

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF PROGRESSIVE THEOLOGY USING ALPHONSIN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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Abstracts

*The paper explores Progressive theology Using Alphonsin Research Methodology. The Researcher was Guided by fundamental option theory which maintains that God is the intrinsic end of human self-realization. An Apostolic Exhortation Church's document "Evangelii Gaudium 63" which means the Joy of the Gospel will be analyzed in order to provide light on the issue. The researcher among other recommendation suggest that Christians should consult contemporary Church documents which response to political and moral philosophy that emphasizes closeness with the poor. This is important because in the 21st century many sacred things that lead to faith viz-a-viz divine joy have been heavily compromised. **After the Recommendation, Conclusion was drawn.***

Back ground of the study

A story published on page six (6) of South East Forum's" Newspaper of August 2017 of how a pastor bought human heads at the rate of Fifty thousand

naira (#50,000) each and were buried in his Church. So that those who pray in that Church would have their prayers answered sharp- sharp. The immediate response to this is that it is fake news directed to destroy the image of a Pastor. However, commenting on the letter of St. Paul, the scripture to some extent had given us some warning. Now the spirit expressly says in the Catholic epistle in 1st timothy; “that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4: 1-2).

Over the years the Church has been trying to get a foothold to plant the gospel for the proclamation of the good news amidst so many opposing forces. Yet, amidst many of these flourishing members of the Church are Prosperity gospel seekers. The prevailing computer age in which communication are made at lightning speed have made issues of witnessing more complex as believers are faced with all kinds of teachings. In the light of the prevailing circumstance, many questions are being asked concerning doctrines and moral issues; some are good while others are misleading these require highlights.

Statement of the Problem

Jesus figuratively admonishes Christians about authority of life and action with the saying “You will know them by their fruits”. Secondly, Pope Benedict xvi said the present-day society is plagued by materialism and many other vices that have relegated faith to the background when he said that Christians are living in a society influenced by the philosophy of the enlightenment of Emmanuel Kant where everything is permitted, even legalized in the name of false freedom. Therefore, the researcher explores Progressive theology to find out if it features and doctrine were counterfeit this is because Prosperity gospel is being criticized by many Christian leaders from various Christian denominations including orthodox, some Pentecostals and charismatic movements. They maintained that it contains elements of fraud, scandals, exploitative, idolatrous and indifferent. **To make matters worse many Church apologetics are defending the doctrine, while others are vehemently against it. So, while it is an Uhuru for some, for others it is an enigma. Apologists say the question of relating the gospel message to contemporary human experience gives the doctrine its relevance in this modern age of Scientific advancement and Secularism, which have altered the course of human history and values** and it is against these backdrops the researcher explores Progressive Theology to investigate if its various expressions are in line with the teachings of Christ who is the foundation of Christian morality.

Research Questions

What is the nature of Prosperity

What are the effects of Prosperity Gospel

What are the implications of the Prosperity Gospel

Methodology

The researcher adopts and approached the subject with an expository and apologetic forms of methodology. It is expository in as much as it investigates Prosperity Theology which was done through a secondary research. It is apologetic because **the Researcher was Guided by fundamental option theory which maintains that God is the intrinsic end of human self-realization and that culture has to be awakened to the inadequacies of reasoning.**

Theoretically the research has exposed the core doctrines and debunked many misconceptions against morals. Some apologists who had hitherto seen nothing wrong with this new movement and continue to disparage Christian Leaders who have been critical of this new religion will have to adjust their erroneous position

The Arguments for Prosperity Gospel.

The result of Prosperity Theology among other things is the harsh reality that monies are being collected in Churches using mind boggling technique and is increasingly becoming a salient feature of Christianity. The doctrine among other things equates Christian Faith with material possessions, particularly financial success and abundant wealth as a sign of God's blessings. A reference to this is deduced from David Oyedepo's book entitled "Possessing Your Possession" in which he emphasized that Christians should flourish in all endeavours of life because Christians are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs to the blessing of faith, being part of the covenant God made with Abraham. Seemingly there is nothing wrong with this assertion but considering it, in respect to the basic teachings of the prosperity gospel, that God want believers to get abundant wealth but are being hindered because of their inability to pay seed faith, then one can assert that "Possessing your Possessions" belongs to the cadre of the gospel of success. While money is not evil in itself the unhealthy desire for it is the root of evil. For Jesus nothing is more precious than striving for the kingdom of God. The prosperity that Jesus offered his followers was based on the Divine will that have been thoroughly exposed in two sections of this work and also through his teachings in the scriptures and in the Church's tradition. Jesus's teachings went beyond bodily attention, in which he, socially promoted, integrated and demarginalized the needy as shown by the cures of the possessed, lepers, lames

and the blind. According to Archbishop Martins “Our commitment to evangelization is simply so that we can fill everywhere with the fragrance of the salvation brought on by Christ, and to remove ourselves from the cynicism of Judas and join the company of Mary, Martha and other great Saints of the Church.

Another literature that was reviewed was entitled, “Fire from Heaven” written by Cox Harvey. In this book, Cox critically examined the opinion of another mega church pastor, Kenneth Hagin whose opinion was that through the crucifixion of Christ Christians have inherited all the promises made to Abraham and these include both spiritual and material well beings and interpretation whose foundation is from Gal 3:14. “That the blessings of Abraham might come upon the gentiles” Cox Harvey’s opinion in the book is that Kenneth is one the prosperity gospel leading preachers. A third book that was reviewed was entitled, “God’s will is Prosperity” by Kenneth Copeland. The title of this book has already implicated Kenneth Copeland as a prosperity gospel promoter. His stated in the book that since God’s covenant had been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you clearly asserts his position.

The Argument Against Prosperity Gospel

The first proposed argument against Prosperity gospel was scripturally deduced that the term prosperity appeared about four times in the scripture and was derived from a Greek word “**eujoydovw**” which means and expeditious journey not material gains. The second argument against prosperity gospel is in a book written by Russel Woodbridge entitled, “Health, Wealth and Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel overshadowed the Gospel of Christ”. When he argued that many who espouses prosperity gospel have a fundamental misconception of the life of Jesus as they posit Jesus has a nice house and wore designer cloths! Russel posits that this kind of conception is injurious and leads to faulty comprehension of the scripture. To support this argument 2 Corinthians 8:9 was cited which reads, “For you know the grace of our lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that through his poverty you might become rich. He argued that a shallow reading of this verse may lead one to believe St. Paul teachings was about an increase in material wealth. A contextual reading however will reveal St. Paul was actually teaching the exact opposite.

Another argument was that prosperity gospel views the bible as a contract between God and man. If humans have faith in God, God will deliver security

and prosperity this is against the teachings of Jesus in the parable of the talents in which talents were given according to God's desires rather than being a condition of faith.

General Overview of Evangelii Gaudium

This is a Church document of about 47,560 words written by Pope Francis which attacks complacency at every level of the Church and demands for openness and creativity, in other words new ways of doing evangelization. The document contains the following; "love" 154 times, "joy" 109 times, "the poor" 91 times, "peace" 58 times, "justice" 37 times, and "common good" 15 times. It is a 2013 encyclical of 208 pages with guidelines and themes including, obligations Christians have to the poor and the duty to establish and maintain just economic, political, and legal orders for the entire Church expanded in five chapters. The document was written in response to a meeting of the Synod of bishops.

A brief Summary of the content of the document.

Chapter One is about the Church's missionary activities which enjoins every with the task of finding new way methods of doing evangelism. This is to be done within our human limits despite the difficulties stated in Chapter Two; Amid the Crisis of the challenges of today's world. Chapter three explain how this evangelization can be carried out in its simplest terms which is through a sound homily which is at the mercy of a proper understanding of the scripture. Chapter four states the social importance of missionary activities and the final chapter, which is chapter five tells us how much that can be learnt from the poor if we become their friends and how we can find Christ in them. Finally, the need to have solace with Mary the Mother of all Evangelizations in this final Chapter must not be overlooked.

A Structural Analysis of the content of the document.

The conciliar document which is an Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis has Five Chapters. The document has a captivating Introduction which the researcher has entitled "a missionary Option" to meet the needs and renew from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness which only the joy of the gospel can fill, according to him this missionary impulse is capable of transforming everything in us. The concluding section of the book intimate us of the need of embracing the Mother of Jesus, who is ever willing to learn a helping hand in the pursuit of your missionary works.

Number of Articles in Evangelii Gaudium

Index	Articles 1-19
Chapter One	Articles 20-49
Chapter Two	Articles 50-109
Chapter Three	Articles 110-175
Chapter Four	Articles 176-258
Chapter Five	Articles 259-288

The Text of Evangelium Gaudium 63

The Catholic faith of many people is nowadays being challenged by the proliferation of new religious movements. Some of which tend to fundamentalism while others seem to propose a spirituality without God. This is, on one hand, a human reaction to materialistic consumerist and individualistic society, but it is also a means of exploiting the weaknesses of people living in poverty and on the fringes of society, people who make ends meet amid great human suffering and are looking for immediate solution to their needs. These religious movements, not without a certain shrewdness, come to fill, within a predominant individualistic culture, a vacuum left by secularist rationalization. We must recognize that if part of our baptized people lacks a sense of belonging to the Church, this is also due to certain structures and occasionally unwelcoming of some of our parishes and communities or to a bureaucratic way of dealing with problems, be they simple or complex, in the lives of our people. In many places an administrative approach prevails over a pastoral approach, as does a concentration on administering apart from other forms of evangelization.

Moral theological Analysis of Evangelii Gaudium 63

New Churches are springing up in every nook and cranny. Ordinarily Christians are supposed to respond with Joy, but this is not the case because many Church leaders are worried. They are worried because these Churches are proposing a spirituality without God. The above assertion of ritual by a pastor may or may not be social media propaganda, however, it will be difficult to determine if the heads buried in the Church were fresh bodies or that they were dug from one of the graves in a cemetery. However, this abominable act has consequence, irrespective of whether they were fresh bodies or exhumed. The Pastor has committed a grave offence against God, a crime against the State and against humanity. It is a recourse to idolatry and it is a pointer to the extent people can go acquire financial success.

Jesus in the gospel of Mathew 24:4, foretold some of the signs of the end, namely: Take heed that no one leads you astray, for many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ" and they will lead many Astray. Christians tithed regularly no matter how tight funds were, beside they have other means of making money like harvest. The scripture is happy with this kind of giving a genuine expression of a person's devotion to God. But the effects are many, one is that some few greedy ones want to take advantage by establishing their own private Churches. The type of giving that is scornful, however, is the type that is making giving a business transaction and disrobes the charity that sanctifies it. It views the Bible as a contract between God and man. They are looked upon as a sort of taxes to be paid to God, because he will deliver security and Prosperity if humans sow seeds. The doctrine emphasizes that alleviation of sickness and poverty are curses to be broken by faith. When some shrewd parishioners come to Church motivated by a desire to enrich themselves with a distorted individualistic, utilitarianism or eudemonism maxims they end up becoming victims of the materialism and consumerism that has set our generation on fire the bus stop is unsurprisingly a pastoral stagnation. According to an online report Prosperity Gospel has spread from U.S to Africa and when it spread to Latin America tens of millions of people left the Roman Catholic Church. Those who could not live the Church outrightly became dual members.

Biblical Perspectives

According to Trench, St. Paul usage of such terms as "good" (Rom.3:12), "kindness" (2Cor.6.6; Eph.2:7; Col.3:12; Titus 3:4), and "gentleness" (Gal.5:22) captures the virtue that pervades and penetrates qualities of a good Christian. The Christian obligation concerning a straying sheep is well documented in the bible. The parable of the Lost Sheep Lk. 15: 3-7 clearly compels us to seek for erring members of the church and bring them back to the Church. The goal of Religion is the universal search for truth, peace and goodness. Plato defines kindness "Chrestotes" in Greek as Sincerity of character with prudence" While Flavoinus explained it as good- heartedness, being sympathetic toward a neighbor and regarding his possessions as one's own. Rather than being a virtue that refers only to a person's words and countenance, "chrestotes" refers to a virtue that pervades and penetrates the whole nature, that mellows anything harsh and austere.

Implications of Prosperity Gospel.

The term Prosperity Gospel is Misleading

True Christian prosperity is investment in the knowledge of scripture

Beware of distractions by running from one faith to another

Recommendations

Church Faithful's must realize that there are proliferations of new religious movements.

Some of these movements are materialistic and are being Criticized by Church Leaders.

The Faithful's must consult Church Document and read them.

Some Pastors consult demonic powers.

Avoid dual membership stick to one Church

Conclusion

If theology is a science of faith and science is discovery, it must sort out its own inadequacies in the light of a changing world. Among the tools with which it sorts to do this are the Holy Bible; which will include the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Church's tradition, its social teachings, opinion of theologians and a Christian obligation towards a straying sheep.

The Christian obligation towards a straying sheep is well documented in the Holy Bible. The preaching of the gospel brings people to faith in Jesus Christ and accomplishes great things for God it is therefore important that the ministers of God should know the gospel fully. Some of the preaching of the gospel misses the desire goals. It is a mis-normal and the paper condemns it whenever the preaching of the gospel is appealing to emotion and not the kerygma

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