper.

1.4 Impact of Prosperity Gospel in the Kenyan Local Church

At the beginning of this paper, we pointed out how it is a common phenomenon in Kenyan urban centres to come across advertisements about a future miracle meeting or convention organized by interlocutors of prosperity gospel. In Nairobi in particular, these meetings tend to be more common on the eastern side of the city or along the estates associated with the lower income cadre of the Nairobi city dwellers. In other words, the organizers seem to attract a captive audience already experiencing socio-economic problems and therefore a people looking for immediate solutions even if it means reaching out for supernatural interventions. But, again whether a solution is immediately reached or not, attendance is itself therapeutic. It encourages the believer to have hope and wait for a future miracle. Hope is the weapon of the defeated and the desperate.

Having said all that, it may be apparently unrealistic not to point out that prosperity teaching tend to be misleading because, as we have pointed out, preachers selectively use and interpret the scriptures; thereby giving a distorted and pre conceived conclusions of the said texts. Generally, Neo-Pentecostalism as a part of revival movement does not put much emphasis on strong theological training. What is important is faith in a God believed to unconditionally respond to a worshipper. Hence, Gloria Copeland (1978: 54) can boldly assert, “Give \$10 and receive \$1000, give \$1000 and receive \$100,000...” Definitely this type of faith as advocated by teachers of prosperity gospel may be misleading. Faith is trusting in the person of Jesus Christ and the truth of his teaching and the redemptive work he accomplished at Calvary (cf. Douglas, 1999). Russell Alexander Morris (2012) has rightly pointed out that; “At all levels, faith finds its essence in God who is the giver of faith. Biblical faith cannot be reduced to mere formulae that are neatly packaged sets of principles, for the purpose or personal aggrandizement or material gain. On the contrary, the very nature of biblical faith is designed to enhance the covenant relationship and communion with God. The focus of faith is ever on God, “the source of all good things”. To our thinking, Russell A Morris does indeed give a significant biblical interpretation above, which should guide advocates of prosperity teaching. The common and apparent pedestrian expression of proponents

of prosperity theology that “simply believe and all will happen as you so desire” should be re-examined or disregarded altogether.

The advocates of prosperity gospel may be accused of exploiting the masses about financial and employment solutions. When a person starting a small business and s/he is asked to contribute a part of her/ his capital in the hope of boosting the business without success! Or when a young man or woman searching for employment is requested to bring money so that the pastor prays over it for subsequent employment and nothing happens, what impression of Christianity would be given to the two groups of needy people? Your guess is equal to mine! Once more we need to be reminded that faith cannot be reduced to a subjective formula. The goal of biblical faith is not mere material gain or remuneration, but a life that is pleasing to God (Russell A. Morris, 2012:252).

The advocates of prosperity teaching significantly promise their congregations both wealth and good health in this life. Indeed, it cannot be doubted that divine healing is an important part of the Gospel. The tricky and apparently critical hermeneutical question is whether all sickness is demonic in origin? And whether it is absolutely right to believe and teach that the presence of sickness of any form is indicative of the presence of sin. This is a difficult theological concern. The issue is whether divine healing is somewhat automatic provided an individual follows particular criteria. Arrington, (1993:266; 2003:83 quoted by Russell A Morris 2012:90), refutes and argues that real faith in Christ is no guarantee of perfect health in this life, nor that provision for healing means that everyone will be healed this side of eternity. Russell A Morris continues with reference to Arrington (2003:83) and points out that according to this author, God can provide healing in five different ways: (i) instant or progressive healing; (ii) private or public healing; (iii) healing following prayer; (iv) healing following medical treatment and (v) healing as a result of life style changes. What is of importance here is that, since divine healing finds its origin in the atonement of Christ, human healing cannot simply be based and interpreted according to their dictation. Every healing depends entirely on God’s mercy which may not be subjected simply to our faith as the proponents of prosperity gospel tend to tell Kenyans. Once more initially, Neo-Pentecostalism was beneficial with its call for renewal, but gradually it exposed itself to theological and scriptural questions due to too much emphasis on prosperity theology. What then are some of the existential analyses and critiques of prosperity gospel here in Kenya?

1.6. Analysis and Critique of the Prosperity Gospel

Pragmatically it would seem that in Kenya; prosperity gospel does not live up to its claims that faith in the living God would ensure prosperity and good health. Kenyans are learning that one’s level of income and good health may not necessarily have a bearing on prosperity adherence. To verify such claims and suspicion, we organized for a field research making use of both questionnaires and oral interviews administered to two hundred and fifty Kenyans as indicated in our Table I.

TABLE I: POPULATION OF RESPONDENTS

Gender	No.	Percentage
Women	106	42.4
Men	69	27.6
Female students/ Girls	45	18
Male students / Boys	30	12
TOTAL	250	100

We found out that despite the common criticism, crusades and churches run by preachers of prosperity gospel are successfully attended. The majority of their congregations being women adding to 44% , followed by adult men making up to 26% of our population of the study (vide Table II).

TABLE II: CATEGORIES OF THE CONGREGATION

Gender	ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE		ORAL NTERVIEWS	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Women	66	44	40	40
Men	39	26	30	30
Female students/ Girls	25	16.7	20	20
Male students / Boys	20	13.3	10	10
TOTAL	150	100	100	100

Our study however, was not intended to be a direct theological proof of the veracity of prosperity gospel's supernatural claims.

We may point out right away that this paper is not intended to be a direct theological proof of the veracity of prosperity gospel's supernatural claims. The overarching questions that we sought to answer are: What is the origin and meaning of prosperity gospel? Who are those that believe in its teaching? Are they rich or poor, more or less educated? Young or old? Are they mostly men or women? Where do they live? Do they have higher or lower income and education? How do they give and how genuine are the preachers? (vide Koch, 2009).

In answering these questions, we were guided by the characteristics of neo-Pentecostal movement and healing revivals as given by Michael G. Moriarty (1992: 41-42). Once more, here in Kenya, prosperity gospel has been a subject of criticism by some Christians. People have even questioned the authenticity of its interlocutors. The majority who attend their crusades and church services as we have pointed out tend to do so with preconceived intentions prompted by the promises and demands made by the preachers. The preaching is often tainted with often unconvincing claims of healing. And, as pointed out already, the apparently pathetic situation of Kenyans expose them to subjective preaching of prosperity gospel. First, there is an exodus from Kenyan rural to urban centres. The estates in all Kenyan urban centres are designed according to economic viability. For example, in Nairobi, Kibera, Kawangware are in the West, but before Karen, While Huruma, Kariobangi and Korogocho are found on the Eastern side of the city. In Nakuru, Langas is on the southern side, in Kitale, Laini moja is on the Western side. In Kisumu, Obunga is in the North of the town and Nyalenda is on the South East and many more. Those who plan and arrange crusades for prosperity Gospel preachers tend to use these perceived lower income associated estates than the middle class estates. Most job seekers, the poor terror gangs, sex workers are perceived to reside in these estates of the majority of searching Kenyans. Normally preachers of prosperity take advantage of these people's situation. And, to do so, the preachers use the Biblical texts selectively to convince their congregations. For example, the common interpretation of the book of Malachi 3:16, a contract between God and human is that if a human being has faith in God, he will deliver his promises of security and prosperity. That is in confessing these promises to be true as perceived acts of faith, God will honour definitely them. The influence of this prosperity belief and interpretation is reflected in Table III.

TABLE III: POPULARITY FOR ATTENDANCE

Reasons for attending	No.	Percentage
Healing of diseases	100	40
Job seekers: youth/adults	50	20
Success in business	24	9.6
Desire for pregnancy	26	10.4
Success in examinations	30	12
Success in political campaigns	20	8
TOTAL	250	100

Here, 40% of those who attend these neo-Pentecostal churches go there to be healed from various ailments. The belief in promises for job is reflected by the fact that 20% who listen to prosperity gospel preachers are job seekers. This table further reveals that, even though the leaders of prosperity gospel may be accused of being thin theologically and hermeneutically, their congregations, and Kenyan in general still feel that they have something to offer, especially their convictions of supernatural interventions and promises. It is such belief that supports our earlier remark that neo-Pentecostalism suits the African worldview in which every human problem is believed to be sorted out supernaturally.

Proponents of prosperity gospel in fact, exploit this belief and teach that the promises made (vide Malachi 3:16) was meant for Christian dominion over society, because God's promise of authority to Israel applies to Christians today. The doctrine underscores the importance of personal empowerment, arguing that it is God's will for his people to be happy. The atonement made by Jesus is interpreted to include the alleviation of sickness and poverty, now viewed by preachers as curses to be broken by faith (Wikipedia, the Free encyclopedia). We have already pointed out how these prosperity gospel tend to be theologically thin (Michael G. Moriarty, 1992) and even exegetically, their conclusions are seemingly subjective. They give false impression that faith is an answer to everything, forgetting that despite our faith, God is still in control and can respond to our faith according to his divine will and authority.

Churches in which the prosperity Gospel is taught are usually personality centred (Michael G Moriarty, 1992). This is because, more often, they are non-denominational and are directed by a sole leader granted some have developed multi-church network similar to denominations. Such personality centred churches are many here in Kenya as evidenced in televangelist presentations. The plurality is equally witnessed on Sundays and during lunch hours when particular preachers have their congregation in buildings within the street centres or in parks. The message from these preachers is almost the same, faith and what God can do to a believer who must also contribute something in return for the favour from the almighty.

Talking about money is indeed characteristic of prosperity gospel. Here too, we can notice a rather selfish use of the Biblical text to fund-raise. In Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus is quoted as saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field..., yet when it grows it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches”. Preachers of prosperity Gospel have often exploited this verse even in the buses, people are told “to plant a seed”. Yet nowhere is money even mentioned in the context of this verse. If anything, the context has to do with the outward growth of Christendom from a small seed to a huge tree. In fact, Jesus was talking about the kingdom of heaven and not about money issues. This planting of seed is linked with the same biblical image of “sowing and reaping” to get members of the congregation to bring their tithes and offering, which in turn are proclaimed to be the “instrument of prosperity” (Gifford 2009).

In the course of preparing for this paper, we attended one of the Neo-Pentecostal churches in Huruma -Nairobi and witnessed the high level of deliverance and what to us was false faith. The preacher repeatedly explained that, it is the will of God for Christians to enjoy life to the fullest extent John 10:10 as we have explained above. He equally talked at length about financial prosperity and success in business quoting from Deut. 7: 12-26, Josh. 14:9, Ps. 23:1-6 and Mk. 10:29-30. He explained that those living in poverty are actually violating God’s will. The interlocutors of prosperity gospel whether in the church or over the television especially on family channel and Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Channels are not shy to point out that Christians may fail to be healed and enjoy good health because of lack of faith since God never wanted his people to suffer or to be poor. All forms of suffering are attributed to sin and Satan, this is a common premise of prosperity gospel preachers. It appeals to Kenyans because, these preachers often report during their sermon of successes received as a result of heeding the call for proper “tithing”. Some job seekers may even borrow some money to bring along to accelerate the search for employment. The concern for financial contribution is reflected in Table IV.

TABLE IV: FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

Mode of Collecting Tithes	No.	Percentage
Demanded	130	52
Specific amount	25	10
More amount tied to healing and requests	60	24
Payment through M-Pesa	35	14
TOTAL	250	100

In this table, the majority of our respondents argued that, even though the promises made by the interlocutors of prosperity gospel are attractive, they nevertheless feel that the demand for money can hardly be justified. What happens to a poor person who cannot afford? Who can pay for God for his blessings and gifts? Among those interviewed, 52% pointed out that the preachers hardly forget to point out the importance of financial contribution, granted the accounting for such contributions is hardly shared with the congregation. The reality of these observations is reflected in Table V.

TABLE V: ACCOUNTING OF MONEY COLLECTED

Persons and Purposes	No.	Percentage
Preachers control	150	60
Charitable organization	60	24
Who banks the money/pastor	40	16
TOTAL	250	100

In fact, most preachers of prosperity gospel seem to live a fairly comfortable life than the majority of their congregation, a reality which justified both Karl Marx and Max Weber's theory on how religion can be used to suppress people for the benefit of the leaders.

1.7. Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed the meaning, teaching and impact of prosperity Gospel which is a common expression that God requires all people to prosper in all their endeavours. This includes: financial blessings, faith, positive speech, offerings and generous donations to churches' ministries (Mal. 3:16). Prosperity Gospel is also transdenominational; personality centred which emphasizes believers' commitment in order to facilitate empowerment and happiness. However, it is the pastors who benefit from the tithes and other donations that are contributed by the faithful. This is meant to pay for the high expenses incurred in Televangelism, organizing seminars and crusades and also enable them live modest lives. This movement has gained popularity especially in main urban areas and cities in Kenya with the majority of its leadership and management is made up of middle class people granted the large part of congregations are Kenyan in search of divine intervention in their commonly pathetic situations. As for the future of the third wave of Christianity in Kenya, it seems difficult to predict as long as hard economic reality and its numerous pursuits continue to impact on Kenyans, the need for supernatural intervention may be difficult to halt especially among the middle class.

References

- Anderson W.B. (1977), *The Church in East Africa 1840-1974*, Nairobi, Dodoma, Kampala: Uzima Central Tanganyika Press and Centenary Publishers.
- Anssi Simojoki (2002), "The other Gospel of Neo-Pentecostalism in East Africa" in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* Vol. 66:3 Indiana.
- Arrington, F. (1993), *Christian Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective* Vol. 2, Cleveland, T.N. Pathway.
- Clifton R. Clark (2006), "African Indigenous Churches in Ghana Past, present and future", in *Journal of African Instituted Church Theology* Vol. II, No. 1, September, Accra-North, Ghana, Good News Theological College and Seminary.
- Dake F. (1949), *God's Plan for Man*, Lawrenceville, G.A: Dake Bible Sales.
- Douglas J. ed. (1999), *New International Bible Dictionary*, Rev. Ed., Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan.
- Gerard Giordano, *Twentieth-Century Textbook Wars: A History of Advocacy and Opposition* New York: Peter Lang Publishing. Inc., 2003), 150-151.
- Gloria Copeland (1978), *God's Will is Prosperity*, Tulsa, OK: Harrison House.
- Hagin K.W. (1983), *Faith Worketh by Love*, Tulsa, OK, Kenneth Hagin Ministries.
- Hinnells John R. ed. (2010), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* 2nd ed., London and New York.
- Hollinger D. (1997), "Enjoying God Forever: A Historical/ Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel" in Moo D. (ed), *The Gospel and Contemporary Perspectives*, Grand Rapids, M.I. Kregel.
- Hunt S., (1998). "Magical Moments: An Intellectualistic Approach to the Neo-Pentecostal Faith Ministries", *Religion* 28 (3), 271-280.
- Hunt S., (2000). "Winning ways: Globalization and the Impact of the Health and Wealth Gospel", *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15:3, 331-347.
- Koch Bradley A. (2009), "The prosperity Gospel and Economic Prosperity: Race, Class, Giving and Voting, PhD Unpublished thesis, Indiana University.
- Lioy D (2007), "The Heart of the Prosperity Gospel: Self or the Saviour?" *Conspectus online Journal*, 4: 41-64.
- Luis Lugo (2006) *The PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life*, A Project of PEW Research Centre, October 27th, 2012.
- Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005), *African Charismatics: A Study of Independent Indigenous Pentecostal Movements in Ghana*, Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Kwabena J. Asamoah-Gyadu (2012), *African Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity: An Overview*, October/ November.
- Marx Karl (1978)/[1844], "Contribution to the Critique of Hegels' Philosophy of Right: Introduction", pp. 53-65 in *The Marx Engels reader*, New York: Norton.
- Maupeu H. (1998b), *Organizations Pentecotistes, espace Public et Sujet Politique: L'exemple du Kenya*. Paris, Colloque: Laicites, Religions et democratie perspectives Comparatistes.
- Maxwell David (1998), "Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty: Pentecostalism Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe" in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 28: 3 (350-373).

- Meyer Birgit (2004), "Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal Charismatic Churches", in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33:447-74.
- Michael G. Moriarty (1992), *The New Charismatics: A Concerned Voice Responds to Dangerous New Trends*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, Academic and Professional Books.
- Perriman A. (2003) *Faith, Health and Prosperity*, Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press.
- Pilgrim D (1992), "Egoism or Altruism: A Social Psychological Critique of the Prosperity Gospel of Televangelist Robert Tilton". *Journal of Religious Studies* 18:1-2.
- Robbin, Joel (2004), "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33: 117-43.
- Russell Alexander Morris (2012), *A Biblical and Theological Analysis of Specific Tenets of Word of Faith Theology: Pastoral Implications for the Church of God*, South African Theological Seminary.
- Saskia Sassaen (1998), *Globalization and its Discontents*, New Delhi: New Press.
- Spiro, H.M., Mc Crea Curnene, M and Wandel, L.P, Eds (1996), *Facing Death: Where Culture, Religion and Medicine meet*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Starner R (2006), "Prosperity Theology": in Burgess S. ed., *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, New York, N.Y. Berkshire Publishing.
- Tilton R. (1983), "God's Word about Prosperity. Dallas Texas: Word of Faith Publications.
- Van Biema, David and Jeff Chu (2006), "Does God Want You to be Rich" in *Time*, September 18, pp. 48-56.
- Vinson Synan (1971), *The Holiness Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, Eerdmans, Publishing Co. Grand Rapids: Cambridge.
- Weber Max (1946) [1915], "The Social Psychology of the World Religions", pp. 267-301 in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.W. Gerth and C.W. Mills New York: Oxford University Press.
- Yvan Droz (2001), *The Local Roots of the Kenyan Pentecostal Revival: Conversion, Healing, Social and Political Mobility*, IFRA-Les Cahiers.

So I want to explore why Prosperity Gospel is so appealing, sociologically and psychologically, so we can effectively counter the teaching. Prosperity Gospel is tempting. It is promising. When we buy into Prosperity Gospel, we buy into the preachers and televangelists that give us false hope, giving them a profit and financing their pyramid schemes. Jesus came so we could have life abundantly. So it won't happen overnight, but let us move towards the God that will give us eternal and abundant life, instead of the false teachings that will give us false promises. I know it's hard, but God never gave us anything He couldn't handle. And so let us depend on Him to deny the appeal and temptation of Prosperity Gospel, and recognize our need for Him. "Prosperity Gospel in Kenyan Urban Centres: Come, See, Pay and Receive Your Miracles and Healing." *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2015;5(10):199-208. Abstract Even here in Kenya, we are not foreign to these challenges. Some of which include; ordination of women, gender mainstreaming, marriage of the same sex, sex scandals of celibate clergy, leadership struggle, corruption and prosperity gospel, to mention but a few. This paper investigates the impact of prosperity gospel, an offshoot of neo-Pentecostalism in Kenyan urban centres with emphasis in Nairobi. This Christian social phenomenon teaches that true Christian faith results in material wealth and physical well-being. If poverty comes it comes as something undesirable and unwelcome. In our view it is this dislike of poverty that has seen huge crowds of people being attracted to the prosperity gospel churches. During their deliverance and healing services in the 1940/s and 1950's Pentecostal evangelists delivered sermons and, or, teachings in which the emphasized what has come to be known as "the laws of faith" or "the laws of divine reciprocity" that find expression in such biblical texts as Matthew 7:7ff and Luke 6:38 respectively: Ask and it shall be. For everyone that asks shall receive; and he that seeks shall find; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. Practices Giving, especially tithing as a form of giving, takes centre stage in Prosperity churches.