

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF PROSPERITY THEOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT AMONG THE POOR IN NAMIBIA

By

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*The opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of
the South African Theological Seminary.*

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own creative work and has not previously in its entirety or part been submitted to any scholarly establishment for grade purposes. While the major part of thought and argument are mine, I would like to also inform my readers that some of the ideas are borrowed from other people who have done similar studies; where I have used these other ideas, I have acknowledged the various authors as it is required of me by the South African Theological Seminary.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kasera', with a stylized, circular flourish to the left.

Basilius M. Kasera
04 October 2012

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DEDICATION

To my daughter Abigail-Nicole. Not that she understands the details of my writing now, but in the future she will need this information in deciding her faith.

SUMMARY

This thesis conducts a biblical and theological analysis of the prosperity theology's (PT) impact amongst the poor. The main problem is to seek ways of effectively responding to the biblical, theological, and ideological problems raised by PT in Namibia, without overlooking the social issues of poverty and suffering, which this theology claims to be solving. The subject under discussion is found in various denominations but especially amongst neo-Pentecostal churches and it is not a standardised theology. Through interacting with the various views of the proponents and opponents this research proposes that although PT may have certain positive aspects, it is a theology established upon faulty hermeneutics and is not helpful in providing biblically and theologically sound solutions to the problem of poverty.

The research aims to show that Christians have a biblical mandate to care for the poor and to work towards assisting the poor to help themselves. However, we do not foresee a time in the here and now when poverty will be totally abolished. Living with this painful reality, we have the duty of continuously pointing people to the future hope in Christ. On the other hand, our looking to the future hope does not exempt us from doing our best in helping people in the here and now as God enables us.

The research shows that the gospel is the hope for humanity and we should do away with methods and practices that do not have their roots in Scripture. Moreover, the church has a duty to warn against any theology that is conducted in an irresponsible manner and is given to reductionist arguments when it comes to providing solutions to human problems. Therefore, the research seeks to suggest biblical, theological and practical ways of responding to the issue of poverty and ministry to the poor.

ABBREVIATIONS

AC (Abrahamic Covenant)
AFM (Apostolic Faith Mission)
AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)
ATRs (African Traditional Religions)
BT (Black Theology)
CAFO (Church Alliance for Orphans)
CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics)
CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)
EcoT (Ecological Theology)
ESV (English Standard Version)
ET (Ethiopian Theology)
FT (Feminist Theology)
GDP (Gross Domestic Product)
HIV (Human Immune-deficiency Virus)
LT (Liberation Theology)
NC (New Covenant)
NP (New Pentecostalism)
NPC (National Planning Commission)
NT (New Testament)

OC (Old Covenant)

OT (Old Testament)

PPC (Protestant Pentecostal Church)

PT (Prosperity Theology)

UCKG (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God)

UK (United Kingdom)

USA (United States of America)

WoF (Word of Faith)

ABBREVIATIONS OF BIBLE BOOKS

Old Testament

Gen. (Genesis)
Ex. (Exodus)
Lev. (Leviticus)
Num. (Numbers)
Deut. (Deuteronomy)
Jos. (Joshua)
Jud. (Judges)
Ruth
I & II Sam. (I & II Samuel)
I & II Ki. (I & II Kings)
I & II Chron. (I & II Chronicles)
Ezra
Neh. (Nehemiah)
Esth. (Esther)
Job
Ps. (Psalms)
Prov. (Proverbs)
Eccl. (Ecclesiastes)
Is. (Isaiah)
Jer. (Jeremiah)
Lam. (Lamentations)
Ezek. (Ezekiel)
Dan. (Daniel)
Hos. (Hosea)
Joel
Amos
Obad. (Obad)

Jon. (Jonah)
Mic. (Micah)
Nah. (Nahum)
Hab. (Habakkuk)
Zeph. (Ze phaniah)
Hag. (Haggai)
Zec. (Zechariah)
Mal. (Malachi)

New Testament

Matt. (Matthew)
Mk. (Mark)
Luke
John
Acts
Rom. (Romans)
I & II Cor. (I & II Corinthians)
Gal. (Galatians)
Eph. (Ephesians)
Phil. (Philippians)
Col. (Colossians)
I & II Thess. (I & II Thessalonians)
I & II Tim. (I & II Timothy)
Tit. (Titus)
Phil. (Philemon)
Heb. (Hebrews)
Js. (James)
I & II Pet. (I & II Peter)

I, II & III John
Jude
Rev. (Revelation)

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Much has been written and said about Prosperity Theology (PT), however, none of these works is written with the Namibian context in view. Therefore, this study will attempt to examine PT in the Namibian context with the hope that the church will start to engage in the discussion of this subject and perhaps take the time to rethink PT biblically and theologically.

As Christians, we acknowledge that poverty is a serious social concern and evil that affects large numbers of people around the world, however, how we respond also matters. Both the promotion of material prosperity or lack thereof as signs of godliness have no biblical validation and striking the balance on these issues is one of the church's most serious challenges throughout the world (Taylor 2003:25-36). Moreover, both of these views in their extremity are too simplistic or offer very superficial solutions. However, the sad aspect is that the very Christians who ought to be the salt and light of the world are implicated in acts that push people further into poverty (Kunhiyop 2008:142). This should not be limited to political corruption because presenting a skewed or an imbalanced biblical teaching on the issue of poverty culminates in furthering poverty (Taylor 2003; cf. Kunhiyop 2008).

For example, there are Christians who believe that "good news to the poor is news of spiritual salvation" or "the church's mission is exclusively spiritual and should concentrate on spiritual issues" (Taylor 2003:27). This kind of thinking excludes social concern especially towards the poor and eventually leads us to conclude that "poverty is bliss and godly." On the other hand are those who believe that we are to

live and enjoy the pleasures of the world to such a degree as to surpass the material prosperity of unbelievers (Avanzini 1989; Oyedepo 2007:39). Or because heaven is rich, all of God's children ought be identified by material wealth and goodness (Oyedepo 2007:30-32). Poverty here is considered to be the result of a lack of faith, lack of giving, a lack of knowledge, or negative confession (speech) and thinking (Goroh 2009:41-82). While the research will deal with both extremes on the issue of addressing poverty, it is the latter version that will be the focus of this thesis. This latter version of Christian response has received various labels over the years such as "name it and claim it," "wealth and health gospel," "prosperity gospel" etc. However, for the theological aspect of this research, the researcher will settle with the label of prosperity theology (PT). (See details of this label in Chapter 2).

PT's "widespread diffusion owes much to its pervasiveness in Christian broadcasting. However, it is not only its functionality but its general socio-economic context that is significant" (Gifford 1998:39-40; cf. Hackett 1998:258-277). Its "socio-economic context" has become an attraction to a great number of impoverished people and the upwardly mobile. While this is a growing theology attracting many people, there is no significant scholarly work yet that has researched this movement in the Namibian context. It is with this background that this research comes into play – as a seminal project in examining the issue in the Namibian context.

PT became popularised in Namibia during the 1990s, spearheaded by Haruna B. Goroh, especially through his ministry's annual conference known as the Greater Love Faith Convention. The conference draws all its main speakers from outside Namibia. There has been no single conference in which a Namibian preacher has been the keynote speaker. All keynote speakers come from outside, for example, Myles Munroe (Bahamas), Joseph Imakando (Zambia), Abel Damina (Nigeria), Alan Bagg (South Africa), Ken Lukumba (Lesotho), James Ojuok (Kenya), Enoch Sitima (Botswana), Matthew Ashimolowo (UK), to mention a few. This appealing to "star preachers" has earned the conference great success in drawing Charismatics and neo-Pentecostals from across the country and beyond. Moreover, the conference has served in many ways as a platform to influence many other Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal leaders with PT concepts. Pastors (the majority of whom are non-Namibians) influenced by this conference have succeeded in establishing

congregations that have become centres for propagating PT. They attract a number of young people and the poor who believe that they can now walk out of the bitter grip of poverty and attain an upper class lifestyle if they only practice the taught principles of prosperity (more of this development will be dealt with in Chapter 2).

With its ostensibly unsophisticated message that puts strong emphasis on material wealth, divine health and happiness made possible through faith, positive confession, faithful tithing and giving to the man of God (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 Jesus Christ (Piper 2007).

Since these proponents are indebted in various ways to their North American counterparts “their symbols, hymns, denominational organisation, networks, rituals, technology, order of service, use of the Bible, instrumental music, literature on sale and theology” (Gifford 1998:40) are quite similar. Those in Namibia have harnessed the power of modern technology for example, television, radio ministry with similar fundraising techniques and messages as those in America (this promotes also an imposed American culture upon Namibians). Very few have started publishing their books, however, a great majority do produce sermon CDs and DVDs and the latter have proven to be effective tools in gaining public recognition in a society, which is generally a non-reading one.

Considering the increasing percentage of unemployment standing at fifty-one per cent and people living below the poverty line standing at fifty-six per cent (CIA Factbook 2010; cf. Central Bureau of Statistics 2008:6-7 (CBS)), the poor are embracing this theology as a ray of hope. Since independence in 1990, the majority of Namibia’s wealth has been in the hands of the minority, and government reforms for distribution of resources is progressing at an enormously slow pace (CBS 2008). The CBS 2008 executive summary,

[R]eveals how unequal the consumption expenditure patterns are in Namibia. The 10 percent of households with the lowest levels of expenditure account for just over 1 percent of total expenditure in Namibia. The 10 percent of households with the highest expenditure account for more than 50 percent of total expenditure...in another way

the wealthiest 10 percent in the country have consumption levels that are 50 times higher than the poorest 10 percent.

With such high poverty rates and inequality it is easy to see why PT would become an attractive intervention, appearing to offer hope and answers to the poverty problem. The Namibian context as with the majority of other African nations in which PT flourishes is thought to be contextually different from its American counterpart (Folarin 2007). Thus, the African PT is “need driven” and the Western as “greed driven.” Moreover, its critics have labelled the Western version of PT as promoting a faith of consumerism, materialism and hyper-capitalism. However, many other African critics of PT have labelled its African version with similar terms as the American PT (Akoko 2007; Chilongani 2007; Kigame 2010; Liroy 2007). Whether this is a fair generalisation must be examined in the context in which it is presented. However, it is also relevant that PT in Namibia may should be placed in its own category – mainly as a response to social injustice and especially rampant poverty. Perhaps what we need to concern ourselves with then is whether this response to poverty is biblically and theologically correct.

While it enjoys an attractiveness and wide acceptance especially amidst neo-Pentecostals, PT has in recent years come under criticism both by those within these denominations and those outside them. The criticism has come from several angles especially for biblical and theological reasons (Piper 2007; cf. Kigame 2010). Chacko (2010) criticises PT for its theology and hermeneutics and while he is pleased with the humanitarian acts of some of its proponents, he dismisses their methods of raising funds as unscriptural and unethical. The Institute for Global Engagement ((IGE) 2007) believes that PT’s growth cultivates a commercial style faith and serves as a platform for propagating the destructive consumerism, materialism and capitalism of the Western societies. In the course of this thesis, the researcher will look at either sides of the arguments (pro and con) and through careful biblical exegesis provide some conclusions.

As it is often the case, many who have written on the subject have aimed at addressing PT at its weakest points and in so doing have “shed far more heat than light” (McConnell 1995:ix). Michael Fortner’s (2011) book *The Prosperity Gospel Exposed* is one good example of works that have shed more heat than light on the

subject. Although it has many helpful insights, it also has many negative aspects. For example, it uses various Bible versions and these versions are used subjectively to stress the point the author wants to make. In some places the book is just disrespectful and boastful in its approach, as it calls PT advocates stupid and the author praises himself of his ability to study and understand the Bible (2011:9). In other parts, the author makes many contradictory statements concerning biblical interpretation which are not helpful in advancing the cause. What makes the book generally worse is the author's unkind and warring attitude that throws even the good away and is poor in providing solutions to the issue of poverty.

Although this technique of pointing only to the weaknesses seems to give these writers who disagree some sort of an upper hand over their opponents, their kind of victory must be celebrated with caution as it often fails to take the matter into proper perspective (McConnell 1995). Moreover, most of the arguments are confined to specific situations, which do not apply directly to the Namibian experience and as a result fails to answer PT's impact here at home. Therefore, to initiate a meaningful and relevant discourse the researcher will focus on examining the stronger arguments for PT rather than the usual path of tackling the movement's obvious weaknesses.

Prosperity teaching has been incorporated into the main doctrinal stands of some of Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches. This incorporation poses both a biblical and theological challenge. Thus, anyone who assumes that PT is an error needs to prove its error not by militant actions but from Scripture. Especially in a seminal project like this one, it is important that the researcher should start with the right attitude, with the hope that some dialogue may begin with those who endorse this theology. The common error in polemics and apologetics is that we drive away the people whom we wish to reach and then run after them in the hope that they will listen – the result is chasing after the wind.

As the thesis aims to address issues arising out of PT we need to be clear about certain issues. First, PT is neither a standardised movement nor does it hold a clearly expressed theological position (Chacko 2010:2) and although the majority of its followers are Charismatics and neo-Pentecostals (McConnell; cf. Akoko 2007;

Chacko 2010) it is also expressed amongst other Christian denominations. Second, PT as a movement is fundamentally a hybridisation of various doctrines and philosophies promoted by multiple voices. Thus, its “teachings are neither systematic nor do all the proponents teach the same precepts of this theology. Depending on the persons, the teachings vary and there is no uniformity...” (Chacko 2010:2). This polymorphic theological expansion has made it difficult to hear its suppressed authentic meaning and message. However, this doctrinal-pluralism gives its proponents the freedom to add and subtract ideas at will in order to make their message of prosperity adaptable to their given context. Thus, every interpreter can come up with his own revelation-knowledge about passages of Scripture (Smalling 2010) and even the meaning of prosperity.

This is important to keep in mind, so that when we speak of PT we are aware that we are referring to a cluster of concepts that do not necessarily relate to each other. Knowing this may bring many to realise that we should not at first appearance scoff at PT and think that it is a theology of sinister men and women – for it is after all not such a simple issue. For example, when it is redefined in the Namibian context to address the social issue of poverty, those who would oppose PT must know how to respond because it is addressing an issue of great importance. Thus, there needs to be a well thought out biblical alternative.

1.1.1. Three main views concerning PT

The subject of PT has mainly produced three kinds of groups:

(1) Fierce proponents of PT

This group believes that the will of God for all Christians is to flourish in all areas of life. These proponents believe that those opposed to PT do so just to preserve their traditional theology and practices (Copeland 1999:11). According to this group, teaching PT means having a holistic approach to man’s needs including his material wellbeing. Moreover, those who oppose this theology are believed to be opposing the move of the Holy Spirit, just like the first century Pharisees did. Dollar (1999:12-13) argues in *Total Life Prosperity* that when God is with you, you are bound to prosper and prosperity is a sign of God’s presence abiding with you, that is,

God being with you equals prosperity or total victory and mastery over circumstances of life. Therefore, to oppose PT is an indication of an unrenewed mind and allowing carnal ways of thinking to obdurate God's blessings (Dollar 1999:31). Not only is it a lack of a renewed mind to oppose PT but it is also going against God's will, for Avanzini writes that God wants believers to prosper and He also gives them the power to obtain wealth, and "God has a covenant with you. *If you understand God and His Word, and if your life is one that abides in His will, then the Lord has a covenant of blessing for your life*" (1989:119, italics added).

David Oyedepo (2007:63-65) argues in his book *Possessing Your Possession* that as part of God's covenant, believers ought to prosper. This covenant is sealed by the death of Christ, that all who believe in the message of the gospel will along with the salvation of their souls obtain *all good things* in this world including wealth, health and total success. Thus, considering that God is a good God, only good things should happen to His children – referring to wealth, health and success. It is perhaps with this concept of goodness in mind that Avanzini (1989:69-86) writes in *The Wealth of the World* that because of the unchanging nature of God (using Heb. 11:8), He will give the wealth of the wicked to the godly so they will rule the earth in the last days (cf. Copeland 1997:229-248). These proponents stretch their argument further, that the said prosperity can only be realised on the condition that people believe in Jesus Christ. Further, they are to exercise undoubting trust in God's promises of prosperity, meditate upon God's Word, believe and trust unquestioningly in their "man of God," live holy lives, and practice regular giving especially in financial forms. In addition they are to avoid speaking negative words and thinking negative thoughts, and consider things such as poverty, sickness etc as mere symptoms and focus on their inheritance of prosperity (Dollar 1999:44-62; cf. Copeland 1999:11-30; Copeland 1997:249-258; Price 1999; Oyakilome 2010).

For the Namibian context this first group is what is popularly known and accepted and the ideologies of the above mentioned people are also easily accessible through free to air Christian TV channels. While our context is Namibian, much of the motivation comes from the tele-evangelists who have also managed to gather television and cyber fans. Moreover, many of those who promote PT in Namibia draw much of their theology from the books and sermons of the American

and Nigerian PT teachers, which make the above views the general view of PT here in Namibia. These similar views are promoted in publications of those who promote PT in Namibia as will be seen in the course of the thesis.

(2) *Fierce opponents of PT*

This group is composed of the likes of Hank Hanegraaff (1993; cf. McConnell 1995; MacArthur 1992) who believes that this kind of theology “poses one of the greatest contemporary threats to orthodox Christianity from within. Through it, cultic theology is being increasingly accepted as true Christianity.” While those who promote PT believe that this is a biblical message and the will of God (Copeland 1997:1-22; cf. Dollar 1999; Avanzini 1989), the opponents disagree with most of these biblical claims and say that this theology has its roots in the neo-Pentecostal denominations of the United States of America (Phiri & Maxwell 2007: cf. Akoko 2007:60). Robison (2003) said that PT is a theology that appeals to the “Western materialistic mindset.” MacArthur calls PT a product of the cargo cults, aimed at imposing Western ideology (1992). Piedra (2005:331) wrote, “principally, it must be recognized that this theology is a neopentecostal religious package” and because of its origins and theological position McConnell (1995:x,xx,186-213) goes on to state that PT is a cultic and heretic movement that systematically subverts the true Christian message.

Thomas Schirrmacher (2001:79-85) in his work *The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All* dedicates a chapter in which he argues that PT does not match the reality of the persecution and suffering faced by the wider Christian community around the globe. He sees this as a theology that ignores problems, denies suffering and the instructions of Christ. He further, writes that presenting only a gospel in which there is no place for suffering or hardship, “robs the believer of several elemental applications and results of his faith” (2001:80). Schirrmacher’s view seems to be the general perspective of those who oppose PT (Piper 2007; cf. McConnell 1995; MacArthur 1992). These opponents believe that “it is a fallacy to equate Christianity with health, wealth, success and smooth sailing” (Alfred Yeo quoted in Schirrmacher 2001:81) or to “assume that man’s [material] welfare is God’s highest priority” (Smalling 2010).

The majority of these opponents agree that PT has its roots in North American neo-Pentecostalism and materialism and that the gospel is primarily to deal with the spiritual need of man (MacArthur 1992). Thus while believers are encouraged to strive to have better living standards, they are to live such lives that God is first, whether they be in the midst of lack or abundance. The approach of the second group then is that people should hear the gospel of salvation and part of the duties of believers is to reach out with humanitarian activities in helping those who are poor. This group is not opposed to Christians being materially wealthy.

The opponents argue that given the condition of man in this world PT promoters overlook the reality of the Fall that has affected all of creation. Moreover, that PT undermines the aspect of God's sovereignty over creation, providence and redemption – as it insist that man can have absolute control over his circumstances and make God respond according to the desires and whims of man. The majority of these opponents argue that those who claim that PT is God's will do so with "no adequate theological or biblical basis for this claim" (Chacko 2010:4). Because of this inadequate theological and biblical basis and the said cultic and materialistic origins, 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.

Numbers of Reformed and Evangelical and older Pentecostal churches do take a strong opposition to the prosperity gospel. However, they are also quite aware of the biting reality of the poverty situation in society and sympathise with the prosperity message especially where it seems helpful. Yet, they do not consider the prosperity message as the gospel (Horn 2011).

(3) The middle view

This group argues that those who promote PT have quite similar doctrinal stands to the majority of the Evangelical community. Therefore, regardless of this offshoot of Pentecostalism and having adopted non-Christian ideas – we have no logical reason to dismiss this as something that has nothing to do with Christianity because it does not originate from some non-Christian tradition. This view acknowledges some of the positive things in PT and says that this may also be a wakeup call to the evangelical churches especially on issues of faith (though they do

not define faith as the PT proponents do) and social concerns. They state their disagreements with PT but proceed with caution in drawing conclusions.

However, on issues of PT, the middle view promoters also do take a stern stand. For example, Gordon Fee quoted in Chacko (2010:13) who embraces the middle view agrees with the second group that PT “seems far more to fit the American dream than it does the teaching of him who had ‘nowhere to lay his head.’” He does not simply end there but provides three other reasons about why he thinks that PT is a deficient-Christian theology: 1) it is a man-centred theology. 2) It teaches a counterfeit theology of giving. 3) It opposes social and economic equality and encourages materialistic excessiveness and by so doing, it sets up a theological superstructure of oppressing the poor and even taking from them (Chacko 2010).

The attempt for a balanced view is commendable and essential to avoid acclimatising to one view to such an extent that we throw away even the good and true part of other theologies. From experience, we know that humans are prone to go to extremes. However, we should realise that “too much sound deafens us; too much light dazzles us; too great [a] distance or proximity hinders our view” (Pascal 2002:12). As a result, the researcher will attempt to be as fair as possible, however, also aware that there is no such thing as a work that is utterly neutral or fully objective. Nevertheless, theological research should be subject to the authority of Scripture “and serve theological construction” (Peterson & Williams 2004:11).

These groups are introduced here to create awareness, as these views will be presented in many parts of the thesis in the following chapters. Taking into consideration the arguments and claims of all the groups, the researcher will endeavour to work towards establishing a biblical and theological concept of prosperity. While there are growing numbers of those who oppose PT, we should not ignore the fact that a larger number of Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal believers embrace PT, their belief does not rest on a whim but is based on certain portions of Scripture, and they do not consider PT to be a departure from biblical teaching. Thus, those who endorse this theology do not accommodate the charge of it being a theology that fails to “take a holistic perspective of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Institute for Global Engagement 2007). Rather its proponents consider it as the

declaration of the full council of God, who desires to prosper those who believe in Him (Copeland & Copeland 1997; cf. Oyedepo 2007).

Therefore, the researcher will examine both the claims of the proponents and opponents of PT based on sound biblical exegesis. One property that makes Christianity unique is its inflexible character to human experience, human philosophy, popularity of TV evangelists or the growing or decreasing number of adherents to a specific theology (whether for or against PT). None of these things proves truthfulness, therefore, any theological claim must in the first place pass the test of Scripture and as believers, and we should examine with integrity the issue of pristine health, abundant wealth and happiness based on its Scriptural worthiness rather than on our preconceived ideas.

1.1.2. Calling for the right attitude

It is customary that the average paper, article or book on the subject of PT has an angry tone, meaning that the authors can be quite emotional. However, in the process, they confuse their convictions with the authority of Scripture – this clouded thinking often leads to newer forms of witch-hunting. The researcher too has been guilty of this kind of attitude in the past but in this thesis, he seeks to examine PT through the eyes of Scripture, rectify his errors made in previous writings and exercise the utmost love and kindness. Rather than embarking upon a militant approach, we will take the route of inquiry so we may correctly determine if PT:

- Is a theology based on erroneous biblical interpretation and hardly reflects true biblical values.
- Is a theology designed to arouse unhelpful human inclinations which contradict the teaching of Scripture (I Tim. 6:1-10) – motives of greed, love of money and materialism (Piper 2007).
- Is a theology that misconstrues and reduces faith in God by directing people's faith to money and "a person does not have to be spiritually awakened in order to embrace it; one needs only to be greedy" (Piper 2007).
- Is a theology that embraces the full council of God and is the expression of the full gospel (Oyedepo 2007).

- Has anything positive which the church at present may be ignoring and may need to revisit in order to be socially relevant (Chacko 2010).

Having stated the above, the researcher would like to emphasise that the church in Namibia needs to seriously think through PT's impact, work towards establishing a correct understanding of biblical prosperity and effectively address the issue of poverty from Scripture, which are the things that make PT attractive to its adherents. While there are many debates going on about PT, it may also be necessary to deem this as a worthy wakeup call for the church.

To achieve these goals of reaching a valid conclusion on the subject, the thesis will make a thorough examination of PT, both biblically and theologically. This will include the examination of terminology, history, theological and social impact, and a biblical examination of this theology (see more details in the Overview below). It is with this background that the author will provide some historical background about the originators of PT in the United States of America, Africa and Namibia. This is so the readers may be able to examine for themselves the original propagators' ideas and in so doing may help them in constructing objective criticism and make informed decisions concerning PT.

1.1.3. *The importance of Scripture*

As we consider the issue of PT in this research, in order for it to be a truly evangelical paper, Scripture needs to be emphasised and given its proper place in the way we have our theological discussions. Heppe writes that:

H[oly] Scripture carries its *certitudo* (authority) in itself, since it is essentially a beam of divine light and divine wisdom. And since Scripture gives this account of itself, it cannot base its reliability upon any alien authority or allow it to be so based. H[oly] Scripture desires only such an acknowledgement of its certainty as is conceded to it purely because of its inspiration (1978:18).

Because the evangelical community of believers acknowledge and accept Scripture as God's authority, we are also bound to live by its instruction. As J.I. Packer writes:

The Christian principle of biblical authority means on the other hand, that God purposes to direct the belief and behavior of his people through the revealed truth set forth in Holy Scripture; on the other hand it means that all our ideas about God [and life] should be measured, tested, and where necessary corrected and enlarged, by reference to biblical teaching (1993:16).

This tells us that basing our arguments upon Scripture is essential. Since both those who endorse and those who oppose PT claim to derive their ideas from Scripture – a whole chapter is exclusively reserved to examine these claims. We need to examine whether Scripture is treated as authoritative in matters of doctrine and whether the passages used to propagate or oppose PT are interpreted correctly in their context (enforcing the message of the Bible) or if it is interpreted erroneously to suit specific pre-conceived presuppositions (enforcing human ideas over Scripture). “[O]nly a return to the study and correct application of the principles of biblical hermeneutics will reduce the common tendency towards...spontaneity in the use of biblical passages” (Kigame 2010).

As we handle God’s Word, we want to avoid the theological disasters that come from misreading passages of Scripture, especially the disasters that come from ignoring biblical instructions in order to pursue prohibited lifestyles. There are several views we need to avoid concerning the subject of PT. First, that of widening the Christian message to living a life of unlimited material wealth as a sign of godliness. Secondly, narrowing the Christian message down to living a life of destitution as a sign of godliness. Thirdly, limiting our outlook only to spiritual salvation and therefore neglecting socio-economic factors. Fourthly, widening our outlook concerning socio-economic issues to the extent that we only pursue a social agenda. All of these extremes sentimentalises the biblical message (Kigame 2010). Therefore, the researcher will deliberately take a hermeneutical approach that seeks biblical fidelity on the matter. “[T]he hermeneutical precondition of Christian theology requires that Bible passages be treated in a balanced manner with clear appeal to the entire canon of God’s revelation and not merely a citation of favourite portions” (Kigame 2010).

The advantages of consistent redirection to Scripture as the final authority in doing Christian theology are several. First, it will lead believers to the right biblical

concept of prosperity. Secondly, it will help believers develop a proper New Testament (NT) understanding of prosperity. Thirdly, it will lead believers to biblical answers to help them to address social issues of poverty especially amongst believers.

It is the researcher's wish: 1) That the research will assist those who promote or oppose PT theology to at least be able to reflect on issues of doctrine and grapple with what Scripture teaches concerning prosperity, wealth, poverty and suffering. 2) That the research will clearly present the impact of PT on people's faith, economic standards and especially how its ideologies are affecting the poor. 3) That the research will clarify the attractiveness with which PT presents the 'gospel' offer, that is, why it attracts such large crowds and wields such a social impact. 4) That the research will equitably examine the effects of the PT upon the Christian community especially with regard to how it affects evangelism and Christian witness. 5) That the research will encourage the Church at large to hold in tension the gospel message with social concern. 6) That the positives in PT that deserve commendation will receive fair commendation and that which is not commendable will be addressed in love and in a spirit of seeking dialogue in order to achieve a biblical understanding.

Therefore, for there to be any form of fair presentation of either views (pro or anti-prosperity theology), it is best if we allow ourselves to be guided by the authoritative Scriptures. For in issues of theological disagreement only Scripture will be able to liberate people from theological misconception, deception, error and false teaching. As this thesis unfolds, Luther's declaration concerning his conscience being captive to Scripture will serve as our Hippocratic Oath.

1.2. My personal experience and motivation

This thesis is also motivated by my personal experience of being involved over ten years in the Word of Faith Movement (WoF) and belonging to a church that pioneered PT in Namibia since the early 1990s. Not only was I a member but I was also one of the enlisted men who believed, supported and propagated this theology to hundreds of people.

Though I was not a staunch advocate of PT, I have witnessed this theology propagated in its different forms. However, my personal motivation stems from having witnessed a number of my friends' faith destroyed by being exposed to this theology. For example, a young woman whom I go to know through my best friend had just joined my previous church. At this time, the church needed to construct a building as they were still meeting in a tent, so the leaders began to raise funds. As usual the fund raising always came with promises e.g. God will bless you double, give you a promotion, give you a bigger house, give you a husband etc. She gave away her only bed with the hope of receiving blessings from God; months passed by with no prospect of receiving the blessings she expected. She left the church and also the Christian faith thinking that God has disappointed her.

Two of my friends also left the church and abandoned the Christian faith altogether. One of them had given the church most of his money with the hope that God would give him a better job with a better salary. The other was told to practice certain "principles of faith" so that God would meet her desires; with many disappointments over the years, she abandoned the Christian faith altogether, even questioning the existence of God. There are numerous examples that I could mention but for the sake of space will limit myself to these few examples. These people have rejected Christianity thinking that the God of Scripture has abandoned them.

I have witnessed how the poor have been told over the years to give away their money and resources so that God will bless them or even turn them into millionaires within a period of three months. People have sacrificed their salaries, emptied their saving at the expense of their families, and neglected other duties for the benefit of the church.

My personal conviction on this subject began when I started teaching in the Bible school of the same church. The materials we used opposed every belief concerning prosperity that was promoted in the local church where I served. I thank God for exposing me to those materials. Prior to this experience, I had read a small booklet by John Ankerberg, but had been too narrow-minded then to accept any criticism. It was at this time that I began to critically look at Scripture and the

practices of my then church. It was for me as if I were reading the Bible for the first time. I started to see that Christianity does not promise material prosperity nor absolute health and success in this world.

A number of my friends have also abandoned PT. However, a great number of people whom I know and their families continue to follow this deception. When I go to meetings or gatherings with some Charismatics and neo-Pentecostals I hear how they propagate this theology. Christian television, radio and print media are constantly flooded with PT and many people have just not realised the error of this theology. Sadly, there are only a handful of people who are speaking against the spread of this movement that is taking advantage of people and teaching unorthodox doctrines.

1.3. Problem

The general research question of the study: *How can we effectively respond to the biblical, theological, and ideological problems raised by PT in Namibia, without overlooking the social issues of poverty and suffering, which this theology claims to be solving?* Based on this question the following subsidiary questions are asked:

- (1) What are the theological and biblical departures of PT?
- (2) What are the hermeneutical issues or concerns of PT?
- (3) What are the good and positive things that the church can learn from PT in order to make the gospel relevant to the everyday life of people in Namibia?
- (4) What does the Bible say about the church and social responsibility, especially on issues of poverty?

The researcher will attempt to answer these questions by taking into consideration the various perspectives surrounding the subject. In addition, it is the researcher's sincere hope that this study will add value and a better understanding in the Namibian context and therefore be a blessing to many in the body of Christ. More especially that it will be an appropriate response to those who follow PT unquestioningly and that it will be informative to those who criticise PT without proper analysis of the facts.

1.4. Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To biblically examine the recent explosion of health and wealth theology within many Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal denominations in Namibia.
- To examine the biblical and theological basis for PT. That is, whether the message it propagates is in line with the overall message of the Bible.
- To provide a framework to listen to the voice of PT and not simply reject or accept it without careful examination and understanding of its claims.
- To establish a meaningful biblical and theological concept of ministry to the poor.
- To create awareness of the impact PT has on the growth of Christianity in Namibia.

1.5. Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the Biblical and theological assertions of the PT which are astronomically growing in Namibia (Hunt 1998:272; 2000:73). Towards the close of the 20th century after the development of African theology, theology in Africa adopted a newer movement imported from the North American neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic annex called the WoF movement (Jackson 1987:16). This imported theology has come to be known in our days as PT or prosperity gospel. The purpose of this study is:

- To examine whether PT is biblically accurate and theologically consistent; that is, to determine whether PT is relevant to everyday experience of human life in a fallen world (a systematic evaluation).
- To work towards providing a correct biblical and theological perspective concerning the issues of material prosperity and poverty.
- To provide a framework for further and refined discussions concerning PT and the issues of poverty and economic injustice.

1.6. Research Methodology

A plethora of books, articles, journals and websites are available today either supporting or opposing PT. These materials range from highly academic works to

perfunctory ones. The researcher has had the privilege of reading many of these books, especially those written in favour of PT and has been part of those who previously endorsed PT; he, therefore, feels that he has attained a fair amount of understanding on the subject. Not that he claims to be an expert on the subject for this is just seminal work from a Namibian perspective.

Therefore, to get as deep an insight as possible into the issue of PT, the researcher has consulted various resources that deal with the subject theologically and academically. Much of the materials written by opponents of PT are from the internet, however, the researcher has used strict guidelines to ensure that he uses only credible sources such as online journals and websites (for example, www.bible.org, www.jstor.org, www.monergism.com and www.equip.org). To add some local content to the research, the researcher issued a questionnaire to various people, conducted brief interviews, did onsite observation of various congregations that promote PT and made use of some other resources such as sermons, short publications and books.

This research paper is a conceptual study. Its general design is that of literature study integrated with interactive and qualitative tools. Although there is a practical aspect of data collection through observation and a questionnaire, most of the information is from books, journals, and websites. This literature study is to provide a scholarly background and provides the motivation for the specific study. The study is:

(1) Observational: There will be data collection of several Namibian churches and Christian organisations to provide a statistical basis for the research. The author will observe (action research), use a questionnaire and hope to get interviews with church leaders who propagate and oppose PT to enquire into what is actually being taught in churches and theological seminaries. The reason for this practical approach is to provide an objective perspective on the subject of PT in Namibia, as there are no significant academic sources on the subject.

(2) Analytical: This method serves to give a clear understanding of what the proponents of PT mean when they speak of prosperity. The researcher will engage

with the works of prominent PT proponents such as Kenneth Copeland (USA), David Oyedepo (Nigeria) and H.B. Goroh (Namibia) as well as others.

Moreover, I will examine the theological and biblical material on the subject and work towards a biblical concept of prosperity and ministry towards the poor. Thus, the author will commend aspects that are truthful and consistent with the biblical revelation and refute aspects that are not biblical. In order to make the subject relevant and also unique, the author will present the characteristic of PT in Namibia and its impact among the poor and how it affects the gospel.

(3) *Epistemological*: The epistemological aspect is aimed at analysing the core beliefs of PT, as this carries both philosophical and theological implications for those who pastor churches and lecture in theology in the Namibian context. The response to PT is a response to a specific worldview, which has borrowed concepts from various philosophical, cultural and religious groups and has incorporated such beliefs to create a theology of its own unknown Christianity.

It is imperative to keep in mind that the worldview promoted by PT needs to be challenged from Scripture as it has a serious bearing upon the truth of the Gospel and the life of the Christian. The burden then rests upon those who desire to teach the Gospel faithfully and at the same time be relevant to the social issues. PT is promoted as a solution to soul winning and addressing social issues. With these seemingly positive intentions and the movement gaining considerable numbers of adherents worldwide: how could this be a theology that departs from the gospel of Jesus Christ? If this theology is based on good intentions and contains many positive things, are the opponents perhaps not being over-zealous in labelling PT as a theology that is practically destructive to the faith of Christians? Moreover, the researcher would like to establish the validity of the claims made by PT's opponents that its attempt to address social issues is based on marketing strategies, which fails to employ a biblical model and most of the time takes away from the socially and economically marginalised, rather than giving to them.

The researcher will provide from Scripture a concept of ministry to the poor and work towards removing any form of hermeneutics that might hinder the unity of Scripture and thus undermine its authority and truth on the subject of poverty and

wealth. Since the Bible is the guide of the believer in all matters of faith and conduct, it is the author's desire to redirect both the proponents and opponents of PT to the evidence of Scripture. It is my aim that we avoid creating a worldview that on one hand "breeds superficiality, seriously misrepresents the gospel, and sets people up to believe, when evil and suffering come to them, that God has been untrue to his promises" (Alcorn 2010). On the other hand we are to avoid creating a worldview that breeds a misconstrued view as if God's promises will never be realised in any way in this life and that we can attain certain levels of victory over evil, suffering and poverty.

Evangelical hermeneutics aim to clarify the message God has communicated through those He inspired, yet when such a message is contextualised and made practical, it should not distort the original message in order to fit the cultural and sociological context. However, it is possible to hold to a high confession of Scripture and yet distort its message which would eventually lead to a failed application of the revelation of God's truth concerning issues of suffering, wealth, poverty, health etc. Sarles wrote earlier that many who proclaim prosperity have the tendency of misapplying the Bible, "Bible verses are quoted in abundance without attention to grammatical indicators, semantic nuances, or literary and historical context. The result is a set of ideas and principles based on [a] distortion of textual meaning" (1986:337-349). However, the same could be true for those who oppose PT, that in their attempt to respond to the issue they may simply be appealing to passages of the Bible that would only affirm their biases.

(4) *Polemical:* This research is written in defence of the truth of the Scripture. If PT is an erroneous theology, as is suggested by its opponents, could this be pointed out from Scripture in a way that will bring out the message of the gospel and yet provide a positive and strong approach towards helping the poor in Namibia? It is the researcher's belief that Christians have a duty to safeguard the truth of Scripture and faithfully teach it to others who will in turn teach others (II Tim. 2:2). However, the orthodoxy needs to be accompanied by valid and strong orthopraxis.

If the existence of PT poses a great danger to the evangelical community in Namibia, how can this be countered without appearing as if opposing PT is to propagate a theology of poverty? Therefore, although PT may be said to be negatively affecting the young spiritual condition of the country, we cannot overlook the real need of addressing the material lack that is the plight of more than half of the population. In this case our polemics should be engaged with a perspective of being biblically sound and practical relevant.

Therefore, the researcher aims to discuss various passages of Scripture as used by both opponents and proponents but also to suggest practical ways of integrating the theory with the practice. Our polemical approach should help to settle differences of opinions on certain issues but it must be done in such a way that it will bring honour to God and edify his church.

1.7. Limitations of the study

This research is limited in various ways:

- (1) Its context is limited to the situation in Windhoek (the capital city of Namibia). The assumption is that many of the churches in Windhoek have sub-branches across the country which teach similar doctrines to those propagated in their headquarters. Moreover, considering the size of Namibia, most of the activities in the capital city are reflected around the country since the population is small and there are a large amount of migration between towns making both news and theological views travel fast.
- (2) PT advocates are generally hostile towards dissenting voices and will not give interviews to a researcher that will write a critical review about their theology and practices.
- (3) The researcher will observe only a sample of the churches in Windhoek, which teach PT – these are churches, which I personally know from my previous interactions as a PT follower.

- (4) There are no Namibian scholarly works on the subject and the researcher will use his personal experience and local resources produced by PT advocates.

1.8. Overview

Chapter 1: Introduces the subject of PT and the structure of the study.

Chapter 2: concerns the examination of PT, its history and other dimensions. This section will provide reasons why a specific term has been used e.g. why prosperity theology and not prosperity gospel or name it and claim it gospel. It is essential that the study should begin with the examination of terminology, history and the essential dimension of PT as this will clarify the problem and explain who are the key players (opponents and proponents). This chapter will mainly use epistemological and analytical methods.

Chapter 3: considers the theological and social impact of PT in Namibia. There is virtually no writing on this issue in Namibia, therefore the researcher will gather this information from sermons and articles by some leading PT promoters in Namibia as the sources of information. This chapter will use the analytical method by engaging and setting forth the ideas.

Chapter 4: considers *the critical theological examination of PT in Namibia*. In light of the information provided, especially in Chapter 3, the researcher will provide a theological examination of PT. This chapter will also examine the hermeneutical issues involved in the passages used to defend PT. These passages will be judged in their actual context, as they have been understood in the orthodox community of believers. This chapter will strongly make use of the polemical method.

Chapter 5: will summarise the research and provide the biblical concepts of prosperity and ministry to the poor.

CHAPTER 2: EXAMINATION OF TERMINOLOGY, HISTORY, AND ESSENTIAL DIMENSIONS

2.1. Introduction

PT can best be understood when placed into its historical context and when its terms are clarified. This chapter will therefore examine PT within its larger historical context and its local context in Namibia. Because PT is not a creedal theological system, it is difficult to pin it down as its different proponents interpret it differently. These multiple interpretations are the reason why this chapter will examine the terminology of PT. In the study of biblical theology, words do matter and should be cautiously employed in defining something. In fields such as language, philosophy, theology, law and others, words can be easily used to mean different things and one meaning is not always agreed upon in academia.

This also calls for a careful examination of the words used by PT advocates and their opponents to be certain about what those terms mean before flaunting them for the purposes of labelling. Because of PT's multiple voices, we find variant forms of PT whose advocates teach diverse doctrines (see 2.1.2). Therefore, we must be careful not to label all PT advocates in the same way but to place each of them in appropriate categories. For example, Joel Osteen's (2009) message of prosperity is [significantly] different from that of David Oyedepo (2006) or Haruna Goroh (2009).

2.2. Definitions

2.2.1. *Prosperity theology*

In the attempt to provide a definition to PT, the researcher would like to explore the various definitions of prosperity given by those who advocate it. Going along this route will allow us to deduce the meaning of prosperity from the “horses’ own mouths” rather than just drawing the meaning from the conclusions of their opponents. The definition the researcher will provide at the end of this section will be drawn from the various camps of PT promoters, in so doing we will have an inclusive definition.

As in expository preaching, we expect the message to come from the text of Scripture, so the definition of PT must come from the writings or interpretations of those who advocate it. This will give weight to the final definition of PT that the researcher will use throughout the research. The researcher will deliberately avoid the definitions of the opponents; else, it may be assumed that he is working from the same set of assumptions as the opponents. This is not to say that he disagrees with the definitions of the opponents but simply that he wants to avoid giving the impression of a fixed definition.

2.2.2. *Deriving the meaning of PT from its proponents*

As Prosperity Theology has spread round the globe, it has taken on numerous guises in such diverse locations as West and South Africa, Latin America, South Korea, and Western and Eastern Europe. Promoting organizations and preachers have developed relatively autonomous, idiosyncratic, and often diffuse spheres of influence, appealing in some contexts to urban middle-class constituencies, in others to the aspirant poor, and in yet others to ethnic enclaves situated in migrant diasporas (Coleman 2004).

In the opening chapter, the researcher mentioned three representative groups of PT. These three groups are not exhaustive. Those who advocate PT have some other subdivisions. However, there are two dominant forms in which PT is packaged by its advocates:

(1) *The militant form of PT*

The primary advocates of PT could be said to be dominantly militant. For example, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Fred Price, Benson Idahosa etc. The militant approach is not one that promotes violence but rather one that makes radical claims, such as “God’s will is healing,” “God’s will for you is wealth,” “poverty is of the devil,” or “God is a rich God and all His children ought to be rich” etc. Their basis for such claims is a few verses of the Bible such as:

- “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
- “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (II Cor. 8:9).
- “Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul” (III John 2).

Yinka Yusuf (1999:11), who has been in Namibia several times through Goroh’s ministry, writes that prosperity comes through the creative force of faith and is a “life of supernatural abundance and [limitless] possibility.” Bible-Verse-Insights (2011), a pro-PT website, uploaded an article entitled *Biblical definition of prosperity* that states, “Biblical prosperity means literal wealth, success, and honor. Too many people try to explain away the basic meaning of prosperity in the Bible.” Another pro-PT article *Biblical prosperity: more than enough* says “prosperity is to go to a higher place in something desirable: the state of succeeding or flourishing, esp[ecially] financially” (2010).

Kenneth and Gloria Copeland (1997:vi) define prosperity as success or “gain in anything good or desirable.” While that definition may hold true to some degree in its general usage, the Copelands throughout their book limit the meaning of prosperity to redemption “from sickness, poverty, lack and all the curse” (1997:134). While the definition of the Copelands may appear to be neutral at face value, the two last chapters of their book clearly show what they actually mean. The emphasis is more on gaining material wealth. This gaining of wealth is expected to come in various ways: First, God will take the riches of sinners and give it to the church.

Secondly, rich sinners will come to saving faith and give their resources to the church. Thirdly, the principle of hundredfold return. That is, “People who are increasing their giving as they grow will see ever-increasing returns on their giving – as the reservoirs that have held riches from unjust gain are tapped” (Copeland 1997:230-231).

The Namibian based PT preacher Goroh who has been greatly influenced by the teachings of the Copelands and the late Kenneth Hagin writes,

If you are a believer, abundant life is your birthright. The seed of the righteous are not meant to beg bread but to enjoy plenty...You are supposed to enjoy the best. Life is not supposed to be lived in crises when Christ is living in you. You are supposed to live an abundant life even during the season of famine (2009:36).

Billy Lubansa a friend of Goroh and a prominent proponent of PT writes along similar lines,

I...believe that the type of prosperity that Job enjoyed is what God designed for every believer to experience... People of God, you must believe that when the gospel is preached to the poor it helps them to grow rich. This is because that is how God intended to deal with the poverty issue. God...design[ed] the gospel...to teach [poor] people that He desires for them to prosper...the gospel is a prosperity building message (2007:17-19).

Ken Hammond (2004:1) also known as *The success coach*, a crusader of PT writes with vividness that “I’ve got Good News for the human race!...[it will] eradicate poverty from the face of the earth...**GOD WANTS YOU TO BE WEALTHY!**” (emphasis in original). He continues on another page “When poverty moves in, the Will of God moves out” (p. 4). Oyedepo (2006) takes the claim of Hammond further, basing his argument on II Corinthians 8:9. His concept of prosperity is linked to the message of salvation or rather he sees it as being part of the “salvation package” – thus he sees salvation as a means to wealth or deliverance from economic poverty. He writes, “Redemption is a cure for poverty, as it gives you access to the cure for poverty. When you were saved, you were redeemed from the plague of poverty, because your Father is very wealthy” (Oyedepo 2006:74). I will briefly interact here with Oyedepo’s view.

Oyedepo's view sounds plausible as it seems to point out that Christ's death had the entire human concern at heart. Moreover, that the whole incarnation of the Son of God actually proves that God has great concern over his creation – the human race. This is definitely something positive if we look at it from that angle. The fact that God gave his Son and came to live in the form of man amongst men surely serves as evidence of the great concern of the Creator. This is an admirable reality to note that the incarnation has both a material care and a spiritual care for the human race.

However, care is required before a passage is interpreted and applied. It is important to understand the historical background of the entire book of II Corinthians and the context of chapter eight. For example, it would be fair to look at what Paul is addressing in the eighth and ninth chapter: raising donations for the poor Jewish Christians and the poor Macedonian church, who gave regardless of their own lack. With this context in mind, Oyedepo may need to rethink the truth and application of his statement that "redemption is a cure for poverty." How does this redemption plan to cure poverty apply universally if it appears that the early church was faced with such serious poverty to the extent of needing to receive donations from other churches?

Although Oyedepo may unconsciously be pointing out an important aspect of the incarnation and God's concern for his creation, the historical, theological and practical context of this passage does not seem to agree with his conclusion about material wealth. There is a sense of prosperity this passage is advocating, however, the context tells us that this is not material wealth and health. Rather Paul is speaking of the riches of divine grace and the love of God which was made effective through the poverty of Christ. The poverty has to do with Christ leaving His heavenly glory by making Himself of no reputation and humbling Himself and dying on the cross (Phil. 2:6-7). Through this, self-abasing act believers have been made partakers of the glory of God and will share in the eternal kingdom. Wiersbe (1996; cf. Kruse 1987, Utley 2002) comments,

In what ways was Jesus rich? Certainly He was rich in His person, for He is eternal God. He is rich in His possessions and in His position as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is rich in His power, for He can do

anything. Yet, in spite of the fact that He had all these riches—and more—*He became poor*.

The tense of the verb indicates that it is His incarnation, His birth at Bethlehem, that is meant here. He united Himself to mankind and took on Himself a human body. He left the throne to become a servant. He laid aside all His possessions so that He did not even have a place to lay His head. His ultimate experience of poverty was when He was made sin for us on the cross. Hell is eternal poverty, and on the cross Jesus Christ became the poorest of the poor.

Why did He do it? That we might become rich! This suggests that we were poor before we met Jesus Christ, and we were—totally bankrupt. But now that we have trusted Him, we share in all of His riches! We are now the children of God, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ” (Rom. 8:17). Since this is true, *how can we refuse to give to others?* He became poor to make us rich! Can we not follow His example, as did the Macedonian churches, who out of their deep poverty abounded in liberality?

Because becoming materially wealthy is the emphasis of PT, it is necessary to clearly point out the message that Paul is trying to convey to his Corinthian readers. The comparison of Christ becoming poor so that believers may become rich has everything to do with the cross of Christ. Now that all believers are beneficiaries of the cross of Christ, Paul appeals to the then wealthy church of Corinth which was being slow to share the burden with the believers in Jerusalem. Far from describing how rich Christians ought to be, Paul argues that we are to learn from Christ’s example of self-sacrificing for our fellow believers. The message is that we are to be generous and this generosity is also indicative of the effects of the gospel of Christ working within us. So Paul is saying that, because believers have received and believed the gospel and have experienced the riches of God’s mercy in Christ Jesus, they ought to demonstrate this salvation also through showing compassion to the poor and afflicted members of God’s church. Thus, if there is a practical way of demonstrating our appreciation of God’s grace we should show it through sharing with fellow believers our material wealth. This in a sense advocates the concept of becoming rich, that is, the idea of meeting the needs of the needy seems to demonstrate a concept of wealth (I Tim. 6:6-7).

The interpretation of this passage as a cure from material poverty for believers contradicts what we know about the early church and the intentions of the

apostle Paul. It does not correspond with Paul's personal sufferings for the sake of the gospel (I Cor. 4:11-13) and many passages that tell us of the early church's experiences of persecution and material need rather than prosperity.

This failure to read and understand the context of this passage has potential for detrimental outcomes when pushed to its logical conclusion. Although the doctrine of the incarnation resembles the reality of God's concern for humanity and his desire to bless them, it must be interpreted in the context of the entire canon of Scripture, to avoid developing new worldviews that do not reflect both biblical and practical realities.

Because the biblical data is not dealt with in a coherent way that will provide a true and practical solution to address poverty, it is unavoidable that Oyedepo writes that riches will be given through what he calls "covenant practicing." What is this covenant practice? Oyedepo explains it as follows,

Solomon loved the Lord, so he gave to the Lord. As a result, when the covenant was established, he was supernaturally empowered for inexplicable wealth. He gave, and then the heavens opened. If you are not a giver, the heaven over you won't open, your 'connections' withstanding (2006:76).

This is the radical form of PT and is very easy to identify. It is not subtle in nature because its advocates clearly state that "God's will is for you to be rich, healthy and always happy." The radical form is easier to handle too as one can point out hermeneutical and pragmatic problems that it constructs. Those who have attained great wealth usually advocate this form of PT. For example, Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, David Oyedepo and Chris Oyakilome are preachers who run multi-million dollar ministries. It is not only their ministries which are wealthy, they have also attained personal wealth running into millions of US dollars. They then use their personal wealth and that of their ministries as proto-types upon which all believers should claim riches.

(2) The diffused form of PT

This group does not make express statements such as "God's will for you is health and wealth" or "poverty is a sin," however the idea (of health, wealth and success) is implied. Their emphasis is more motivational and creating an impression

of a world with limitless possibilities and victories, and without suffering. It goes something like this,

Break those chains [of despair and discouragement]. Become a prisoner of hope. No matter how long it takes, no matter how impossible it looks, your attitude should be: 'I just can't help it. I know it will work out. I know I will overcome. It may be taking a long time, but I know this too shall pass. It may be difficult, but I know that means I'm close to victory' (Osteen 2009:6).

Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Thomas D. Jakes and Robert Schuller, are perhaps the most influential people in the 21st century who propagate this second form of PT. Basically the path to successful living is to ignore all external symptoms of sickness, problems, bankruptcy, pain etc. Instead of thinking about the problems, one should concentrate on the opposite of any challenge. The idea is that positive thoughts coupled with faith, hope and right actions are guaranteed to always bring forth the desired outcome in every situation (Osteen 2009:8) or "If you will keep believing...hoping...doing the right thing, and...stay strong for that final push, you will see the situation turn around" (Osteen 2009:9).

Those who advocate the militant form of PT also incorporate the notions of Osteen. Goroh writes,

I speak to that broken relationship to be restored. I command a change in that business. I speak open doors over your life and family. Your worst days are behind you. Your best days have just started. Wipe your tears, wash yourself, dress up and show God's glory. Speak what you desire and not what you see. Every day you wake up; make a positive confession about your health...children...spouse...business and everything around you (2009:102).

Chris Oyakilome who is an ardent proponent of the message of health, wealth and success also takes the motivational approach. He believes that believers have power and anointing to excel in life, he writes,

[E]veryday, consciously declare that the grace of God is working in you and you're increasing in it. Meditate on God's Word everyday and let your spirit radiate the glory in the Word. Before long, that glow in your spirit will begin to show up outwardly and others will recognize the hand of God upon you, and necessarily do you good. Remember, the grace of God is already available to you, so grow in it; take as much of it as you can; and watch the power of promotion catapult you upward

and forward as you make progress with giant strides! (2008:8th December)

John Akpami (2009) who has visited Namibia generally appears to be distant from PT advocates but reading in-between the lines he is actively one of them. He claims that there are hard times lying ahead for everyone. However, those who have God as their covenant partner will be spared. He writes,

To settle for an excuse for not making it [during the coming hard times] is to be caught in a trap of deception. Those who use covenant eyes to look at problems know that every problem is smaller than what you see. Every mountain is much less than the size you see. The truth is, no mountain is equal to the size of faith in your human spirit. Whatever that mountain is: Debts to pay; sickness in the body; projects to execute. They will diminish if you look well...The covenant will make available wisdom to enable you to tap honey out of the rock (2009:51-52).

Thus, the covenant with God would create a life of continuous victory for the believers in this life. The meaning of “covenant” in the above mentioned quote is not very clear. Which covenant is he referring to? There are various forms of covenants advocated in PT. One is the covenant established with God through sacrificial giving (Oyedepo 2006:76). However, this notion of the covenant is called the Abrahamic Covenant (AC). This view is strongly propagated by US based PT advocate Jay Snell in a series of his books for example, *What Are Abraham’s Blessings Anyway?: Why Jesus Must Heal And Prosper You Now* and *How to Obtain Abraham’s Blessings*.

The AC view advocated by PT skips over the central message represented in the AC – the message of salvation. God’s covenant with Abraham has come to be because of the Fall (Gen. 3). When God revealed Himself to Abraham the world was in a state of increasing ungodliness and the people of the world were serving idols. God, out of His own will, chose Abraham that through his line the Saviour of the world would be born. Through Christ all nations will be blessed by placing faith in His work on the cross.

One of the key passages used to advocate wealth for the believer through the AC is Galatians 3:13-14 that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a

tree’ – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (ESV; unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version). Prosperity preachers use this passage to say that the AC entailed material blessings to all of God’s people. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the AC, we need to keep the context of this covenant, which is the spiritual blessings provided through the atoning work of Christ. Failure to see the gift of salvation as the central blessing God has extended to all who will believe, would reduce God’s plan of salvation to that of obtaining of material things in this world.

Donald K. Campbell (1985) provides us with a helpful commentary on this passage. He tells us that the blessing being referred to here has to do with justification by faith in Christ Jesus. The passage then is an address on the subject of justification apart from the Law which is given to all who believe in the same way as Abraham (Campbell, 1985:598). This seem to have been the historic understanding of this passage by early theologians like Poole (1685) who wrote that **“the blessing of Abraham, [are] those spiritual blessings of justification, reconciliation, and adoption, which came to Abraham upon his believing, and the imputation of righteousness thereupon unto him.”** The nineteenth century theologian Adam Clarke (1825) also understood the blessing of Abraham for those who have believed as “justification or the pardon of sin, with all other blessings consequent on it, such as *peace with God, spiritual life, and eternal glory.*” Thus, our reading from history shows us that believers never considered themselves as eligible to material blessing through the AC but as heirs of God’s spiritual blessings because of what Christ has done.

This thought or interpretation of the AC stated by Wolvaard, Poole and Clarke is also maintained by many modern evangelical scholars. Falwell (1997) writes, “The blessing of Abraham is justification by faith...intended for the whole world, but it is only in and through...Christ”. MacDonald (1995) affirms with Falwell when he writes, “God had promised to bless Abraham and to bless all the world through him. The blessing of Abraham is really salvation by grace through faith.” So the AC’s greatest purpose was to reveal,

...[T]he plan of salvation with greater clarity than ever before. In both the post-fall promise and the covenant with Noah the saving grace of God is revealed, but the plan of salvation is still rather obscure. With Abraham the promise of the new covenant is considerably expanded, providing a much clearer vision of the future salvation. Thus the Abrahamic covenant became the “reference covenant” for the rest of the covenants in the old covenant era (Smith 2006:30).

While there appear to be two forms in which PT is propagated the core message remains unchanged. The language, emphasis and style may be different but it is saying the same thing in different ways. So, what do these two views have in common? They both claim that:

- (a) God’s will for the believer is absolute success in all areas of life.
- (b) God’s will is for believers to overcome all trials.
- (c) Suffering is not part of the believer’s heritage.
- (d) God wants us to have the best of everything in life.
- (e) Our spiritual redemption is a guarantee of victory in all other areas of life.
- (f) Jesus suffered in our place so that we can to live victoriously in every area of life.
- (g) Being a Christian guarantees “smooth sailing” through life.

Having mentioned the above, how do we define PT then? PT is the theology that advocates that it is God's will for every believer to be prosperous (Oyedepo 2006; cf. Goroh 2009; Copeland 1978). Thus, God blesses those who are faithful with prosperous living (Price 1999:1-5). However, the said prosperity does not come automatically. To obtain this prosperity the believers must repeat certain prescribed prayers, make prescribed positive confessions and confess prescribed Scriptures, and by “sowing seeds” they will in turn receive almost anything they desire. The view infers that a sick, poor and suffering believer is outside the will of God because his life lacks sufficient faith, or he lives in some sort of sin or disobedience. In its emphasis on prosperous living being a reward for obedient and holy living, the will of God for the believer is remodelled in such a way that the followers of this theology feel guilty especially if they become terminally ill, or have financial, marital, or career struggles.

PT theology then, from the ideas we have gathered from its advocates is based on three pillars, which are:

- (1) Divine healing
- (2) Material prosperity and
- (3) Positive confession.

In each of these areas, believers emphasize the goodness of God, alongside the idea that the faith of the born-again person can activate divine favour in predictable and tangible ways. The Old Testament covenant that made blessings available to the chosen people is said to have been extended to all peoples by virtue of Christ's atonement on the cross (Coleman 2004).

2.2.3. *The prosperity teaching as a "theology"*

This research refers to prosperity teaching as a theology, however, this definition needs to be qualified. There are various kinds of theologies, especially under the brand of Liberation Theology (LTh), for example, Black Theology (BTh), Ethiopian Theology (ETh), Feminist Theology (FTh), Ecological Theology (EcoTh) to mention a few. "All of these theologies see liberation as a key concept in the Bible, and take it that one can formulate the entire gospel, or at least important aspects of it, in terms of the concept of liberation" (König 1998:12). PT may be categorised under LTh as its emphasis is on liberation from poverty, sickness and suffering.

What makes a specific view to be referred to as a theology? This is a difficult question to answer. It is much easier to label a view a theology but to qualify it is not that easy. Most of the scholarly works that deal with theology do not explain what makes a theology a theology. Rather they all answer the question: "What is theology?" Therefore, the branding of prosperity teaching as a theology will be derived from what is implied by the various definitions of what theology is. The researcher will use the following definitions to help categorise PT:

(1) Brian Gaybba

All theology is ultimately a reflection by Christians on their faith. This reflection can take many forms, and that is what distinguishes one type of theology from another. It can take the very basic form of a personal

attempt to apply one's faith to one's own life. Or it can take the form of a very abstract, detailed and highly sophisticated analysis of a particular aspect of faith, utilising the latest philosophical insights or whatever other insights contemporary knowledge can give us (1998:27).

The above is a general explanation of the discipline of theology. Thus, it is the reflection of how Christians can apply their faith to everyday life. This reflection can be subjective, highly academic or philosophical. In this reflection, the reflector should consider the subject concerned under the scrutiny of Scripture. What separates bad theology from good theology in the evangelical community is that Scripture ought to govern our application. On this basis PT is surely a reflection of those who belong mainly to the WoF movement concerning issues of wealth, health and success. This reflection is raised by the social context of the people and although the Bible is used to propagate this sort of theology, there appears to be a great measure of subjectivity and hermeneutical dissension.

(2) *Tite Tiénou*

Theology is the reasoned statement of biblical revelation, in specific places and specific times, which makes possible the transmission of the Christian faith to future generations. We may compare the Christian faith to a beautiful song. Biblical revelation forms the words of the song and theology represents the music and rhythm. Both revelation and theology are needed. In our cultures, music and rhythm serve to support the transmission and instruction of the messages. Likewise, theology is the indispensable support of the revealed Word of God (1982:12).

Tiénou's definition of theology takes the approach of doing theology from the message of Scripture. It is not just doing of theology for its own sake but in order to remain faithful to the revelation of God in Scripture. The emphasis is that theology should develop from Scripture and the context of Scripture should not be sacrificed at the expense of changing times. Thus, while theology ought to be practical and relevant it is only relevant if the context of Scripture is not corrupted in the process of application. It could be said of PT that it is a reasoned (although not systematic) collection of biblical material concerning the issue of prosperity. Whether this reasoning is done with the overarching message of the Bible in view is what many biblical scholars are in disagreement with.

(3) *Millard J. Erickson*

[Theology is] that discipline which strives to give a coherent statement of the doctrines of the Christian faith, based primarily upon the Scriptures, placed in the context of culture in general, worded in a contemporary idiom, and related to the issues of life (1985:21).

Although PT is represented by multiple voices and lacks congruity in definition by those who advocate it, it holds to an underlying belief concerning the Christian faith. That is, Scripture promises all who believe in Jesus Christ lives defined by prosperity (financially), health, success and happiness. It endeavours to be relevant to the contemporary issue of poverty but this attempt to address poverty can be said to be moving into hyper-capitalism, transnational-capitalism, materialism, abuse of Scripture and exploitation of people (Maxwell 1998:350-373; Meyer 2004:453-454; Piper 2010:15-32).

PT is a very recent development that has various features and may never find its way to being systematised as a theology except in the loose sense of the word. With this loose sense of the word “theology,” prosperity gospel qualifies to be termed as a theology in that it is an attempt of some Christians, reflecting upon the relevance of their faith, to address the issue of poverty in Namibia. This reflection is with reference to certain passages of the Bible. The conclusion from this reflection is that the central message of the Bible is redemption but it is a redemption not only limited to the soul but also including social and economic elevation. Thus, Christianity promises emancipation from poverty, sickness, failure and suffering because God who is the owner of this world can only give good gifts to His children. As a theology within LTh, it is concerned with the attempt to help people achieve emancipation from present struggles and have them experience heaven on earth. (That is, it may be considered an over-realised eschatology).

PT is a theology that promotes prosperity as the central or overarching message of the Bible. Although it lacks a symphonic message, there are key factors to which all its advocates hold, regardless of their different ways of expressing it. The underlying factor is that God desires to bless all believers with prosperity, which includes financial freedom, absolute health, wealth and success. Even where Jesus

is said to be preached, He is presented as a giver of health, prosperity, protection, business success, etc (Oyedepo 2006:127-204; cf. Osteen 2009).

Theology is definitely important for the believer as it aims to enhance his or her relationship with God. However, it is important that our theology should be right. That is, we need to have a theology that stems from Scripture and is in agreement with the overarching message of the Bible (the grace of God shown in Jesus Christ). Any theology that departs from Scripture and improvises methods that are considered politically correct to our present day culture will result in incorrect beliefs about God. While PT may have some commendable aspects, it is generally constructed upon a defective theology.

While Prosperity adherents usually emphasize the importance of a literal interpretation of the Bible, they also stress the authority and inspiration of the spoken word, as deployed either by God or by believers themselves. Key to this assumption is the doctrine, based in part on Romans 10:8, that whatever is spoken by faith can address and have an influence on all situations. So-called positive 'confession' is therefore not an admission of sin...but rather a statement that lays claim to divine beneficence, giving prosperity to the person but also equipping them to be more effective in converting others to the faith. Inspired words are therefore seen as literally creative, so that the believer must be careful to speak positively at all times in order to avoid the dangers of 'negative confession' (Coleman 2004).

2.2.4. Definition of the poor

Seeing that this thesis focuses on the impact of PT among the poor, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the poor and who the poor are. Poverty is generally described as a state of lacking the essential necessities of life. This would then mean that the poor are those people without adequate food and water, clothing and shelter (which are necessities or essential needs). These people

[A]re normally not seen as those who make a contribution to the economy because they lack. In fact, the poor are normally looked at as consumers through the eyes of the more affluent people. However, the poor are part of the make up of any economic system irrespective of their contribution or consumption (Reynecke 2006:56).

Moreover, this is not an economic rank or class but a description of the most vulnerable people of society (see Figure 3). They are described as "those surviving

on less than one US dollar a day” (National Planning Commission (NPC) 2007:1). These people are generally uneducated, have few skills to make a living, bad health and have very low earnings, if any. Women, children and old people are the most vulnerable. These poor people are often isolated and marginalised from general society. For example, by locating them on the outskirts of towns, in houses made of tins, plastic, and carton boxes (see Figure 1 below). They lack choice, that is, they have to live here, they have to work etc. It is to such a group of people (the poor) that PT by its promises may be appealing to because it claims to offer hope of a higher quality of life (see Figure 2) (Gifford 1990; Harrell 1975; Hollinger 1991).



Figure 1: Corrugated iron huts without water and electricity in an informal settlement on the edge of the Katutura in Windhoek



Figure 2: A luxury house worth N\$ 4.5 million in one of the upper class suburbs of Windhoek

The figure below (next page) provides the different layers of poverty and the poor of society are those who are most likely to experience many or all of these issues.

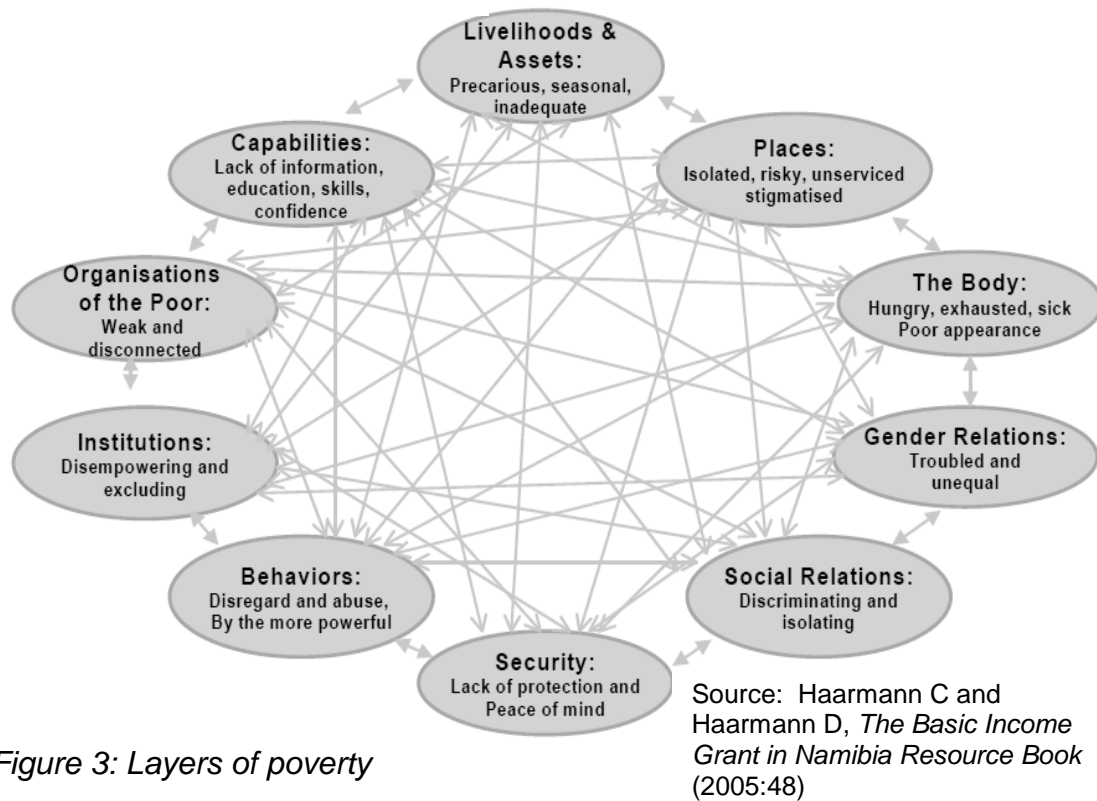


Figure 3: Layers of poverty

Since PT teaches that God wants people to be prosperous, especially financially, the poor then become an easy target of this theology. Their economic desperation is also fuelled by their lack of education, so it is much easier for them to accept PT without question. These poor people are told to deal with their lack of faith, which is said to be the cause of their poverty. This approach, while it may sound spiritual, is impractical in addressing the issue of poverty. The idea this faith teaching denotes is that our duty as Christians is to simply deal with the poor's lack of faith but in reality do nothing about the poverty itself.

The poor, for the sake of this context, is not inclusive of every poor person but referring to the poor who are Christians. This is not to say that Christianity is not concerned with the non-Christian poor but because what is at stake is the interpretation of Scripture and faith in Christ, the subject is limited to those within the household of faith (for example Gal. 6:10). Because Scripture calls upon us to do justice, to share bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into our houses and cover the naked (Is. 58), it is therefore important that we should work towards a biblical concept of combating poverty.

Two extreme points come into play here. One is that of presenting a Christian message that encourages materialism and consumerism based on a misinterpretation of several biblical texts. The other is that of presenting a Christian message that regards poverty as a Christian ideal modelled on Jesus Christ. Neither of these extremes is healthy for those in poverty nor do they do justice to the spirit of Scripture. What we can be assured of as believers is that our faith demands that we should be able to respond to the needs of the poor. That is, as we serve Christ we should never forget the poor for “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (Js. 1:27; cf. Matt. 25:36; Is. 1:17, Eph. 2:10, Mic. 6:8). This is to say that spirituality and active works of mercy go hand in hand because true “Religion in its rise interests us about *ourselves* in its progress, about our *fellow creatures*: in its highest stage, about the honor of God” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown 1997). Moreover, true religion requires holy living before God. That is, those who claim to belong to God must separate themselves from the defilement of the world. But,

After we have seen ourselves and Christ in the mirror of the Word, we must see others and their needs. Isaiah first saw the Lord, then himself, and then the people to whom he would minister (Isa. 6:1–8). Words are no substitute for deeds of love (James 2:14–18; I John 3:11–18). God does not want us to pay for others to minister as a substitute for our own personal service! (Wiersbe 1996).

With Scripture commanding us to be concerned for the poor, the issue is not whether there is evidence of concern; instead, we need to ask what actions we need to take to deal with the reality of poverty. In opposing the prosperity gospel, we need to ask as to what hope the gospel offers to the poor both for the “here and now” and the future. John Stott (1992:27-28) provides us with practical wisdom of how to respond to the issue of poverty when he writes,

We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolved not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathize with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it.

Thus, as this research aims at providing a biblical concept of dealing with poverty as Christians we are not just to resolve to have beautiful definitions and descriptions of poverty and the poor. Instead, as Samuel Kunhiyop (2008:138) writes “we must examine the biblical material, for it is the starting point for meaningful Christian discussion” in dealing with the poverty problem however, we need to critically examine the various approaches of dealing with poverty “before making recommendations for addressing it” (Kunhiyop 2008:138).

2.3. The historical background of PT

PT is definitely a very recent phenomenon although it has gained considerable numbers of followers and propagators just in a matter of decades. How the movement came to be is still a controversial point of discussion, however, the majority of scholars are of the same opinion that the movement began in the USA (Gifford 1994:516; cf. MacArthur 1992:322-323; Piper 2010:15-32). Initially the movement did not start as a purely Pentecostal or Charismatic division but altogether based on and borrowed from pagan religious concepts. E.W. Kenyon along with Vincent Peale could be rightly termed the fathers of PT with their roots in Christian Science and New Thought (McConnell 1995:15). There has been some disagreement about where Kenyon got his influences. What is evident is that his influences did not stem from one source but several. That is, he was influenced by various emerging healing ministers of his time, the Pentecostal movement and the American metaphysical cults (McConnell 1996).

However, Kenyon himself was not a Pentecostal and in fact he opposed much of Pentecostalism, yet he exerted great influence on “many of the post-war Pentecostal healers, the dominating influence on his theology is in fact the metaphysical cults which abounded at the turn of the [19th] century” (Jackson 1987:16). This influence has manifested itself strongly through the teachings of men such as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Frederick Price, Charles Capps, Paul Crouch, Benny Hinn, Benson Idahosa, David Oyedepo, Chris Oyakilome, Haruna Goroh, Wahl Abrahams and Fred Joseph, just to mention a few.

The historical and ideological roots of Prosperity Theology are complex and disputed, reflecting the controversial nature of its adherents' claims. The influence of Pentecostal revivalism...seems evident,

particularly through the activities of the North American healing movement of the 1940s and 1950s. Important figures in this post-War revival, such as William Branham, Oral Roberts, A.A. Allen and T.L. Osborn, promoted a prosperity message that eventually encompassed both physical and financial aspects of the believer's life. Some of these preachers were later able to become high-profile participants within the burgeoning revival of independent charismatic ministries that marked the latter decades of the twentieth century (Coleman 2004).

While Kenyon might have pioneered the movement's ideologies, however, they were remodelled and spread in a new form by the late Kenneth Hagin and other leading neo-Pentecostal revivalists (Oral Roberts, R.W. Schambach). However, Hagin was more instrumental in the spread of PT and came to be known as the father of PT, a title which in recent years was passed on to his disciple Kenneth Copeland (Atkins 2011). Hagin had initially started as a health preacher and gradually evolved into propagating the doctrines of material success especially financial prosperity. Both health and wealth have become earmarks of the movement Hagin started.

PT is found in various denominations but mostly in neo-Pentecostal denominations. It can therefore be seen that PT is analogous to classical Pentecostalism in its emphasis on the baptism of the Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues and charismatic gifts. What makes it somehow different from classical Pentecostalism however is the degree to which it emphasises divine healing, material prosperity and positive confession. Because God is a good God only good should come from God and by faith the believer can activate divine favour and cause circumstances to work for his good. This theology is propagated on the basis that the blessings God promised to the people of Israel in the Old Testament (OT) covenant (Abrahamic and Mosaic) have been extended to the church by virtue of Christ's death on the cross. Thus, "the prosperity emphasis then makes a further extension to the theology of the cross. It is argued that if sickness is atoned for, then also other forms of human suffering are also atoned for, notably lack of finance or poverty" (Williams 2001:196; cf. Gossett & Kenyon 1981:53; Copeland 1974:51).

As Prosperity Theology has spread round the globe, it has taken on numerous guises in such diverse locations as West and South Africa, Latin America, South Korea, and Western and Eastern Europe. Promoting organizations and preachers have developed relatively

autonomous, idiosyncratic, and often diffuse spheres of influence, appealing in some contexts to urban middle-class constituencies, in others to the aspirant poor, and in yet others to ethnic enclaves situated in migrant diasporas. This variant of conservative Protestantism has proved highly controversial in many of the contexts in which it has appeared. It has variously been accused of promulgating Gnosticism, undiluted forms of American capitalism, New Age...individualism, naïve trust in faith healing, and acceptance of, rather than revolt against, conditions of racial and economic inequality (Coleman 2004).

It is however, not the interest of this research to write a comprehensive historical background of this movement. The researcher would like to place emphasis on PT's development in Namibia. But the above background is necessary because it is the same message being propagated in Namibia except that is redressed in African garments.

2.3.1. PT's development in Namibia

There is no substantial written record of PT's actual beginning in Namibia and it can therefore only be traced through those who have pioneered the movement. While Drs Buys and Nambala (2003) have written an insightful book on the history of the church in Namibia, they did not deal with the subject of PT under the Pentecostal developments. The reason for this is unclear.

At the time of independence (1990) the Namibian religious milieu was basically dominated by mainstream churches (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Dutch Reformed) and a small but significant number of African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal-like churches (Morriah, Eben Ezer, Back to God Assemblies of God, Apostolic Faith Mission etc). The Pentecostal-like groups were often ridiculed and seen as fringe groups consisting of people who were mentally disturbed or perhaps had committed some sort of "big sins" in their lives. These Pentecostal-like groups had their roots in holiness movements as they placed emphasised more on holiness and evangelism (Buys & Nambala 2003).

Emphasis on the charismata came as a post-independence phenomenon. While neo-Pentecostals in Namibia do hold to a literal interpretation of the Bible, much of the spiritual gifts were not emphasised, especially that of speaking in

strange tongues. The early 1990s witnessed great revivalism that emphasised Spirit baptism and healing. Many new churches were also established in the process. None of these churches taught PT as they focused more on the revival of charismatic gifts and evangelism. Thus, PT was unheard of amongst early Pentecostal-like churches in Namibia. This phenomenon developed and gained popularity after independence.

The Namibian Broadcasting Cooperation (NBC) has been instrumental in promoting PT via its Sunday broadcasting of preachers such as Nevers Mumba, Myles Munroe, and Thomas D. Jakes etc. However, the researcher does not assume that NBC aired these preachers to knowingly deceive the public. He does not know what really motivated their airing of these tele-evangelists. However, this media exposure sparked a great awareness of tele-evangelism and more and more people began seeking the resources of these tele-evangelists.

However, the father of PT in Namibia can rightfully be said to be Haruna B. Goroh. He came to Namibia in the early 1990s claiming to be sent by God to do a quick work that has never been done before. The meaning of the quick work remains unclear; he interprets the quickness as referring not to time but the uniqueness and impact of the work. The early focus of Goroh's ministry was strongly evangelistic, however, with time he developed into a fully-fledged PT exponent. The Greater Love Ministries headed by Goroh was the first to start hosting a national conference known as the Faith Convention importing prosperity preachers from across the globe (Fred Ado, Matthew Ashimolowo, Alan Bagg, Myles Munroe etc). These conferences mainly focused on issues related to financial breakthroughs, healings, discovering one's hidden potential and personal success.

While the Greater Love Ministries could be rightly said to have paved the way for the spread of PT, as it was not only vocal about the subject but also publishing books, a group of other churches also adopted PT into their main teaching and preaching programmes. At times, it is subtle in some of these churches (for example AFM and PPC) while it is quite obvious in others (for example, Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), Christ Embassy, Kingdom Faith Builders, Forward in Faith Ministries etc).

These PT churches are divided into two main categories. First, there are those who operate amongst the poor of the Namibian society and are also involved in some humanitarian activities especially feeding projects. These humanitarian acts surely deserve to be applauded but the theological concern still remains about the doctrines they propagate in their local congregations. These poor people are continuously encouraged to give away their resources with the promise that God will bring them out of their condition and catapult them into immeasurable riches. Secondly, there are those who believe that God has called them to minister to middle and upper class people in the society. These churches are established in suburbs of middle and upper income earners. They are also involved in humanitarian activities but not amongst the people they minister to, these activities are carried out amongst the poor.

In recent years, there have been changes; both of these two groups are now establishing churches in poor and rich neighbourhoods. However, there are great distinctions made regarding how these two groups of people are treated. Ministries in the poor suburbs are often manipulative whereas those in the middle and upper class suburbs are run with great caution. Issues of time are not considered amongst the poor; they can come to church and be kept for five or more hours in church. On the other hand, those of the middle and upper classes have church services that run for only one or two hours. The common issue propagated in both of the groups is that God desires prosperity for His people and that they are to live good lives surpassing that of the ungodly. So the followers take note of this message encouraged by their leaders and "Confident that the Spirit empowers and protects them, they boldly progress into new opportunities presented by urbanization, higher education and globalization" (Born 2002:ii).

Another thing to observe is that PT in Namibia is mainly in a Nigerian cultural form. Nigeria and South Africa can rightly be said to have been amongst the first African countries to be exposed to PT by the USA. South Africa was first in bringing Pentecostal theology to Namibia as early as the 1940s (Buys & Nambala 2003:147-149). South Africa has also been instrumental in advocating other Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal phenomena in Namibia, for example, speaking in tongues, slain in the Spirit, holy laughter etc. However, the Word of Faith movement in Namibia was

pioneered by Nigerian neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic missionaries, for example, Haruna B. Goroh and Chris Oyakilome.

This version also came with a deep-seated African worldview which dominates much of the Nigerian culture more than it does in Namibia. The traditional African worldview “has no concept of asceticism” (Chilongani 2007:53) and this is the same worldview incorporated in much of the Nigerian version of PT. Most of the Nigerian preachers who have come to Namibia for example, Matthew Ashimolowo, Fred Ado, Yinka Yusuf etc have displayed a taste for African religiosity. Chilongani writes, “African religion is meant to ensure fertility, abundance and longevity. Wealth and success are naturally perceived as signs of supernatural blessing, whether from God or the ancestors” (2007:53).

This Nigerian version of prosperity at heart also promotes “the traditional African religio-culture and especially the philosophy of abundant life” (Chilongani 2007:52-53). The philosophy of abundant life is clearly demonstrated by Oyedepo that “As an ambassador of heaven here on earth, you are to enjoy heavenly supplies and provisions, thereby, granting you immunity from lack and want” (2006:40). Goroh repeats this same sentiment when he writes, “If you are a believer, abundant life is your birthright. The seed of the righteous are not meant to beg bread but to enjoy plenty” (2009:36). This desire for abundant life combined with positive confession would be expressed as follow, “When sickness, poverty and defeat try to attack you, say, ‘It is written; I’m the healed and not the sick! I’m the rich and not the poor! I’m a bundle of success happening everywhere” (Oyakilome 2008).

This concept of abundance that is borrowed from both the American Dream and African Traditional Religions (ATRs) (Gifford 2004:47,48), has infiltrated much of the neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic community as this is very similar to their local cultures. Especially for those who come from strong cultural backgrounds PT brings the same message of abundance told in their folklore.

The movement that once started as a small fellowship in a sitting room of the Gorohs has become a serious theological force to reckon with. Various PT churches are now found across the country mainly the Christ Embassy and UCKG which is gaining more adherents because of their financial capability to build modern

attractive structures, buy time on television and radio and their charismatic advertisements. Besides these large proponents are many smaller ones, both Namibians and non-Namibians, who are equally gaining adherents. The majority of Pentecostal-like and Charismatic churches have evolved into being pro-PT and only a few are opposed to this theology, notably those with “classical Pentecostal roots” such as Eben-ezer, Moriah, and New Temple etc. However, the latter are also faced with other theological issues such as syncretism and of mixing the Law and Grace.

2.4. The underlying reasons for the propagation of PT

There are several reasons why PT is taught. These reasons have been displayed by many of the movement’s proponents and have become universally accepted, however, not in a creedal form. Although these reasons are not in written creeds they have been adopted into the teachings of those who propagate PT. The reasons below are not following a specific order of importance.

2.4.1. Eschatological reasons

Some Prosperity doctrines echo the theological assertions ... that Christians are the true custodians of the world and have the right to ‘reassert the Lord’s dominion over the nation’ (Wills 1990:175). They combine a personal ethic of self-realization with an approval of activity that extends into social and political spheres, and include the apocalyptic notion that Christians should fulfill their mandate by dominating the planet before Jesus returns (Coleman 1993:356).

PT holds an eschatological view in which future elements of God’s kingdom are “moved into a more present realization” (Winebrenner 2007:39). That is, PT proponents hold to a view in which they would like people to think that they can have heaven on earth (believers are to experience the life promised in future, in the here and now). The failure to understand the *now but not yet* aspect of the Kingdom of God has made the PT proponents concentrate only on the now. The *now* is proclaimed with the vigour and glory that was meant only for the *not yet* aspect of the Kingdom (see Chapter 5:§5.3).

In reaction against a defeatist teaching, PT has embraced a triumphalist view, which says, “you do not have to wait for a good life in heaven you can have the fullness of heaven right now.” Defeatism downplays the reality of the blessings and

victory secured for the believer by the Lord Jesus Christ. However, triumphalism in rejecting this defeatism has moved into the error of the other extreme by claiming that the victory Christ won for the church is to be manifested fully in the here and now. Thus, the blessings and victory we have in Jesus Christ should result in a life free from suffering. That is, since Christians are children of the King, they are entitled to lives of financial prosperity, physical health and are delivered from the curse of the Fall. This view overlooks passages such as Rom. 8:18-25, which tells us that the curse of the Fall still remains on earth and that all of creation continues to experience the consequences of this curse. It will only finally be removed when Christ returns to the earth (Rev. 21-22).

The triumphalism of PT is based on certain passages of the Bible such as “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3) and “[Who] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Their interpretation of these passages is that God has provided for all of the believers’ needs spiritually and with sufficient faith, we can have a full manifestation of these spiritual blessings in the form of material blessings (health, wealth, success). Moreover, this is guaranteed by the fact that we are “seated with Christ in heaven.” Thus, believers are ruling with Christ from heaven in the spiritual realm and given that the spiritual realm experiences no lack, it should be manifested in the natural realm as well in the form of perfect health, immeasurable wealth and endless success.

However, this triumphalism is also motivated by the belief that we live in the last days and that God is about to gather in a harvest of new converts around the globe. Since it requires money to do this work, of evangelism God will raise up very rich Christians to fund this mission work but above all God will give the riches of the non-believers to the believers (Avanzini 1989:145-162). Two major passages of Scripture are used to justify this view: 1) “I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name” (Isa. 45:3). 2) “Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; but you shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God;

you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast” (Isa. 61:5-6). These passages have been interpreted as referring to the end time’s wealth that God will take from the ungodly and pass it on to the church. This version of “wealth transfer” is definitely attractive and has been used to lure poor people into giving to PT teachers with the promise of being partakers of the wealth that God is about to pour out on the faithful.

Do these passages justify the wealth transfer concept as something God will do for His church? What needs to be considered is the context of the passages used to advocate wealth transfer if we are to do justice to the spirit of Scripture. These prophecies are specific and point to a certain time in history. For example, Is. 45:3 is directed towards King Cyrus, that God would give him the riches or hidden treasure of his enemies.

[T]hat is, hidden in subterranean places; a common Oriental practice. Sorcerers pretended to be able to show where such treasures were to be found; in opposition to their pretensions, God says, He will really give hidden treasures to Cyrus (Jer 50:37; 51:13). Pliny (*Natural History*, 33:3) says that Cyrus obtained from the conquest of Asia thirty-four thousand pounds weight of gold, besides golden vases, and five hundred thousand talents of silver, and the goblet of Semiramis, weighing fifteen talents (Jamieson et al 1997).

PT holds to some degree of biblical truth in that “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4). The great mistake is that they have taken this future fulfilment and applied it to the here and now. This application of future fulfilment in the here and now regardless of its plausibility, creates a destructive theology and a false hope in those who believe PT. First, if it were truly so, this theology of triumphalism would have begun in the early church. Secondly, if this theology was truly biblical it should not have become a problem only in the modern period (Hall 1982:105). Thirdly, triumphalism has not been propagated throughout church history by true believers, nor was it a theological view promoted by the Reformers. PT would today fit into Luther’s concept of the theology of glory versus the theology of the cross.

Both defeatism and triumphalism place emphasis on only certain parts of the Bible. However, the Apostle Paul provides believers with a more realistic situation by emphasising the truth of our spiritual victories *and* our on-going trials in life. Paul writes “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (II Cor. 4:8-10). However, since PT wants to have heaven on earth this passage of Scripture would either be ignored or be reinterpreted as an exclusive work of God in the life of Paul. The rest of the believers, however, have been given by God nothing less than victory in every situation of life. This over-realised eschatological outlook fails to realise that,

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 reserved for the age to come. It’s not always easy to discern when we should, by faith, confidently claim our inheritance and when we should, in humility, embrace the weakness of living in a fallen world (Storms 2007).

Because PT propagates triumphant living, with certain conditions attached, it leaves those who fail to achieve this victorious living with feelings of great guilt and questions concerning their own faith and even ultimately about God’s faithfulness. The adherents are left in a state of worry, guilt and despair. For them experiencing victories in one’s life is equated to blessedness, great faith and righteous living. Those who are struggling in various ways are left wondering whether they are even Christians in the first place, not to mention whether God is with them. Regardless of the spiritual problems this view causes, it is propagated because it sounds relevant to a society in which people want to experience wellness and wealth in the here and now.

However, in the midst of triumphalism PT advocates are faced with serious questions which they are required to answer with honesty. If believers are to experience heaven on earth, why is it that no one is experiencing heaven on earth *in a perfect sense*? If believers are to live lives of absolute victory over every circumstance of life, why is this not true for the great majority of believers around the world? How true is the theology of “heaven on earth” considering the millions of

persecuted Christians around the world? What are we to do with passages of Scripture that clearly teach that the lives of Christians will be hampered by persecution (John 15:20; cf. Mark 10:30) and that we are also suffering the consequences of the fallen world (Rom. 8:23; cf. II Cor. 5:2)? Pyne quotes Douglas Moore on PT's eschatology "The WHG [wealth and health gospel] is right to proclaim that God has promised to remove all our physical infirmities; but they are wrong to claim that we can expect this to take place in this life" (2000:131).

2.4.2. *Pragmatic reasons*

Because passages of Scripture in PT are read at face value with no reference to their historical context, the plain reading becomes more attractive as it is pragmatic in nature rather than doctrinal. Moreover, because of its strong roots in the history of God's working with Israel, PT advocates have developed a similar pragmatic view of religion whose major question is, what can I do so that God will bless me? With that being the central question, health, wealth, happiness, success and protection become selling points. The Bible has become a pragmatic guide of motivational quotes that one can use to speak to oneself into prosperous and victorious living. Goroh (2009:93) writes, "If you are to live above tough time, you need to have your faith solidly grounded in God's word". Copeland (1999:14) writes with a trichotomic view of man "what produces spiritual, mental and physical prosperity? What brings all these areas together?" He answers his rhetoric questions "The Word of God."

Joel Osteen who stands out amongst the advocates of PT as a motivational speakers has clearly demonstrated the downplaying of expository preaching "Boiling down 'principles' to live one's life by into a 7 point outline for easy digesting...is his focus" (King and Martinez 2011). This can be seen from his bestselling book *Your Best Life Now*, he writes, "Search the Scriptures and highlight those that particularly apply to your life situation. Write them down and get in the habit of declaring them" (Osteen 2004:132).

You've got to believe good things are on their way. You must believe that God is at work in your life, that He is restoring you to your rightful place. In other words, you've got to see those things coming to pass. You've got to see your marriage being restored. You have to see that

wayward child coming home. You need to see that business turning around. It has to be conceived in your heart. Look at life through your eyes of faith into that invisible world and see your dreams coming to pass (Osteen 2004:79).

The concept of making the Bible into a self-help book has also been used by African Theology (AT) advocates. In the Africanised context the Bible has been used as a book of incantations to be recited to cure or remove barrenness, deafness, blindness, stomach aches, bad luck, curses, evil spells etc. For example, David T. Adamo (2001:47-100; cf. Adeboye 1988; Ademiluka 1991) has suggested that the Africans should read the Bible therapeutically using the ATRs shamanic methods of incantations to obtain healing, protection and success in life. This style has also been carried over into PT circles in Namibia. Some adopt this practice out of ignorance, while others such as Adamo seek to use the Bible for therapeutic purposes. Adamo advocates that the Bible in many ways approves or affirms the African worldview and culture (2001:47) and as a result, we can actually use certain passages of Scripture for health, protection and success. With this ATRs background, many Namibians in neo-Pentecostalism use the Bible in a quasi-magical way in order to obtain health, wealth, happiness and success.

This pragmatic perspective of Scripture influenced by the nineteenth century American metaphysical clubs has made PT advocates believe that God made a covenant of wealth with the Patriarchs (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) and the nation of Israel (Deut. 8:17-18) and based on this covenant of wealth Christians are entitled to claim what rightfully belongs to them from God. That is, “We are perfectible and we are soldiers with a call to take wealth from the Devil in the service of the Lord’s desires for our well-being” (Keller 2008). PT advocates believe that this covenant was transferred to the church through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 8:9). The *covenant* of wealth, which is perhaps the foundational reason for the existence of PT, is derived from several Scripture passages interpreted in favour of PT. Some of the foundational passages that are used as biblical evidence for believers’ claim to a life of prosperity are Joshua 1:8, II Chronicles 20:20, Nehemiah 2:20, Psalm 1:3; 35:27, III John 2 etc. Joshua 1:8 is used to say that obedience to God will result in prosperity and success in life and III John 2 is used to teach that the will of God for the believer is to prosper materially.

PT is advocated as a practical theology for everyday living, as such it provides practical methods by which people can obtain the wealth, health and success God has promised and how to live victoriously. This pragmatism can clearly be seen from the titles of the books such as *“How to walk in favour,” “How to turn your faith loose,” “If you need healing do these things,”* and *“Kingdom principles of financial increase.”*

Even where the books may not have themes that suggest pragmatism, their pages are most likely to advocate it. Most of the PT books contain the following practical tips for their readers:

(1) Revelation knowledge

Basically the path to prosperous and victorious living begins with the knowledge of God’s promises to prosper those who believe in Him. Goroh (2009:22) writes, “The truth you know is the vehicle that delivers to you your inheritance in that area. Discover the truth about sickness and God giving ‘healing’ as His children’s bread, and satan won’t mess with you in that area.” This view of knowledge is presented by other PT teachers as follow, “if a person doesn’t know it is God’s will for him to prosper, it is highly improbable that he will prosper” (Savelle 1983:47) and “the revelation of the truth of your inheritance is the number-one step into your possession” (Oyedepo 2007:46). This is to tell us that God’s blessing can only be claimed once one has obtained a certain level of knowledge. Therefore, as an entry level into God’s blessings, people are to saturate themselves with passages of Scripture that speak of health, wealth, goodness, abundance etc.

(2) Obedience

Since many believe that all of God’s covenants with man are conditional they also believe that the AC was also conditional and the condition was – obedience. The validity of this claim requires Scriptural justification, especially because God’s covenant with Abraham was God’s own doing and there appears to be no conditions (see Genesis 12). However, PT advocates teach that obedience to the laws of God is the gateway to prosperity based on Job 36:11 “If they listen and serve him, they complete their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasantness.” Thus, if the believer obeys God’s commands and principles in his life, he will prosper and if he does not, he will not prosper. As Dollar writes,

If you obey Him, God will make sure that you're in control of whatever your hands touch. If you begin to walk in obedience to His Word, His promise is that no matter what happens to you in life, no matter where you end up, he is going to cause you to prosper (1999:106).

The act of obedience is interconnected with tithing and giving as Goroh (2009:56) writes, "many believers don't even pay tithe, yet they expect God to keep them alive during famine. God is not moved by our tears but by our obedience." Thus, obedience becomes a means by which we can cause God to do something for us – especially bless us materially. But we need to ask whether this kind of obedience does not merely become a means to an end? Is this biblical obedience when it is encouraged only for utilitarian purposes? Is this not an undermining of the whole idea of the gospel of God's grace?

(3) Faith

The aspect of faith is highly emphasised in PT and it is seen as the condition upon which prosperity will be manifest in the life of a person. However, the sort of faith taught in PT appears to place tremendous pressure on its adherents. The followers are told to act in faith. That is, people after praying or having received prayer must act in a way that is opposite to their situation. For example, "cripples must stand up, or they will remain lame...This means people must disregard symptoms of illness, or the evidence of their bank accounts but act in accordance with their prayer" (Williams 2001:203). Hunt's (2000^a:77) interview of some members of Reachout International demonstrates the great emphasis of the relationship between faith and good life:

"Example 1. 'Faith helps me because I am assured that God knows my circumstances. I know that if I walk in faith that my needs will be catered for, including my financial security.'

Example 2. 'Faith helps you with work, home life, your finances, everything. God says that in all ways we will prosper if we have faith in him.'

Example 3. 'God looks after His people and makes sure that you get what you need. He helps in various circumstances and we are assured that we get it.'

Example 4. 'Walking in faith, means realising that you can obtain the things you haven't got...lots of things. I don't just mean the promise after all the struggle is over. I mean the here and now.'

This faith is defined as that which obeys "the command of scripture, in order to gain control of your future" (Oyedepo 2007:122). Faith, according to PT, is a vital force for success in life. The greater measure you have of it, the greater your success will be. With faith, the believer's prospects for success are limitless and unimaginable. Goroh writes, "Faith will deliver you out of any situation, no matter how deadly and impossible it may seem in the natural" (2009:63). He continues that "Faith makes you have victory over every [onslaught] of the devil. No matter how tough the attacks may be against your life, you can stop them through faith" (Goroh 2009:64). Faith has to come from the individual and is therefore defined as a firm decision to possess the wealth, health and success God has provided (Sarles 1986).

This concept of faith defies the Scriptural view of faith being a gift of God (Eph. 2:8). What is obvious in this issue of PT's faith is that "the pendulum has swung from a vague hope to a blatant presumption, or from a bland general trust to a practice approaching magic" (Williams 2001:199). Scripture tells us that faith is a gift from God and also provides us with a description of this faith in Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (see also Rom. 8:24; II Cor. 4:18; 5:7; I Pet. 1:8). Thus, "...Bible faith is not blind optimism or a manufactured 'hope-so' feeling...It is certainly not believing in spite of evidence! That would be superstition. *True Bible faith is confident obedience to God's Word in spite of circumstances and consequences*" (Wiersbe 1996, italics in original). This understanding of faith differs from the kind of faith taught in PT where people must invoke some sort of will-power hidden within oneself and couple such will power with the Word of God in order to have what one desires. Biblical faith does not deny reality (Heb. 11) by telling people to live in fantasies by ignoring their circumstances or treat them as if they do not exist by simply speaking "faith-filled words" and making financial sacrifices.

(4) Positive confession

The idea of positive confession is related to the idea of creation (Genesis 1). That is, the same way God created the universe through the words of His mouth the

believers can also create their own circumstances especially of wealth. The speaking must be loud as it is believed that God can only hear us if we say the words loud and our circumstances can also hear our word and as a result will conform to what we want them to be.

For example, during one of the practical observations in an AFM church, the pastor called people forward who needed prayer. One of the members, who runs a construction company, had just shared his testimony of a tender which he got to build several hundred houses. During the altar call, this man also came forward to be prayed for. What was his prayer request? He was requesting that the pastor would pray that his application for the tender would be successful. The pastor rebuked the man and told him to continue stating that he had won the tender and not doubt anything else, or he would not have the tender. The encouragement was “Stand on that word brother. If you believe that God has given you the tender keep confessing it and it shall be so.” The testimony was in reality a mere expectation but the man had people believe that he had already got the tender, so much so that many applauded his success. Moreover, the pastor also knew that this testimony had no substance but told the people that it did. The idea behind this is that faith speaks those things that are *not yet* as though they are.

While faith is said to be sufficient to result in prosperity, this faith needs fuelling if it is going to bring about what the believer expects. That is to say, faith alone cannot result in prosperity and victory therefore it needs the backing of positive words to keep the faith going.

“As in reconstructionism, a strong connection is made with the idea of covenant...However, this does not mean that all in the covenant will be prosperous, as the receipt for wealth depends also on positively claiming it from God” (Williams 2001:200).

This is to say that the believer can actually create any situation he desires according to his faith. By avoiding negative words and speaking only the positive things, the believer will have the fruit of his mouth. Thus, since the believer has demonstrated faith, he can now continue to create by his faith the world and situations he desire to see in his life. Positive confession is presented as a tool that

can wield limitless possibilities in the areas of wealth, health, success, happiness, marriage, business etc. This view is basically stated as follow:

Your confession will determine your possession. Everything hangs in your mouth. Mend your words [and you will] mend your world. You can use your mouth to turn things around you. That tough situation you are going through is subject to change. Your words can change it (Goroh 2009:106; cf. Dollar 1999:44-50; Osteen 2004:121-140).

(5) Giving

Giving is considered a cardinal principle, which if practiced will lead the giver to prosperity and a life of abundance. “In some of the new Pentecostal churches...members are sometimes urged to borrow money [take loans or open insurance policies], if necessary, in order to give to the church; they are told that they thus qualify for supernatural monetary blessing” (Akoko 2007:5). The concept of giving as taught in PT advocates a form of *quid pro quo* a “spiritualised” transaction. Joel Osteen writes,

[I]f we want to reap good things, we, too, must sow some good seeds. Notice, we reap what we sow. If you want to reap happiness, you have to sow some ‘happiness’ seeds by making other people happy. If you want to reap financial blessings, you must sow financial seeds in the lives of others. If you want to reap friendship, you should sow a seed and be a friend. The seed always has to lead (2004:250; cf. Dollar 1999:63-69).

This giving is then prescribed as a method of getting out of poverty, debt, disease etc. The secret of defeating any problem in our lives seems to be finally settled in this one aspect of sowing or giving financial seeds. While giving is surely to be encouraged amongst Christians, PT advocates encourage it for the purpose of providing personal satisfaction and wealth in return. Thus, while giving is encouraged “it is not sacrificial, but [is] on the contrary, for gain. It is portrayed as a means of trying to get wealth...” (Williams 2001:196). As Copeland writes, “In tithing, you are laying the foundation for financial success and abundance. You are establishing deposits with God that can be used when you need them” (1974:72). Thus, giving is not encouraged because we are grateful to God but as a means of having something in return from Him, especially that He will increase our finances, improve our health, protect our families and grant us endless victories in life.

These and many other practical methods are provided which cannot be detailed in this thesis for the sake of space. However, these pragmatic aspects come with serious hermeneutical problems which cannot be ignored by any serious scholar of Scripture. Moreover, the universalising of the practical tips, with guaranteed outcomes, while it is attractive in theory, still needs to prove its validity and trustworthiness. If these practical tips are truly proven to deliver what they promise, by now many people in the movement ought to show the fruits of their obedience, faith, giving and confession. Regardless of this failure to deliver, many PT books are written with warranty clauses such as: “As you read this book right now, expect miracles to happen...I am writing under the direction of the Spirit of God. The anointing is upon the pages of this book” (Goroh 2009:68; cf. Avanzini 1989:9; Dollar 1999:vii-viii; Osteen 2004:x; Oyedepo 2007:41). These warranty clauses serve as baits to attract readers and are selling points. Since people are looking for guaranteed techniques and methods for health, wealth and happiness it becomes necessary by default that their books and sermons should include warranty clauses, else the concept of it being practical help is out of the question.

PT by nature attempts to provide a quick way out of trials by mainly suggesting financial sacrifices as Oyedepo (2007:200) writes, “when you give, you are not giving away your substance, but are giving your way out of poverty.” It also provides a model of simplistic magical positive confession and repetition of God’s Word, and promises that endurance or patience in faith will always result in victorious outcomes in the here and now (Goroh 2009:93-110). This concept of victory is opposed to Scripture in which Paul and his co-missionaries when confronted with trouble saw no guarantee that they were going to make it out alive: “We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But *that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God* who raises the dead. . . . But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that *the surpassing power belongs to God* and not to us. . . . ‘*My power is made perfect in weakness*’” (II Cor. 1:8–9; 4:7; 12:9). The former is a concept of a God who constantly jumps in to rescue and does not allow the faith of His children to be tested (a form of escapism), the latter presents a model of a God who is sovereign and whose promises of deliverance do not preclude the physical

suffering and death of the faithful. The early believers and Christians throughout the church age have always trusted God who is sovereign who will do as He wills and we are to learn to accept His will even in the most difficult and painful situations in which immediate deliverance is far-fetched.

2.4.3. *Cultural reasons*

“The burgeoning of the Faith Movement poses a basic question: Why, despite opposition from Pentecostal, mainline charismatic and evangelical Christians, has it blossomed?” (Hummel 1993:235). PT developed out of a specific cultural context (the American Dream) and its growth around the globe is related to the cultural contexts of those societies (for example ATRs), (cf. Hunt 2000^b:343). Hummel writes,

Every culture creates a view of reality that gives its members a feeling of security and importance based on the things they can control. Even though they have widely different customs, cultures present their gods as responsive to human manipulation, giving religious status to the people who control society (1993:235).

The American preachers who pioneered PT wanted this (message of prosperity) to be true because the American Dream promises a better and richer and fuller life for everyone. Thus, with sufficient opportunities provided, only the individual can determine how far he wants to go in life. It is clear that the American Dream sees no blessing in poverty, struggle and hardships and this concept has been fully incorporated into PT. There are unlimited possibilities for success for every Christian who dares to believe God in the here and now for “God has prepared a fabulous banquet...complete with every good thing imaginable....joy, forgiveness, restoration, peace, healing – whatever you need, it’s waiting for you at God’s banquet table” (Osteen 2004:84-85).

While the Africans may not have such a unified dream as that of the USA, PT fits in well with the so-called African “principle of ‘reward and retribution’ (the equation theory)” (Chilongani 2007:53; cf. Gifford 1994:516). The equation theory says, “The goodness of a person...is confirmed by physical well being and material prosperity while a sinful person is defined by the opposite” (Ashdown n.d:15). That is, the traditional African view holds that whenever people are loyal, respectful and obedient to their ancestors they are bound to receive blessings of various kinds but

the opposite of this will result in misfortune. The African mind naturally sees obedience to the “principles” prescribed by PT and pleasing God as the requirement for abundant life. Moreover, since PT is deeply rooted in a misconstrued Jewish worldview it promotes the same equation theory that is prevalent in the African culture.

Both of the cultural motivations above sanction the prevalence of PT because it is not strange to the people’s everyday experience. The American culture promotes individualism and consumer-driven capitalism such that wealth, health and the good life “...are sacred, perhaps even more sacred than even God, church, the gospel, and the Bible, for some American Christians” (Smith et al. 2008:194). This sacredness of wealth, health and the good life are not strange to the African Christians, especially of neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic inclinations. African culture is also promoting the same sacredness of wealth, health and the good life and these are considered as rewards for an obedient life to God or evidence of one’s righteousness. Obedience and loyalty in Christian service are merely the means to obtain wealth, health and the good life and the said relationship between God and the poor is nothing other than a platonic outward display. Moreover, PT becomes very agreeable with ATRs theology because,

Both of these economies have two dimensions: a material aspect founded on the effort to produce wealth or to account for its accumulation by appeal to techniques that defy explanation in the conventional terms of practical reason; and an ethical aspect grounded in the moral discourses generated by the production of value through magical means (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:19).

With this view in place, we need to be concerned with whether the poor have truly understood the gospel and its demands upon them. Moreover, adoptions of these cultural phenomena fail to address the issue of poverty effectively as they provide an artificial means and simplistic answers. The poor Christian presented with both an American Dream and a *reward and retribution* worldview is actually left to blame himself for everything in his life. If he adopts the former he blames himself for not utilising the opportunities life has to offer and if he adopts the latter he will blame himself for some shortcoming especially that he suffers because of sin, lack of faith, ignorance or failing to give as required of him. These cultural views blur the person’s

view of God, such that salvation is reduced to a mere gaining of a good life in the here and now.

2.5. Reasons PT is appealing in Namibia

In the above section, the researcher stated some reasons for why PT is taught. The reasons above are definitely not without serious theological consequences or implications. In this section, the researcher will mention elements that make PT appealing to many people regardless of its many disagreeable practices. This is not to say that the above stated reasons are to be dismissed altogether, surely some elements do contain truth in them, which should provoke even the opponents of PT to consider them. Note that the criticism of these reasons arise because of the threat they pose to the credibility of biblical Christianity – the hermeneutical errors and poor or simplistic solutions they present for dealing with human social issues. Below are some reasons for why PT is appealing:

2.5.1. Economic reasons

PT promises economic safety for all who would practice its principles (cf. Hunt 2000). The fact that poor Christians are told that they can become candidates for economic emancipation can be nothing else but attractive. The message of PT strikes at one of the most sought after human needs in the Namibian society – economic or financial freedom. With an unemployment rate standing at fifty one percent (CIA Factbook 2010), this theology attracts such need driven people. As a way of escape from such a situation Oyedepo (2007:75) teaches, that keeping to the covenant of God (referring to giving) “entitles you [the Christian] to economic empowerment.” He goes on to write that sacrificial giving is the only way to obtain “enduring wealth, as every other means of acquiring riches is time-tagged” (2007:76).

People are promised staggering returns if they practice these laws of giving. Moreover, it is claimed that giving is a guaranteed method of being freed from lack and “no matter how hard you pray for a harvest, you would not have any until you start sowing” writes Goroh (2009:53). This agricultural metaphor is used to convince readers of a “spiritual principle” that if exercised will bring lasting deliverance from

poverty, lack and financial struggles. At first glance, this principle would appear to be quite divorced from reality, so how does one go about creating the needed responses? Through the sharing of one's personal experiences. That is, the truth of this "spiritualised principle" is not argued from the Bible, but rather from personal experience. Below are a couple of personal experiences used by PT advocates to encourage their followers:

Lubansa (2004:76-77) writes that when he began to tithe many good things began to happen to his family, "For instance, our small garden produced all that we needed, such that for more than six months, we never went to the market for cabbages, tomatoes and many other vegetables...this was the result of my obedience to pay tithes and offerings." Osteen (2004:x) motivates his readers to put into practice the steps he suggests in his book because "I know that these steps work, because they have worked in the lives of my family members, friends, and associates, as well as in my own life." Another example locally is by Goroh (2009:54) who writes, "Many years ago the Lord spoke to me to give out our only car, we obeyed and did. Two weeks later, we were blessed with money four times the cost of the car. You can't out give God."

This compensatory aspect makes PT attractive because those who would like to come out of difficult situations are told that with every sacrificial giving and practicing of prescribed principles comes staggering blessings especially financial ones. When the adherer hears these testimonies and personal experiences, the desire to seek economic freedom intensifies. MacArthur (1992:25) asks, "Is experience a valid test of truth?" From the examples cited above, we can see that PT advocates would respond with a resounding, "Yes!" This experience based teaching gives an idea of a universal way of success for the Christians but do these teachings guarantee success or a way out of poverty?

Koch thinks that in addressing the issue of poverty, "[p]ragmatically, the Prosperity Gospel does not live up to its claims: that by avowing the biblical promise of wealth, one will be wealthy" (2009:81). He continues to argue that, "[i]f it did [live up to its claims], we would expect that those who are members of a Prosperity movement and those who believe Prosperity teaching would be overrepresented

among those with higher incomes.” Koch reached this conclusion based on his own research conducted amongst PT adherents (2009:81). Deon¹ provides a typical example of PT’s failure to live up to its promises in his letter below:

In 2001 March I was diagnosed with spondylarthritis. Because I was in pain and needed help, I visited several witchdoctors in Caprivi but it was all in vain. After six months of sick leave from work, I resumed my work, but still the same problem remained. While I was at work two women came and shared the gospel with me and I gave my life to Christ. I accepted Christ not because I believed in him for salvation but because I was promised healing by the pastor who was came to visit me.

The week after accepting Christ, I went to church and indeed God performed a miracle that I could not forget. My health improved and I began to serve in that church, which went on for a period of one year. In 2005 February, I was accused of receiving a bribe of N\$8000.00 and I was dismissed from work. In the same year my sickness relapsed, I went back to the pastor and asked him that if I am a child of God surely I am not supposed to face this kind of situation because I am serving a God who does no sleep or slumber according to the Bible. But the Pastor assured me that I should not worry, God will restore whatever I had lost, that is, my job, health and wealth. I trusted the words of the pastor and I kept waiting for that day when I would receive absolute restoration. It has been seven years and my situation has not changed.

In devastation, I thought several times to leave the church because I felt betrayed by God and lost hope in His promises. While I was experiencing these things something tragic happened. The wife of the pastor who promised me that God would restore everything I had lost, passed away. I could not understand how such a tragedy could happen to someone who told us that if we have enough faith no evil things will happen to us. Moreover, that with positive confession we can change any circumstance of our lives. My question in this moment was: where was God when all these things were happening to his beloved servants?

When I came back to Katima Mulilo I joined another church called Believer’s Fellowship where I was told that a child of God cannot suffer and suffering is not our heritage. I was then told to go on a fast for 21 days in order to receive my breakthrough. My normal weight is 65kg but after 21 days of fasting I had lost 5kg, my weight drop to 60kg. I have heard my people in this fellowship testify that God had answered their prayers but I was not experiencing the sort of breakthrough they

¹ Not his real name due to confidentiality. Email sent to Basilius M. Kasera after the national television discussion on the prosperity gospel and its effects in Namibia (06 June 2011).

were talking about. Then I started asking myself where I was missing God, because I meditated on his word, read it from Genesis to Revelation. I had regular personal quiet times and all kinds of prayers (loud and silent), I did all the positive confession and still God seemed to be nowhere to be found to help and change my situation.

Today my situation has gone from bad to worse. I'm currently on a wheel chair but I have learnt a lesson, that God's will is above every thought and plan we have in life. He is sovereign even in my circumstance of spondylarthritis and whether he heals me or not it does not change anything about his nature and his promises. I came to understand that being a Christian is about following Christ not for what we can have in this world but because he is God who demands our loyalty. It is about taking up the cross and following Jesus all the way regardless of my current outward situation: (Mathew 16:24) 'who ever will come after me, has to deny himself and carry his cross.'

2.5.2. Emotional reasons

The emotional aspect stems from the dominant anti-intellectualism found amongst many Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal adherents. Thus, rather than appealing to reason, PT appeals to the emotions of its followers. For example, Oyedepo (2009:124) writes "God's Word is not scientific, neither is it logical; God's Word is divine." But does divinity rule out the use of logic from its equation? This concept is a contradiction to the Christian faith and Oyedepo contradicts himself as he wrote earlier that the Christian has surpassing intelligence (2007:37-39). You cannot be intelligent without being logical, for one presupposes the presence of the other. That is, intelligence presupposes the presence of logic (or the other way around). While Scripture is not a scientific book, it is contradiction to say that it is not logical, and then call on people to obey it. If it were not logical we would not be able to understand it and claiming to do what the Bible says with no logic built into it would be "blind faith." The bottom line of Oyedepo's view is that we are to approach Scripture without our thinking capabilities. With reason ruled out of the equation when we approach Scripture, the adherer actually opens a gate for unquestioning trust of virtually everything said by the preacher.

Gifford (1987) writes of Reinhardt Bonnke advocating these same attitudes of anti-intellectualism and experientialism. First, critical thinking is removed from the scene "The Bible puts me through! I'm getting through to the throne of God! Alleluia!" (Bonnke in Gifford 1987:82). Secondly, experience is made the ultimate judge of

spiritual truth by sentiments such as “Don't listen to your head, listen to your heart” and “the gospel happens now! ... The gospel *happens now!*” Implying that the gospel is not to be studied intellectually (Gifford 1987:82) or “The Gospel is not a theological doctrine” (Bonnke 1999:241). The evaluation of Gifford concerning Bonnke's evangelistic ministry could be said to be true for many PT proponents especially those along Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal lines. He writes that if they were be evaluate them,

...along exclusively or even predominantly theological lines would be wrong-headed, for a key factor in Pentecostalism generally is its opposition to academic theology. In fact, this whole stream of Christianity tends to reject modern theologizing as a perversion. According to Pentecostals, the mainstream churches with their lifeless preaching, their intellectual tortuosities and compromises with modernity, meet no needs of real people. This stream of Christianity cares little for theology and puts almost exclusive stress on experience (1987:82).

Surely, the Christian faith should surely not be denied its emotional side, however, emotions should never be manipulated nor be considered as arbitrary tests of truth. A theology that is opposed to thinking leads to the creation of a people who judge with their feelings rather than with their minds. Emotionalism is very appealing as it touches at the very heart of the traditional religious roots of the African and the dominant spirit of Western postmodernism. Thus, because people are made to feel good, they deduce that what they are busy with is true, for if it were wrong they would not have felt good in the first place. With this emotionalism at the centre of things, the Bible is easily set aside or de-emphasised. However, this opening up to good feelings paves the way for deception to creep in subtly.

The problem with emotions is that people are made to believe that it is the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. Such that during church services people are asked to make monetary sacrifices to the church. These requests can come in forms of prophecies or suggestions accompanied by soft music while everyone's eyes are closed. The common saying is that people should not take time to think or go home to think about the decision but should act immediately for at home the devil will suggest to them other ideas. This impulsive reaction, often accompanied by some sort of ecstasy, is taken to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Because this subjectivity is taken to be the presence and leading of God (which is not impossible), people commit themselves and their resources to such churches as they become emotionally convinced that that is the place where God is present. The naïve who come to these churches fall prey to the dominant emotionalism that they begin to believe that soon and very soon God will deliver them from their poverty because they can sense that their “breakthrough is near.”

The dangers underlying this economy are various. First, it robs people of the need to work hard and strive towards a proven means of making a living, when it promises that giving money will lead to great success. Secondly, it drives people to live superstitious and self-deceiving lives. For example, someone who has started a business could be claiming to be prospering when in reality they are drowning in debt. Or someone may be seriously sick but claiming that they are healed and also refuse to take medicine. Thirdly, it robs people of developing endurance through trials and taking responsibility for their actions. Because of suggested quick ways to escape trials people could resort to those measures and in the process fail to trust God. For example, someone faced with a marital problem instead of working at their marriage could make financial sacrifices to the church in the hope that God will sort out their family problems. Or someone faced with a criminal charge instead of facing up to their actions could make financial sacrifices to the church in the hope that God will miraculously intervene and make the situation pass (Brouwer, Gifford and Rose 1996:234; cf. Hasu 2006:680).

2.5.3. *Spiritual reasons*

The spiritual nature of PT is directly linked to neo-Pentecostal spirituality, which gives a sense of superiority because of its transcendental emphasis. PT teaches the poor that if they attain a certain level of spirituality they can live above any natural circumstance and rise above social and economic confinements. This access to a life of limitless victory begins with being born again as this is the “divine insurance for abundance [and] material security” (Oyedepo 2009:42). Thus, becoming a Christian guarantees a life of total victory over every known circumstance of life and a life of wealth.

The aspects of wealth, ceaseless victory and good living are emphasised in this spirituality not necessarily as things with which God will bless us, but as things for which we are entirely responsible to ensure that they happen. PT adherents are told that they become divine when they are born again based on Psalm 82:6 “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment.” This interpretation has given rise to a new sort of spirituality in PT in which people think and believe that they are mini gods or demigods here on earth and as gods, they are entitled to all the good things this world has to offer especially wealth, health and success. Oyedepo claims that Psalm 82:6 “is the basis for the supernatural: you are no longer human, but superhuman. You are a son of God, so you are a god” (2009:34). He then continues to guarantee, “[I]f you grasp this truth, every devil will see you and clear off the way! This is the fundamental secret of all my victories in life” (Oyedepo 2009:35).

Goroh reveals the secret to obtaining the victories which Oyedepo mentions above when he writes,

God wishes above all things my prosperity. All my needs are met according to God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus. The riches of sinners are laid up for me. I serve a very rich God. I am a child of a generous God. I am a lender and not a borrower.

I am the head and not the tail. I will spend all the days of my life in joy, peace and prosperity. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. Abundance is mine. I am a giver and not a beggar. I am a blessing to people; I am not a liability. I make God's Kingdom my priority in my life. My mind is open to ideas that will generate wealth from now on, In Jesus' name. Amen (2009:108-109).

This prayer indicates the spiritual aspect that makes PT attractive to its adherents because people feel that they are in control of the circumstances of their lives. No longer do they have to wait upon God but they can demand of God what they desire and they can call upon any circumstance to change in their favour. Thus, our human words mixed with God's Word can result in powerful things (Osteen 2004:127). According to Osteen (2004:128-129),

Our words are vital in bringing our dreams to pass. It's not enough to simply see it by faith or in your imagination. You have to begin speaking words of faith over your life. Your words have enormous

creative power. The moment you speak something out, you give birth to it. This is a spiritual principle, and it works whether what you are saying is good or bad, positive or negative.

There is a sense in which this neo-spirituality seems to indicate that we actually do not need God. Moreover, the sovereignty of God over situations is ruled out and God's programme is simply to meet the heart desires of man (whether He likes it or not). This spirituality is filled with much activity in order to see results but all these activities are man-centred. This spirituality is representative of the very thing that characterises all synthetic religions or work-based religious systems (for example ATRs). With the desire to succeed in life especially economically, PT's spirituality is employed as a strategy for personal success in life even by non-Christians (Akoko 2007:6).

The Bible and God are employed, consulted and sought after only to assist the adherent on his journey of success. Since the Bible is seen as a 'nugget book,' it is useful only to provide one with motivation. The spirituality offered is such that the cross of Christ Jesus is mentioned only as an entry level to a higher life or of attaining economic glory here on earth. But the bankruptcy of this neo-spirituality is that it offers the poor alternatives which are neither biblical nor practical enough to solve their problems. It ignores the complex nature of poverty and puts people in a state of excitement but with no results. This form of spirituality preys on people's hopes and by so doing diverts them from the biblical context of true spirituality, which is Christo-centric.

Moreover, this kind of spirituality undermines the reality of our dependence on God and appears to foster a humanistic ideology. Since man is now a god, prayer is no longer a request made to God but rather a declarative statement for God to hear. These prayers from their style do not expect a response from God because their outcomes are already fixed – the one praying is not asking God but telling Him. As a result, God is simply a passive candidate in these prayers, the prayers will eventually have to materialise it. It is just a matter of consistent confession of what you want. Therefore, they are called positive confessions. That is, the more you keep saying the things you desire, the more likely it is that one day they will manifest in your life.

Although the things that attract people have many negative aspects, we cannot deny the reality that these PT churches are addressing the issue in the way they know best. It could be that those who seem to have their theology intact have been silent for too long on matters that are of serious concern. Good theology that cannot address the immediate context is just as bad as a bad theology that addresses the context. There is no good in flaunting good theological arguments when the theology is not addressing the questions that people are asking on issues of poverty and suffering. And in this sense, PT should be admired for its boldness in attempting to put the theology they know into practice. Therefore, besides the things we may consider theologically incorrect, the people who attend these churches sense some kind of spiritual vibrancy in these churches, which the “orthodox” people have quenched.

2.5.4. Social reasons

Mary de Haas (1982:41) in addressing a social aspect of the neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movement, writes that:

[T]hese movements offer a home to people who have become painfully aware that their very future is at stake. In other words, by a process of ‘elective affinity’ in the Weberian sense, widely different groups of people have found solace, in different ways, in the face of a situation which is perceived as threatening. There is still hope of redemption from a future, which appears, bleak and fraught with uncertainty.

Those who adhere to PT are people who feel their need to succeed in life, given that natural circumstances have excluded them from the bar of success. PT churches become their platforms for motivation to pursue success, especially wealth. Many, especially the poor, feel that they belong to a “family” that thinks highly of them or that values them. This social affirmation that anyone can attain success in this life regardless of their circumstances draws crowds of people – specially from the formerly economically disadvantaged (Akoko 2007).

Adherents of PT develop a sense of being winners. That is, they feel that they are winners because of the kind of churches they attend. Perhaps a cultic aspect in the movement is that people feel or believe that they have attained some special revelation which those in mainstream churches have not attained. Moreover, there

remains a general belief that one can attain prosperity because you have a certain “man of God” whom you admire or honour. The honouring of the man of God is based on II Chron. 20:20^c “Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets, and you will succeed.” Dollar (1999:117) writes, “Your prosperity will be based in part on whether you believe and trust your man of God.” This view has created great fear. People cannot leave PT churches or comment on the theology of their leaders for fear that doing so, will cause them to lose their prosperity, or that things will not work out for them somewhere else.

2.5.5. The giving of hope

There may be much to disagree with PT churches, however, it is encouraging to know that people’s hopes are somehow raised. PT has helped many people realise that life can actually be better and that they do not have to remain in the poverty that has been caused by various social structures. Although the theology is missing, it is admirable that people’s hope in the midst of misery is restored.

Not all PT preachers necessarily just focus on themselves. There are also many good projects they have taken on, to help their societies. For example, Goroh runs a feeding programme for destitute children, providing them with two meals a day. Wahl Abrahams runs a primary school which helps children to be educated on Christian principles since the state has removed Bible study in public schools. Oyedepo has built a big university in Nigeria and runs several humanitarian programmes that help with human development. TB Joshua often gives away millions of nairas to the poor and destitute. His ministry has adopted some poor families and helps with the education of their children and has provided housing to homeless people.

Moreover, PT has given a chance to men and women, who under normal circumstances would never have found a profession, by granting them opportunities to be church leaders and even pastors. In mainline churches the requirement that is clergy obtain a certain level of theological training before they can be ordained or granted opportunity to minister or lead the church. It is also worth noting that PT churches have helped in changing attitudes towards giving and their members are often motivated to give to the work of God, in contrast to mainline churches.

These things give a certain vibrancy to people who are in search of answers to their problems and practically the PT churches appear to be really practical in addressing people's needs.

2.6. Summary

This chapter has examined the terminologies of PT, its history and other related issues regarding growth and attractiveness. This epistemological exercise is meant to provide a general overview of what PT teaches and its history in Namibia. PT has grown into a very influential theology in the past six decades and its attractiveness especially in developing nations and amongst the economically disadvantaged, has led to exponential growth. With Charismatic and neo-Pentecostal churches in Namibia, growing at a very fast rate they bring the prosperity message to the masses especially to the poor who are desperately in need of economic emancipation. This theology is deeply rooted in various cultural views. It was initially sparked and propagated under the banner of the American Dream but has found its roots in Namibia because of the dominant traditional African views concerning prosperity which has been advocated by mostly Nigerian mission churches (Akoko 2007).

With growing social, spiritual, and economic issues which hamper living conditions PT claims to be holding permanent answers to these problems. It also presents itself as a way of hope for all the downtrodden of society and promises to offer a renewed spiritual vitality which the mainstream churches are said to be lacking. However, this theology raises significant theological and practical problems which need serious examination from Scripture and experience. This examination requires an empirical aspect which our next chapter will address as it explores the impact of PT. We will examine both the positive and negative theological impact exerted by PT in Namibia.

CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF PT IN NAMIBIA

3.1. Introduction

In order to understand the theological and social impact of PT in Namibia, we need to examine the religious and social environment in Namibia, which existed for generations before the explosion of the present-day PT. Moreover, we need to identify the nature of PT and its impact on Christianity. Rather than simply pointing at its weaknesses, we also need to look at some of the positive things it has brought. We do not have to agree with PT's fundamental doctrines but its presence should serve as a wakeup call to the Church in Namibia to look seriously at prevailing social issues. Moreover, the growth of neo-Pentecostalism should also be considered as a serious challenge to the evangelical community to recognise the importance of vigorous evangelism and of teaching God's Word.

The researcher has stated in the first chapter that there is a general tendency towards hostility and demonisation of PT by its opponents and many fail to take into consideration the reasons for constructing such a theology and the positive challenge it brings to evangelical Christianity. This chapter will therefore look at the social and theological impact of PT in a way that will allow us to provide criticism, but also learn from it. There are many questions regarding various theological aspects to PT which will be evaluated in the fourth chapter of this paper. The Lausanne Theology Working Group (see Appendix II for the full statement) however, in its evaluation of the PT, does recognise,

...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 appalling social realities within which this teaching flourishes and the measure of hope it holds out to desperate people. However, while acknowledging such positive features, it is our overall view that the teachings 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 means of eternal salvation. In such dimensions, it can be soberly described as a false gospel (Kubsch 2010:3).

This chapter will also address issues such as "soul winning" (sic), spiritual growth, church growth and the general social involvement of PT churches.

3.2. Christian and social environment of Namibia

Christianity in Namibia came through European missionaries, firstly through the Rhenish Missionary Society in 1842. By the 1870's the work of the gospel was making good advances and it is at this time that the Finnish Mission Society arrived and began work with the Ovambo tribe (Hildebrandt 1990: 172; cf. Munyika 2004:156). This group is thought to have come for purely evangelistic purposes, whilst many of those who followed were thought to be colonial representatives dressed in religious garments. This latter description could be said to be true especially of German missionaries who acted as emissaries of the German nation in the "scramble for Africa" by various European nations. Regardless of these issues, foreign missions contributed greatly towards modern developments such as establishing schools, hospitals and translating the Bible into local languages. Thus, "Their [missionaries] efforts and those of indigenous evangelists and pastors bore much fruit. A hundred years after the arrival of the Albrecht brothers the church was still growing" (Prill 2010:5). As a result of these efforts of missionaries,

Today, between 80 and 90 per cent of Namibia's...population...is affiliated to a church. The Church is a visible and important part of Namibian society. As such it faces many challenges: the biggest gap between rich and poor in the world [see Table 1 below], a [high] HIV/AIDS prevalence [19.7 per cent]...one of the highest suicide rates in Africa [22.7 out of 100 000 (Smith 2011)] and alcoholism which affects almost every class and ethnic group (Prill 2010:5).

The effects of the decline of Christianity in Africa was felt in Africa as these mission churches became more and more representatives of religious institutions

with very little to offer spiritually. Despite this, many of these churches kept a high level of social involvement especially in the area of education and later in the fight against Apartheid. They continue to do so after independence in various ways. However, neo-Pentecostal churches that emerged after independence seem to have been dissatisfied with the efforts made by mainstream churches and therefore made it their aim to introduce the new wave of prosperity, which had by then influenced many parts of North America and West Africa. These new churches promised not only a renewed spirituality but also a new way of life especially concerning people's economic conditions.

Great numbers of people from mainline churches have changed churches in search of a new spirituality and economic emancipation. The general belief is that to be "born again" requires one to switch churches and be identified as a Pentecostal or Charismatic. However, the concept of being "born again" has not been the only motivation for this ecclesiastical migration. The key motivating factors are numerous but could be summed up as the promise for victorious living advertised by these new churches. The promises of victory and freedom include freedom from demons, sleepless nights, bad luck, sickness (especially HIV/AIDS), poverty, marital problems, drug addictions etc. The crusade posters, displayed around the city carry rehabilitative messages for the downtrodden of society (see Appendix I). These forms of advertising have become selling points of PT for people who are in need of "breakthroughs" in their lives.

Having come straight out of an Apartheid system in which many black Namibians lived in a state of economic lack, PT brings re-assurance that people can have all the luxuries and the lifestyle they were not able to have during colonialism.

Namibia continues to have a strong Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a somewhat stable democracy twenty-one years after gaining its independence from the White South African Apartheid regime. Yet behind this ostensible economic and political grandeur lies the dilemma of poverty. As in any other country in Southern Africa, the chasm between the rich and the poor continues to widen despite the growing economy. The Gini-coefficient index ranks Namibia the most unequal society in the world, with a value of 0.63 compared to other middle income countries

(NPC 2007:9) (see Table 1 below). Namibia's unemployment stands at over fifty per cent, despite the government's efforts to curb it. Moreover, Namibia has the fifth highest HIV/AIDS prevalence in the world.

The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of 19.7% in Namibia is one of the foremost challenges facing the nation, communities, families and individuals. The negative impact of HIV/AIDS on health and longevity is a major factor contributing to a reduction in the population growth rate from 3.1% per annum to 2.6%. Although the rate of new HIV infection is slowing down, there are now more HIV positive people falling ill and dying, leaving behind a rising number of orphans (estimated at about 120,000) (NPC 2007:8).

This places great pressure on the public health sector, which would collapse if foreign donors were to withdraw their funding. It is in the midst of this social pandemonium that PT has taken root in Namibia amongst the poor, especially the black community.

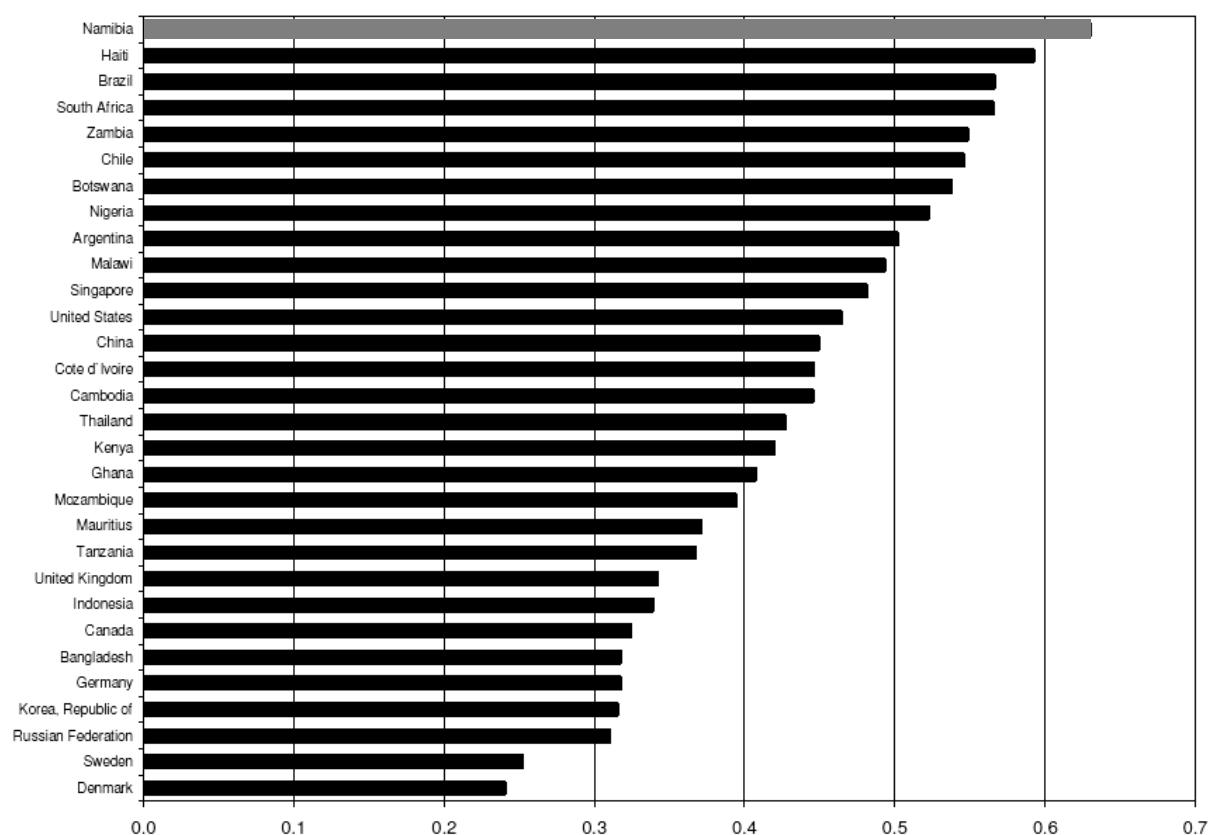


Table 1: Gini-coefficient for selected countries.

Source: Gini-coefficient Index for Namibia 2003/2004 according the World Income Inequality Database of UN World Institute for Development Economics Research (CBS 2008:37)

In addition, Namibia is faced with a daunting theological problem. As a country, very little theological development has been achieved and most (if not all) of its theological ideas have been borrowed from theologies such as, liberation theology, black theology and African theology (especially amongst the main-line churches). Namibia's contribution to truly evangelical theology is virtually non-existent and as a result, a great number of evangelicals have simply adopted Western liturgy and theology and have not given serious thought to doing theology in a context that is relevant to Namibia. What Namibian theology should look like is a difficult question to answer especially considering the rapid growth of globalisation. Although the content of theology does not require re-invention, issues that are uniquely related to the Namibian church must be addressed. The failure in Namibia to apply theology to the immediate context is one of the factors which has contributed to the growth of PT.

3.3. Various areas of impact

The data on the theological and social impact of PT in this chapter is collected from sermons and articles from various PT advocating churches around Windhoek. Various attempts were made to have interviews with a number of church leaders of PT advocating churches but all refused. This section will demonstrate through interaction with various PT resources the impact PT exerts on its members.

3.3.1. *Evangelism and church growth*

There are hundreds of neo-Pentecostal churches across the country. Not all of them are proponents of PT, but wherever neo-Pentecostals are found PT advocating churches abound. In 1960, less than five per cent Christians in Namibia identified as Charismatics and Pentecostals but by the year 2000 the number had increased to nearly fifteen per cent (Johnstone & Mandryk 2001:466) and this number continues to grow. These churches are mission-oriented and they continue to grow throughout the country. Some of them have large numbers of followers, running into a couple of hundred. The eight churches which the researcher visited for observation have an estimated number of over three thousand members collectively, with the UCKG and Christ Embassy having the largest numbers. All of these churches except one have many satellite branches outside the capital city

(Windhoek). This tells us that PT churches are definitely growing and therefore influencing many people.

Why are these churches growing speedily? First, their messages appeal to the needs of the majority especially people coming from poor backgrounds (Williams 2001:195). For example, Ricardo Abrahams (2011) from the Kingdom Faith Builders preached a sermon titled *“Nothing comes without a price”* from Gen. 22:1-18. He used verses 4-8 to advocate a theology of positive confession, that is, Abraham confessed what he wanted and it happened according to his confession. Thus, God provided because Abraham called it forth and Christians can apparently learn from Abraham’s example to command what they want from God.

Secondly, these churches provide simplistic but appealing practical advice to their audience. For example Fred Joseph (2011) preaching on Galatians 6:6-10, in a sermon titled *“It will come back”* said, the sowing and reaping in this passage is a universal principle that can work for anyone in any practical situation of life. For example, if you would like to receive personal healing, pray for the sick and if you would like to receive financial blessings give money to the man of God. He then used his own example that he has ten suits because he had given away suits. So in order to get anything you must give. The preacher went on to say, “If you don’t have anything today, it is because you do not sow,” that is, lack is a sign of not giving or doing the same to others.”

Thirdly, these churches do preach the message of repentance and are evangelistic in orientation. Besides preaching the message of prosperity, they preach the message of salvation from sin and eternal punishment. This is definitely a positive thing, which every true church should exercise, as this is one of the purposes of the church on earth. These churches hold mass evangelistic crusades around the country and get hundreds of responses through the altar calls.

Considering the growth of these churches, it is beyond dispute that they are extremely engaged in evangelism. Mainline churches abandoned evangelism generations ago and currently exist only by automatic growth, that is, their memberships grow through birth rather than through evangelism. A number of other evangelical churches have come to follow this pattern; they are nowadays composed

of certain families and rarely have new converts join them. When it comes to the subject of evangelism, evangelicals need to definitely learn from these churches and be encouraged to seriously consider the need for evangelism again – which is a truly biblical way to grow our local churches.

Having large numbers of churches does not prove effectiveness or truthfulness but it is indicative of a passion to spread the gospel. PT related churches continue to penetrate every sphere of society in Namibia. Even the most remote towns. It is unfortunate that many reformed and evangelical churches have abandoned their involvement in missions and church planting and have left that to PT advocating churches while they remain in their comfortable buildings in the main towns.

Evangelism is required of Christians of all ages, but it needs a sound biblical basis, therefore, “As commendable as this is (and in its best expressions it is very commendable), the foundation it is built on...make[s] the entire package wrong” (Heard 2006:11). That is, the evangelism of PT advocates is deeply influenced by their erroneous fundamental theological tenets. Femi Adeleye (2011:2) writes of an examples of “an advert for an evangelistic crusade in Zaria, one of the major cities in Nigeria, [which] read something like this:

Are you barren? Come to Jesus,
 Are you a failure? Come to Jesus.
 Are you poor and want prosperity?
 Are all your plans not working out?
 Are you sick?
 Are you being attacked?
 Come to Jesus,
 Come and be healed.
 Claim your inheritance and prosperity.”

The above outline as a Christian message provides evidence of the superficiality of evangelism within these circles. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, “The essence of evangelism is to start by preaching the law; and it is because the law has not been preached that we have so much superficial evangelism” (quoted by Holmberg 2009:100). In the case of PT preachers, it is not just a matter of the law not being preached but that that they add a new element to their evangelistic strategies which altogether alters the message of the cross. For example, Creflo

Dollar makes an invitation of salvation to his readers and concludes that “Complete salvation...includes your health, wealth, soundness, protection, and deliverance from every curse, including death. Because we are children of the King [when we believe], [physical] death has no victory over us because we live eternally with the Anointed One” (1999:211).

This sort of evangelism portrays Christianity as a solution to suffering, poverty, sickness, death but in so doing they minimise or dilute the message of the cross by making it appear as if these things are primary to salvation. The poor who are often the recipients of this message are lured into believing a message that is greatly altered in its content such that what is paraded as the gospel is a proclamation of another Jesus. It is with this background that many evangelical theologians have come to term the proclamation of PT as a different gospel. Andrew Heard writes,

It [PT] looks a lot like the gospel that we received—the gospel of Jesus Christ who died and rose again to bring us reconciliation with God—but it has an emphasis upon physical healing, material blessing and success that is very different from traditional evangelicalism. The difference doesn’t lie in the conviction that God can and does bless his people with physical healing or material prosperity, as this has always been accepted as biblical; the difference lies in the conviction that Christians *ought to expect* God to bless them physically and materially here and now (2006:10).

3.3.2. *PT and social engagement*

Prosperity advocates in Namibia are generally not known for their acts of “social engagement” (referring to practical ways of assisting the alleviation of poverty especially among its own members). Instead, they are well known for their excessive emphasis on wealth and a good life. That is, although many claim that that they are concerned for the poor in their societies there seem to be very little done from their side. Many of the social activities such as soup kitchens, distribution of clothes and paying of tuition fees of children are not done to members but to outsiders.

Although their programmes may appear to be positive especially for the outsider, they seem to lack the biblical aspect of caring for the needs of their own church members (Gal. 6:10). This sort of care which is inwardly bankrupt but

outwardly rich raises great suspicion. Are these programmes operating because they care for the ungodly or because they want to boost their church memberships? Why are the needs of the poor within their own churches neglected but greater concern shown to the poor outside the church who are not Christians?

The concept of caring for the outside poor while neglecting the inside poor is not biblically balanced. However, PT advocates would rather keep a system such as this because it makes them look good. That is, the image of the poor amongst themselves is hidden from the outside world as they portray the image that everyone amongst them is well off.

There are however, other areas in which some of the PT advocating churches engage in social action. For example starting schools (very few though), small-scale women empowerment projects, care for HIV/AIDS sufferers and small scale business-training classes etc. But all these take place on a very small scale and the projects often fail as they cannot be sustained in the long run or if they do continue their quality degrades with time. These PT churches could capitalise on these projects but often those who are offering or initiating them have little or no knowledge of how to carry out these projects effectively. That is because they engage anyone who is willing without the necessarily requirement of certain qualifications to ensure that the programmes are run effectively and are productive.

Moreover, another challenge that faces these programmes is the embedded over-optimism of the leaders. Instead of being realistic about these programmes they think that they can produce multi-millionaires from such small scale projects. This optimism leads to an ideology of wealth accumulation so that one can live as comfortable a life as possible, with “enough money” to buy anything one desires. When the desired millions of dollars do not come in, after a time people become desperate and discouraged. This “magico-religious solution for the poor” (Koch 2009:4) is in the long run not helpful but increasing disappointment to people.

So there is a sense of social engagement but it has not achieved societal recognition. However, they should be given credit that there is a way in which they help numbers of people to do something productive with their lives. Therefore, regardless of any theological disagreement one might have with PT advocates, one

should encourage them to put more efforts into these programmes and value them as ways in which they could positively affect society. This is particularly true of Greater Love Ministries, Kingdom Faith Builders International and Christian Faith Impact, all of which have attempted large-scale projects. If they harnessed the power of these initiatives, they could make a great difference in the lives of the communities they serve. On the other hand, the theological issue continues to be an urgent matter that needs to be addressed if they are to make a positive spiritual impact in the lives of the community. For the primary goal of all who claim to be Christians is to faithfully proclaim the true gospel, which is able to transform people's lives inwardly and outwardly.

3.3.3. *Contextualisation*

Although PT is neither a systematised theology nor a creedal theological system, it wields tremendous theological power over its followers. Because PT develops through numerous uncontrolled and unorganised methods of biblical interpretation, it is an easy theology to adopt, as it does not require much training. Especially because it is a theology that borrows much from popular thought. One popular example would be the PT preachers' interpretation of II Corinthians 8:9. This passage is said to be "...staggering in its implication. It's not just that God promised His Old Testament saints riches, but Jesus, Himself, on the cross provided redemption from poverty, so we [Christians] can be rich with His riches" (Brown 2011).

Brown (2011) then goes on to expand his interpretation and application of this passage that:

On the cross, Jesus could have simply focused on our sins and took that away so we can be righteous, but He extended the benefits of the cross to our financial lives. He chose to allow all His riches to be taken from Him – in substitution – so that we can be '*rich*.' Immediately, because of religious upbringing, we have a tendency to interpret the word '*rich*' to mean '*spiritual riches*.' But the context of the passage is referring to wealth. Paul was encouraging the Corinthian Church to give money to the suffering saints in Jerusalem. So the context is about money, and thus, the word '*rich*' is a reference to material riches. I know this is shocking! I was shocked too over the passage – and like

many, I tried to reinterpret the passage in a spiritual way, but I could not, because of the context.

This sort of theology appeals to the needs of people and is a bold attempt to make the gospel applicable to the immediate needs of the people. While those who have formal training of biblical interpretation may disagree with every line of the above quote, we should notice PT's desire to be relevant. It is with this background of trying to be relevant that PT preachers in Africa have adopted a theology of *extreme literalism* to the point of ignoring the contexts in which various texts appear.

Because PT is motivated by the immediate social context, the danger of abusing Scripture to address these social problems is inevitable. Moreover, in their attempt to be socially relevant they have embarked upon the practice called de-institutionalisation. "De-institutionalization involves people questioning old forms of spirituality and developing new ones. It has meant changes in spiritual practices and discourses..." (Ganiel 2008:5). This form of de-institutionalism is not taking place in a peaceful or stable environment, rather it is taking place in the midst of overwhelming social problems. With specific emphasis on the poor, this new form of theology seems to provide a basis for a new form of spirituality, economic liberty and social engagement (Ganiel 2008:5).

This attempt to be socially contextual deserves commendation but also calls for caution because of the exegetical errors and poor biblical theology of its proponents. In their theological simplicity, the PT preachers are doing what they do best and it is here that those who have theological training need to revisit their own theology and its relevance. They should revisit it to see whether their practice of theology is relevant to the context in which they find themselves. It is no use debating theological issues that are not answering questions that people are asking in the immediate context. It is in such an environment that PT happens to thrive while those with the formal theological knowledge are debating things of little importance to their people. However, we must not pursue relevance at the expense of compromising the gospel of Christ. The relevance of our message should emanate from the fact that the gospel has transformed us and as a result we are able to identify with the needs of humanity. First their spiritual neediness but also be able to address their physical needs.

Although the Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual empowerment tends to challenge the individual to join the bandwagon of those seeking hope and material empowerment against the background of the failed state, I submit that the Pentecostal/Charismatic successes in Africa have largely been due to their ability to simplify the complexities of modern life. They do this in such a way that everyone connected to these religions succeeds in negotiating and finding answers to problems caused by social dislocation and the failure of the centralised state. In other words, the transformative power of Pentecostalism in Africa is due to its presentation as an alternative centre of power for solving human needs. Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have pursued their transformations on various levels (Ojo 2008:26).

I agree with the above quotation to a large degree but it must be noted that it contains some exaggeration in its claim that “everyone connected to [Pentecostalism] succeeds in negotiating and finding answers to problems...” However, what is true with the rise of these new Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that teach prosperity is that they “offer a salvation that is culturally relevant” (Ojo 2008:26). Although simplistic and in a great measure irresponsible, PT still presents itself as a theology that is addressing the question of poverty and suffering that is a present reality in the life of the average Namibian.

This attempt to be relevant is worthy of commendation even by the opponents of PT. While there are many churches of Western origin established to serve in mostly disadvantaged communities, these churches in many ways are duplicates of their churches of origin. That is, their sermons and liturgies are all programmed in such a way that they make little sense to the immediate situations of the congregants. With some of the mainline churches having sermons already written for them from their headquarters in Europe, they fail to biblically address the needs facing their parishioners and communities.

For example, Goroh’s church is established in one of the poorest suburbs in Windhoek. As a means of being relevant to society, they have a slogan that reads “Jesus Centre, where Jesus works miracles.” Living in such an impoverished environment it is no surprise that many people feel they need a miracle to survive and a church that promises miracles is attractive. Moreover, they are told in weekly sermons that they can become better persons, they can become wealthy, they can change their circumstances etc. The UCKG uses certain symbols to address the

needs of the people for example, the distribution of grapes, flour, water or olive oil from Israel (Freston 2005:41). This symbolism appeals to the African people because of its relationship to their traditional religious worldview.

It is also worth mentioning that the prosperity message propagated by these churches is not the sort that is divorced from the present situations of the people. Thus, “rather than (very distant) prosperity” these churches are aware of the various levels of people. For example, “township Pentecostals are often seeking security, protection from evil spirits and witchcraft, and provision of fertility, healing, employment and a stable marriage” (Freston 2005:43). Because of these churches’ awareness of people’s needs they have devised services, sermons, conferences, crusades and seminars to specifically deal with these issues. For example, the UCKG runs services throughout the week each day with a special theme.

Mondays are for financial problems; Tuesdays for health; Wednesdays for ‘the Holy Spirit’ or ‘personal spiritual development’; Thursdays for the family; Fridays for deliverance from spiritual oppression; Saturdays for ‘the therapy of love’ (i.e. finding a mate) and also for ‘impossible causes’; and Sundays are for ‘an encounter with God’ and Bible study (Freston 2005:43).

Other churches may not have this kind of design but they exhibit the same principle through the themes of their conferences, church names, songs, bumper stickers, year themes etc. Ngong quotes Paul Gifford on the Ghanaian and Nigerian phenomena of PT that,

[O]ne finds churches named ‘Winners’ Chapel,’ ‘The Triumphal Christian Center,’ ‘Power Chapel,’ ‘Victory Bible Church International,’ among others. Bumper stickers proclaim messages such as ‘I am a winner,’ ‘I am a stranger to failure,’ ‘The Favor of God is upon Me,’ among others. Themes of crusades include ‘Winning Ways,’ ‘Taking your Possessions,’ ‘The Force of Divine Progress,’ ‘Be a Winner in Jesus Christ,’ ‘Abundance is my Portion,’ etc. Popular hymns include ‘Jesus is a Winner Man,’ ‘I cannot fail/I am destined for greatness/I am a stranger to failure/Born to win,’ ‘I’m a Winner in the Lord,’ etc (2007:97).

Finding themselves in communities of mainly poor and working people these neo-Pentecostal churches seek to be as relevant as possible. Relevance is a good thing and every church should learn this important aspect, for any church that serves

in a community but cannot attend to the immediate needs of that community will not continue for long in that environment. PT churches capitalise on this and as a result attract numbers of people regardless of the adjoining theological problems. Many evangelical churches in wanting to keep step with their Western supporters lose their actual presence in their immediate environment and have become mere religious symbols and perhaps powerless in the eyes of their observers. Such that the UCKG said, “the traditional church had its space in Africa and planted a good seed. Now, the church of power, which shows healing, which shows the spirits being cast out... brings a definitive change” (quoted by Freston 2005:42). While there is much to disagree with in this statement, we can hardly disagree with the suggestion that there has been a gradual loss of relevance of many evangelical churches.

At present evangelical churches which are not affiliated to Pentecostalism, are well organised, have functional church government structures, good theology and socialising programmes etc. However, their activity in addressing the challenges facing their parishioners is shallow and perhaps artificial in nature. At a public level, many of these churches fail to address the institutionalised vices that nurture injustice (Akoko & Oben 2006:35). PT advocates come on the scene, then, as those that have been empowered (often claiming to have a supernatural assignment) to bring about desired spiritual and social transformation. How would PT, then, not become an attractive theology if people who are neglected in other churches are suddenly confronted with a theology that promises them a way out of their struggles and appears to be relevant to their immediate situations?

Alph Lukau (2007) speaking on Ps. 23 in a conference held by the Greater Love Ministries says,

I feel in my spirit that the Lord brought me in this place because somebody has been eaten up by sickness. I am a messenger that brings an envelope of healing, if you shall attend that envelop and open it, healing will be yours in the Name of Jesus Christ. I feel in my spirit that there is somebody that cannot have a free life anymore. Everything you try to do go back down. It seems, as there is a force behind you that pulls you back. The Lord has anointed me for you my brother, the Lord has anointed me this morning for you my sister. The chains of the enemy shall be broken this morning, in the name of Jesus Christ. So all I ask you to do...is to open your spirit...if you shall do that, you shall receive something that God has prepared for you, in the

name of Jesus Christ...God will bless you beyond measure. Those who knew you yesterday will not recognise you tomorrow...if you stand by the principles of God you shall have what God says have.

This is a sermon preached in one of the poorest suburbs of Windhoek and it sounds relevant in the immediate context. For the majority in the audience listening to Lukau are most likely to be sick, poor, economically struggling and are amongst society's marginalised and a message like his comes as a timely consolation. Considering the origin of PT with its North American roots, the Namibian form is simply a modified replica of the American version. Kenneth Copeland's influence in this kind of thinking can be seen when he writes,

Being in Christ means that you are 'the healed.' Why? Because Jesus went to the cross, bore the curse of the Law, and broke the power of sickness and disease. He was made sick with our sickness; but He didn't stay sick. Today, He is healed; and because we are in Him, we are healed, too! (1980:9).

By addressing or appealing to the listener's common needs they appear to be relevant. This is not altogether bad homiletics at least in its addressing of the people's needs. But this does not exempt many dangerous implications that this sort of hermeneutics and exegesis nurture. Thus, the problem is not contextualisation but being able to handle and apply Scripture correctly. Contextualisation that does harm to the spirit of biblical text indicates disregard for God's Word and personal carelessness from the exegete.

3.4. Preliminary critical summary

This section serves as a critical review on the assumed relevance offered by PT regarding new forms of spirituality, which manifests itself through evangelism and church growth and its attempt to address social issues, especially of poverty. A very important question for this section is: *Why is PT, regardless of these seemingly positive aspects, still not be regarded as a well-grounded theology to adopt and practice?*

The researcher has noted several areas in which PT wields impact both spiritually and socially. Especially in that it is a missionary movement that seeks to be contextually relevant. This has been commended here as positive in nature. However, the movement itself should not be accepted indiscriminately without

careful evaluation. The theology it exhibits needs to be examined to determine whether it is biblically faithful or not. The researcher has also pointed out the ways in which this theology seeks to be contextual, however, we cannot ignore its hermeneutical and exegetical problems.

3.4.1. Contrast between PT based church growth and its dangers versus biblical church growth

The desire to be relevant to the needs of society seems to be the major determining factor for PT. While the Bible may be used and the message of salvation is allegedly proclaimed, this theology still falls short of the biblical standard in addressing humanity's needs. In this section, the researcher will indicate that social relevance needs to be based on a correct understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, PT in a great measure is missing this understanding of the gospel and simply working on a culturally driven agenda.

The evangelistic efforts of PT are principally overshadowed by a culturally more appealing message of wealth, health and success. It is almost as if evangelism is employed as a subtle means to get people into the church structure and once they are in, open the repository of prosperity preaching. What this means is that the gospel is not preached and if it is preached something else is used to make it more appealing to the natural mind. This sort of evangelism is harmful to the cause of the true gospel. For example Joel Osteen in his famous book "Your Best Life Now," makes a "gospel offer" in a very small sentence. Out of a book of three-hundred and ten pages, only one little section talks about salvation and repentance. However, even this salvation offer is tainted by the overarching content of the book as he writes:

Are you at peace with God? A void exists in every person's heart that only God can fill. I'm not talking about joining a church or finding religion. I'm talking about **life and peace and happiness**. Would you pray with me today? Just say, 'Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. I ask you to come into my heart. I make You Lord and Savior.'

Friend, if you prayed that simple prayer, I believe you have been 'born again' (Osteen 2004:310, emphasis added).

The same can be found in Demola's (2006) sermon which speaks about how much God wants every believer to be wealthy, healthy and successful, but dedicates only about half a minute to make a short "altar call,"

We trust that you have been blessed by this powerful teaching. If you've never made Jesus your Lord and Saviour, you can do so right now. The word of God tells us in the book of Romans 10:9-10, believe in your heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead and confess Him as your Lord and Saviour and you will be saved. For with the heart man believes and with his mouth confesses what he believes. Now receive Jesus into your heart by saying this simple prayer.

Heavenly Father thank you for sending your Son Jesus Christ to die for my sins. I believe that you raised him from the dead and I confess that he is my Lord and Saviour. Thank you heavenly Father for saving me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Goroh who is the only published PT advocate in Namibia follows in the same way as Osteen and Demola. After writing extensively on how one can live above tough times and come out victorious exercising the various "practical suggestions" in his book, he dedicates a short portion about being saved. Goroh at least gives a brief outline that attempts to explain the gospel however, this gospel offer may be accepted for all the wrong reasons, such as, because one wants a life of victory, health, happiness and prosperity. So the invitation to "faith" is rather more like a salesman telling a customer that in order for them to have a specific product, they need to meet certain requirements. In this case the requirement for a life of overcoming all circumstance of life with "guaranteed outcomes" is through "inviting Jesus" into your heart. Goroh ends his book with "You can now live your life above all tough times loaded with God's power" (2009:121), and then instructs his readers on how they can be "born again." He writes:

It is simple if you can follow the steps below you will experience it.

(1) Acknowledge that you have sinned against God....

(2) Know that the penalty of sin is death...

(3) Know that God has provided the way of salvation...

(4) Repent of your sins....

(5) Confess Jesus as Lord of your life.... (Goroh 2009:121)

After providing the above outline, he then proceeds to encourage the reader to pray the following:

I believe in my heart that God raised Christ from the dead for me. I confess with my mouth, Jesus is my Lord and Saviour.

I invite you Jesus into my heart forgive me my sins and make me a child of God. Today I am born again. In Jesus name, amen.

If you have just prayed the above prayer, you are now a child of God (Goroh 2009:122).

What are the sins of the person making this prayer? Is it because they have offended God and dishonoured Him through their conduct and thoughts? The Osteen, Demola and Goroh prayers do not indicate any repentance from sin because of conviction rather they are prayers which are made because of a lack of happiness, peace, victory and a feeling some kind of spiritual/psychological emptiness. This kind of evangelism may be said to be a clinical ploy to lure people into these churches, which grow in numbers not because of converts who have trusted in Christ but because of converts who are in search of a life of success, peace and happiness.

So who needs Christ? At least, who needs Christ as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”...? The sting of the law may be taken out of the message, but that only means that the gospel has become a less demanding, more encouraging law whose exhortations are only meant to make us happy, not to measure us against God’s holiness (Horton 2008:70).

When church growth happens through such simplistic “gospel offers” the true believers need to question the validity of such growth. Because true church growth should take place on the principle of faithful preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4). But PT’s gospel centres around behaviour modification, personal improvement, obtaining a good life, transforming society through positive living etc. The evangelism of PT provides an incentive for self-improvement and borrows from many of the human potential movements. The only difference being that theirs is submerged in Christian lingo. While evangelism is a positive thing and worthy of absolute commendation, true evangelism should be biblically sound and must be founded on

correct doctrine. PT's evangelism at its heart robs the sinner of the true gospel and the churches that develop from them are merely social clubs with a vague spiritual emphasis.

Because these churches fail to present the true gospel those who become members are sustained with self-actualisation techniques, motivational sermons, self-help seminars and books. This being the case, the evangelism and church growth of PT is built on foundations of sand (Matt. 7:26-27) and although some may have saving faith, many others may simply be people who think that adopting Christianity would bring them a good life in the here and now.

A number of problems arise from this sort of reductionistic theology. Most obviously, the emphasis on only the feel-good aspects of scripture displays a lack of understanding of the human condition and detracts from the fact that God's salvific work is to take away our sin, *not* to make us rich or successful. We are rescued from God's wrath so that we may be reconciled with God with a view to glorifying and enjoying *Him* forever ... Contrary to Osteen's 'best life now' spirituality, our fulfilment is to be found, not in temporal pursuits, but in realising that God Himself is the ultimate blessing [Lim 2011].

This kind of evangelism does not deserve to be referred to as evangelism in the biblical sense of the word. Because, instead of creating an awareness of the demands of God on man, it trivialises and makes Him a means to man's selfish pursuits. It reduces the seriousness of the condition of man before God, that is, the seriousness of sin by pointing out that man simply needs more happiness and peace. Where it is said that man needs Jesus, Jesus is simply mentioned as one's gateway to a life of greater happiness, peace, wealth and success. As Bonnke puts it,

God has not planned any defeat for my life ... I am worth something. I am important to God, I am special to God, I do count ... I am a King ... We are kings and priests! ... God will turn the tables in your life ... Jesus will solve your problems. You will find your hearts fulfilled when you come to Jesus here in the front (quoted by Gifford 1987:82; cf. Bonnke 1999:77-87).

This sort of evangelism, though it may at times not be intended to misguide people, does give a wrong image of Jesus and the meaning of salvation. It tends to elevate the individual to such a level that they fail to see their sinfulness but want to

adopt Jesus for purposes of self-betterment. It fails to emphasise the reality of man's sin, the holiness of God, the grace of God through Christ and the judgment of God that will be upon all who reject Christ. While this may be mentioned here and there, it is not a message that is clarified to the sinner. Moreover, it gives a wrong impression of God, making Him no different from any other life-enhancing commodity on the markets.

Michael Horton writes, "God...becomes a commodity – a product or therapy that we can buy and use for our personal well-being. Exemplifying the moralistic and therapeutic approach to religion" (2008:71). Horton goes on that this kind of "gospel" does not lead sinners to mourn over their sins "in the face of God's judgement or dance under the liberating news of God's saving mercy" (2008:71). Why? Because "all *gravity* is lost – both the gravity of the problem [sin] and of God's amazing grace. According to this message, we are not helpless sinners – the ungodly – who need a one-sided diving rescue. Rather we are good people who just need a little instruction and motivation" (Horton 2008:71).

Thus, the gospel preached in the evangelism of PT is in great measure in conflict with the meaning of the gospel as it is revealed in the NT. Furthermore, the message of that evangelism and the methods used are a perversion of the gospel as it were proclaimed by the apostles. They misuse the Bible to raise followers after their self-made religion, which does not motivate people to desire after Jesus Christ. The evangelism and church growth witnessed in PT may appear to be positive on the surface but it is spiritually superficial and is embedded in deeply seated theological errors because it fails to realise that,

The gospel is not behavior modification, becoming a better person or learning to become more moral. It is not taking the life of Jesus as a model way to live or transforming/redeeming the secular realm. It is not living highly communal lives with others and sharing generously in communities who practice the way of Jesus in local culture [Monergism 2011].

Surely all these things are admirable and good to a certain extent, but to substitute the gospel for these things is a grave error, which should have every serious Christian worrying. Such a "gospel" requires critical examination. A gospel of that sort should also lead us to ask whether it can cause to genuine salvation. The

sort of gospel proclaimed by PT does not tell us what God has done for us in Christ to save us from sin, instead it tells us that the life, death and resurrection of Christ is our license to happiness and success in this life. But we know from Scripture that,

[T]he gospel centers 'upon Jesus Christ and what God has done through him. The essential points of the gospel are Jesus Christ's status as the Son of God, his genuine humanity, his death for our sins, his burial, resurrection, subsequent appearances, and future coming in judgment. That no one is justified but in the gracious work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection. It is not merely a recital of theological truths and historical events; rather, it relates these truths and events to situations of every individual believer' (Carson quoted in *Monergism* [2011]; c.f. Carson 2008).

Unless there be this Bible-centred concept of evangelism there will remain doubt in the evangelistic methods used by PT. This is not to limit God who can graciously save people even under misplaced theological doctrines – however, we should not let our guard down concerning the errors around this theology. This is because, no one can come to know the true Christ of the Bible unless they hear Him preached faithfully from Scripture. Moreover, no one can come to the knowledge of salvation unless the true gospel is made plain to them. The promotion of evangelism and church growth through PT is only virtuous because these subjects are derived from Scripture. But divorced from the scriptural context as indicated (by Osteen and Bonnke) they are tools of promoting human agendas and of gathering people who at heart do not desire God but would rather use God for furthering their own selfish ambitions.

The superficial preaching modelled by PT indicates the worldliness of this theology. True concern for mankind does not begin by addressing their need for happiness, success, behaviour modification etc. Instead biblically faithful Christians are to be primarily concerned with the eternal suffering people will face if they reject the gospel of Christ (John 3:18; I John 5:12). For anyone to claim great concern for humanity and yet to fail to clearly share the message of the gospel simply proves their own worldliness and humanism. This concern for the eternal future of human beings is the ground upon which any other Christian works of mercy should be built.

The meaning of poverty ought to primarily be applied to man's miserableness outside God (Kvalbeing 1987). This spiritual poverty is worse than any material

poverty and can only be relieved by the means God has appointed – the gospel. The words of Jesus imply the seriousness of spiritual poverty as well as the solution “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to *proclaim good news to the poor*. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

While the word translated the *poor* in Luke 4:18 implies various groups of people such as the outcasts, those who are miserable, beggars, the oppressed etc, the context of the passage also includes the reality of spiritual poverty. The passage is a fulfilment of Isaiah’s (61:1-2) messianic prophecy. The Messiah as Isaiah portrays him throughout his book is someone who has a spiritual mission of salvation from sin. Wiersbe (1996) writes,

Jesus applied all of this to His own ministry, not in a political or economic sense, but in a physical and spiritual sense. He had certainly brought Good News of salvation to bankrupt sinners and healing to brokenhearted and rejected people. He had delivered many from blindness and from bondage to demons and disease. Indeed, it was a spiritual “Year of Jubilee” for the nation of Israel!

Dockery, Butler, Church, Scott, Smith, White, and Holman Bible Publishers (1992) also affirm that

In the context of Luke, the anointing looks back to the anointing with the Spirit in Luke 3:20–22. As such the appeal to Isaiah was not just to the picture of a prophet, as allusions to Elijah and Elisha in verses 24–28 suggest but also asserts Jesus’ regal role. Jesus would bring salvation to all those in need: poor, blind, and captive. His presence means release from bondage, particularly bondage rooted in the activity of Satan, as His subsequent miracles in 4:31–44 show.

Thus, Christ’s major concern was to preach the gospel of salvation because Israel was in a miserable state in relation to God as revealed in the writings of the OT prophets. Moreover, those who were naturally outcasts of society and were thought to be unworthy of even being instructed in the things of God were receiving the teachings of the Messiah. God’s favour for those who heard Jesus was not in that their economic status changed but in that they were recipients of God’s revelation – especially the gospel of salvation.

We will only be able to care for the economically poor in our churches when we first come to terms with the need of sharing the gospel with them. That is, hearts that are truly focused upon making the gospel of the cross known will not overlook the present physical realities of fellow believers and even of others in their communities. Where the gospel is not truly proclaimed or superficially proclaimed, people tend to be self-centred, for only the gospel, has the power to transform the human hearts and its intentions. If people are continuously taught messages of self-help and of trying to become better, self-centredness will be endorsed and amplified. The sort of gospel proclaimed by PT at best leads to narcissism. Only the gospel of Christ can cause us to live for others and seek their good, even the good of the economically poor that live among us.

Non-Christians can only be reached with a relevant message; however, this message should in no way trivialise or contradict the Christian faith as it is revealed in Scripture. Where the Christian faith is trivialised or contradicted at the expense of relevance it becomes “evangelism without the evangel” and “Christian outreach without a Christian message” (Horton 2008:72). Therefore, it is important to keep in mind “that the gospel is central ... [it] reconciles lost men and women to the God who made them and whose image they bear ... [it] justifies them in this life and prepares them for the new heaven and new earth” (Carson 1996^a:433).

This departure from a gospel-centred evangelism and church growth becomes the primary ground upon which all the other careless theological super-structures are constructed. These things do great harm to the cause of the true gospel.

Numerical growth should be commended however numerical growth must come as a result of faithful proclamation of the gospel. Numerical growth is definitely God’s will (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 11:24) and churches should be encouraged to seek for numerical growth. However, such growth is not and should not be seen as an exercise in improving humanity economically and psychologically through man-made strategies. Unfortunately, because a number of PT advocating churches borrow their church growth strategy from the church growth movement methodologies their churches now serve as repositories to “vendor ... religious goods and services,

epitomized in ... technique-driven ... churches” (Leeman 2006:7). Therefore, the issue here is not about numerical growth but about the failure to grow churches in ways that ought to honour God through the faithful proclamation of the gospel. Preaching messages that will draw the poor will only build a church according to man but preaching the gospel will result in a God-built church.

The former, a man-built church, seeks to accomplish man’s goals, using man’s means, and strives, whether consciously or not, for man’s glory. However, the latter, a God-built church, has the Spirit of God as its energy, the Word of God as its most precious jewel, and the glory of God as its supreme goal.

All around us, we see the effects of the man-built ministry. Many churches have become nothing more than entertainment centers, giving slick performances to growing numbers of memorized, but unproductive churchgoers. Such devices may bring people into the church, but are unable to do anything with them once they arrive. Sad to say, many today are seeking to ‘redefine’ church as though this is an option by looking to the world for its signals the modern day church is suffering from an identity crisis of monumental proportions (Lawson 2006:1).

The above dichotomy is not a universal axiom, it only applies to those who are guilty of such practices and is not generally true for all neo-Pentecostal churches. However, church growth that happens at the expense of the gospel is something the church ought to avoid, be it in neo-Pentecostal or any other Christian denomination. Such church growth turns out to be actually counter-productive to the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The goal of many ... [PT] proponents, to win souls for Christ through the Gospel, is a worthy one. Ironically, many of the ... techniques work instead to undermine the Gospel ... [PT church growth] principles have roots in American revivalism, which suggests that people have within them the free will to ‘make a decision for Jesus.’ This implies that gaining new Christians is a human work—a matter of rhetorical and emotional manipulation, applying the correct techniques, and following the right principles—rather than the work of God. Typical ... [these] techniques minimize the Means of Grace, which are God’s way of conveying the salvation of Christ ... and promote a theology of glory over the theology of the cross. Such things, however sincerely done, undermine the very Gospel they are intended to proclaim (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 2001:6).

The aspect of church growth in these churches is commendable and should be desired by all. However, church growth should not be sought through worldly forms that are void of the gospel (Lawson 2006). The church should grow through the faithful proclamation of the gospel and it is not for us to repackage it as if we were selling goods to consumers by improving the wrapping in order to make it more attractive for the consumer taste and desire.

Although PT churches attempt to proclaim the gospel they seem to be more focused on addressing the felt needs of the people. Instead of providing solid biblical teachings, they tell people on how to get self-esteem, personal success and how to escape poverty. While these are all good things to deal with, it creates the impression that the gospel is a means to a life of success, wealth, health and happiness.

The church ought to preach the gospel of the cross and people should be added by means of them having believed the gospel and not by man-made techniques (II Cor. 10:12-16). Christians are obliged to preach the gospel in order to address the needs of people especially and primarily man's spiritual condition of sin and alienation from God. The church is obliged to preach the gospel (I Cor. 9:16). If the gospel proclamation is the means God has chosen to grow his church, then we should abide by that for it is up to God to build his own church (Matt. 16:18).

We should also realise that the ways PT churches use to attract people may have value, for the church ought to be culturally relevant, sensitive to people's needs and contextual. The problem is that these kinds of strategies tend to move away from the gospel and people get into church with a misplaced concept of Christianity. The message of the church (gospel) is altered so significantly that it is not the gospel anymore. So instead of preaching the gospel that would lead sinners to repentance they provide marketable ideas and a message of economic emancipation (DeWaay [2011]; c.f. Lawson 2006). Because of this shortage of a clear gospel message the growth of these churches is questionable.

Many Africans turn to Pentecostalism as a result of problems they face. By emphasising its claims to solve problems of daily life, as well as existential problems, Pentecostalism seduces populations that are faced by a decreasing quality of life, by the 'insecurity of modernity,' by

feelings of isolation or a loss of traditional points of reference. At the same time, this religion is one solution among many, sometimes chosen as a last resort after having tried 'everything else,' and often part of an individual's complex and unfinished religious path (Mayrargue 2008:8).

3.4.2. *Contextual relevance examined*

As the researcher provides a critique of the contextual relevance claimed by PT, the quote below from the Lausanne Theology Working Group's statement on prosperity teaching provides an overview of why this theology is actually defrauding its followers.

We recognize that Prosperity Teaching flourishes in contexts of terrible poverty, and that for many people, it presents their only hope, in the face of constant frustration, the failure of politicians and NGOs, etc., for a better future, or even for a more bearable present. We are angry that such poverty persists and we affirm the Bible's view that it also angers God and that it is not his will that people should live in abject poverty. We acknowledge and confess that in many situations the Church has lost its prophetic voice in the public arena.

However, we do not believe that Prosperity Teaching provides a helpful or biblical response to the poverty of the people among whom it flourishes...

- (a) It vastly enriches those who preach it, but leaves multitudes no better off than before, with the added burden of disappointed hopes.
- (b) While emphasizing various alleged spiritual or demonic causes of poverty, it gives little or no attention to those causes that are economic and political, including injustice, exploitation, unfair international trade practices, etc.
- (c) It thus tends to victimize the poor by making them feel that their poverty is their own fault (which the Bible does not do), while failing to address and denounce those whose greed inflicts poverty on others (which the Bible does repeatedly).
- (d) Some prosperity teaching is not really about helping the poor at all, and provides no sustainable answer to the real causes of poverty (Kubsch 2010:4).

Contextualisation "is a slippery term with diverse connotations, depending very much on who is using it" (Carson 1996^a:539). Carson goes on to provide us with two ways of understanding contextualisation. First, the sort of contextualisation, "that

recognizes the once-for-all truthfulness and authority of God's self-disclosure in Scripture, but then also frankly recognizes that all attempts to interpret that Scripture are culture-laden efforts undertaken by sinners (redeemed or otherwise), and therefore subject to more or less distortion" (Carson 1996^a:540). Secondly, is the sort of contextualisation that, "emphasizes the priority of the context that the text of Scripture is gradually domesticated to serve contemporary agendas beginning from the observation that interpreters cannot help but interpret texts from the context of their own culture, 'praxis' becomes the hermeneutical control" (Carson 1996^a:541).

It is this second form of contextualisation that poses problems in addressing the problem of poverty. Because PT does not have any clearly defined hermeneutics, (that is, a well thought interpretative system, which ought to serve as a guide in interpreting the Bible) it easily drifts into error. The fourth chapter "**Critical Theological Examination of PT in Namibia**" will provide a detailed evaluation of these theological errors within this movement. This lack of a coherent or well-defined interpretative system has led to PT being a virtually pluralistic movement which, as a result has adopted the second form of contextualisation mentioned by Carson above. Thus, PT fails in its contextualisation because in its attempt to present that holistic transformative effect of the gospel (Tshele 2009:§1.7.1), it ends up diluting the gospel by adopting unbiblical practices and teachings.

Social relevance in a situation like Namibia is most definitely a requirement for both religious and non-religious institutions. That is, the widening fissure between the rich and the poor, increasing unemployment etc calls for the intervention of all concerned bodies to be involved in one way or another to address these growing social hydras.

However, caught up in seeking to face this pandemonium of increasing social ills PT has sacrificed many biblical principles in the process. That is, this search for relevance is principally undermined by theological bankruptcy and mishandling of Scripture. PT may be better defined as a movement of social activism rather than as a Christian movement seeking to spread the gospel. Their attempt to be relevant is worthy of commendation but they should be pitied on the other hand for their failure to allow Scripture to address the conditions of our society rather than allowing the

conditions of society to dictate the meaning of the biblical text. We ought to be relevant in the context in which God has placed us, but such relevance ought to originate from the teaching of Scripture. Right biblical interpretation and theology is imperative. “If an interpretation is unfaithful ... it is faddish and unreliable, however many insightful points it may generate along the way” (Carson 1996^a:433). It is unfortunate that for PT its concept of contextualisation at the expense of sacrificing the faithfulness of the biblical text has become a spiritual and social pathological condition with terminal effects upon its followers (Ferdinando 2008:45).

The researcher noted above that in as much as PT attempts to address the needs facing people, it does so at the expense of abusing Scripture. The gospel ought to be at the forefront in the lives of those who are suffering. Because Scripture has a specific storyline (redemptive history), it is a requirement that those who interpret it need to know this storyline and it needs to be reflected in every other area in which they engage (Goldsworthy 2006). PT generally departs from this biblical storyline. The contextualisation practiced by PT is therefore deficient in true Bible-centred teaching. It is biblically shallow and too simplistic in how it deals with the issues of poverty.

The influence of modern materialism is evident in PT and such it works hard at preparing people for this life. The slogan “do not be so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly use” indicates how PT advocates have freed themselves from the imminent reality of the new heavens and new earth towards which the whole of human history is directed (Carson 1996^a:434).

Thus Christian mission can never be reduced to preparing people for this life. It can never be properly Christian if all that it aims to do, if all that it accomplishes, is to effect some reforms in government, or to improve social, moral, and economic standards. I cannot imagine a church profoundly shaped by Scripture that will not want to reform government and improve social, moral, and economic standards. But if that is all the church is trying to do, if it is all that individual Christians are trying to do, they have lost their moorings. There is a primacy to preparing people to meet God which, though its horizon is eternity, will also change how people live here and now. To put the matter another way, the noting of realized eschatology is ridiculous unless it is predicated on futurist eschatology. The ethics and values of the End cannot be brought back into the present as if there is no End (Carson 1996^a:434-435).

This is not to imply that PT's eschatology is uniformly one-sided. Rather it borrows from any eschatological view (pre-dominantly Pre-millennial Dispensationalism) as long as they can fit into its system of a comfortable life in this world and in the one to come. We noted that the assumed contextual relevance of PT is in reality not relevance in the biblical sense, because biblical contextualisation is grounded in the truth of Scripture. True relevance can only be a reality when the proclamation of the gospel is given its primacy, because the church is not commissioned primarily to reform society but to evangelise the lost. That is, if Christians are to make any significant impact to bring about change in their society, it should be on the basis of the gospel of Christ.

We must not forget that Christ is even now ruling in a sense over history (Eph.1:22ff). The 'already' of grace means that Christians can expect to use God's power to change social conditions and communities. But the 'not yet' of sin means there will be 'wars and rumors of wars'. Selfishness, cruelty, terrorism, oppression will continue. Christians harbor no illusions about politics nor expect utopian conditions. The 'not yet' means that Christians will not trust any political or social agenda to bring about righteousness here on earth. So the gospel keeps us from the over-pessimism of fundamentalism (moralism) about social change, and also from the over-optimism of liberalism (pragmatism) (Keller [2011]).

In order to develop a truly relevant approach to man's needs of poverty, we need to obey the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Everything else in which the Christian engages in, be it social or otherwise, needs to be informed by this one agenda – the proclamation of the gospel. Unlike PT that engages itself in reforming society on the ground of faulty hermeneutics and theology, biblical Christianity in general seeks to further the kingdom of God on earth through the making of disciples. What does this mean? Carson puts it well:

...[M]any in the ... world have become single-issue people. The church is not immune from such influences. The result is that many Christians *assume* the gospel ... but are passionate about something on the relative periphery: abortion, poverty, forms of worship, cultural decay, ecology, overpopulation, pornography, family breakdown, and much more ... From a biblical-theological perspective, these challenges, as serious as they are, are reflections of the still deeper problem – our odious alienation from God. If we tackle these problems without tackling what is central, we are merely playing around with symptoms. This is no excuse for Christians not to get involved in these and many

other issues. But it is to insist that where we get involved in such issues ... we do so ... beginning with full-orbed gospel proclamation and witness and passion, and then, while acknowledging that no one can do everything, doing our 'significant something' to address the wretched entailments of sin in our world. The good news of Jesus Christ will never allow us to be smug and other-worldly in the face of suffering and evil (1996^b:84).

This view stands in absolute contrast to PT's form of seeking to be contextually relevant at the dictates of society's social and economic needs. True Christianity cannot be inactive in the midst of suffering especially poverty but instead of having its agenda set by these social problems, the gospel's agenda is first to reach the heart of man and help them to get right with God. "The point is that in all our efforts to address painful and complex societal problems, we must do so from the centre, out of a profound passion for the gospel" (Carson 1996^b:84). We cannot simply address the social issues head-on and hope that in the meantime our good works will lead people to salvation. Carson (1996^b:84) writes that the gospel should be primarily presented to the needy because,

This is for us both a creedal necessity and a strategic choice. It is a creedal necessity because this gospel alone prepares men and women for eternity, for meeting our Maker—and all problems are relativized in the contemplation of the cross, the final judgement, and eternity. It is a strategic choice because we are persuaded that the gospel, comprehensively preached in the power of the Spirit, will do more to transform men and women, not least their attitudes, than anything else in the world.

The gospel-centred approach suggested by Keller and Carson indicates that true concern for human needs should be primarily demonstrated through addressing issues of eternal destination. Although PT advocates do address issues of personal salvation, its gospel offer is simplistic in nature. It seems to be more concerned with preparing people for *this* life.

Goroh argued in the first ever nationally televised discussion on the prosperity gospel that "a hungry person if presented with only the gospel and his needs are not met, will curse God" (paraphrase). This is because he argues like Oyedepo who writes, The gospel means good news. And what is good new to the poor? 'Supplies are available!' Good news to the hungry is, 'Food is available!' Good news to the

naked is, 'Clothing is available!' To those without a roof over their heads, the good news is: 'Shelter!' (2007:40). However, both Goroh and Oyedepo fail to realise that

The principal work of Jesus engaged in was the gospel – the news of the spiritual deliverance of His people [Matthew 1:21]. Though He had a care for their physical needs and He emphasized that they may pray for those needs (Matthew 6: 'give us this day our daily bread'), He and His apostles reminded the citizens of the kingdom not to let much of an interest for them (Gritters 2004:32).

If caring for the needy were to drive the ministry of Christ, He would have used most of His time running charity activities and neglected the proclamation of the gospel, as many PT advocates do today. In their attempt to be relevant, they neglect the essential issue – faithful proclamation of the gospel. This does not imply that Christians are to turn a blind eye to social issues, instead as Gritters writes,

The people of God must have a strong consciousness and desire to 'do good to all men' out of compassion for them in their misery. This must live in the minds of the people. The preaching of the gospel in the congregation will be the primary means to foster this consciousness, and do so over against a misunderstanding of the antithesis, which calls for spiritual separation from ungodliness (2004:33).

Where gospel proclamation is neglected, believers will never sense the necessity of ministering to anyone outside their church walls (Gritters 2004:33). Thus, the desire for relevance in society, especially in the area of assisting the poor, should be accompanied by the faithful proclamation of the gospel which transforms people's hearts so that they are able to show mercy. The purpose of Christian good works is so that people would "give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16; cf. II Cor. 9:13). This stands in contrast to the self-glory seeking motivations propagated by PT. Many of its proponents do their good works so they might receive political recognition or use them as a means of increasing their church membership (Hasu 2006).

3.4.3. Other issues to consider

There are other aspects of PT that might be seen by evangelicals in a positive biblical light. It has been said that even an erroneous system contains a certain measure of truth, therefore in the attempt to reject the often unbiblical claims of PT, we should not be so blind that we reject that which could be helpful. Below are some

of the things which evangelicals can embrace, perhaps with the same zeal that PT advocates do:

- (a) *Priority given to the Word of God:* Generally, prosperity preachers give priority to God's Word and desire to make it the rule of their practices. This is a positive aspect, however, it is filled with serious hermeneutical errors which instead of leading people to truth leads them into greater error. Evangelicals can be encouraged to take the Word of God seriously and teach it as a living Word rather than preaching it simply as history. That is God's Word should be taught as that which addresses today's people and today's needs. With the right perspective of interpretation, the Bible can be preached relevantly today.
- (b) *Faith in God's power:* PT advocates often encourage their followers to trust in the power of God for miracles of various kinds. Although the things which PT encourages people to trust God for may betray selfishness and/or materialism, it is biblical for believers to be encouraged to trust God for miracles. This would require evangelicals to move out of the realm of an intellectualised gospel and give Christianity its due place as a supernatural religion. In other words, not to limit people's lives to what is natural when they can trust God for what is supernatural.
- (c) *Optimism about life:* There is great optimism amongst PT advocates concerning life. Although this optimism is often divorced from the realities people face in life, it is a reminder that believers ought to generally have an optimistic approach towards life. This optimism can however only be authentic when believers are assured of God's sovereignty in all situations of life. The optimism of PT, is often, in contrast, rooted in personal efforts and positive thinking. Believers in general ought not be pessimistic about life as Scripture tells us that "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). However, this optimism is not blind to the realities of sin's effects in human life of which poverty is one such effect that will remain in this world and will be banished only at the return of Christ.

(d) *Seeking godly prosperity theology*: PT is a theology that came to exist as a reaction towards the poverty theology that was promoted by a great number of evangelicals. But it is positive in that it encourages its followers to think that it is possible for one to live a “decent life.” Especially in a nation like Namibia where the gap between the rich and poor is so enormous, it is only fair that people should be encouraged that there is a way out. Modern evangelicals know that poverty is not bliss nor it is a sign of godliness. Leaving behind the faulty hermeneutics of PT, evangelicals can actually explore this area and begin teaching the values of godly prosperity. In as much as evangelicals decry the claims of PT, this should actually lead them to search Scripture to teach what Scripture has to say about wealth and poverty. Moreover, there should be a biblical way of encouraging believers to escape poverty rather than just criticising PT and its methods. (See section 5.2 for suggestions).

These marks indicate some points of contact with PT that require a hermeneutically sound approach to offering a truly biblical view. Those who criticise then are to take up these issues and search the Bible to give answers to the needs of today. Praxis has become the foundation of truth in PT but true evangelical praxis need to evolve from Scripture rather than the social needs or cultural demands of our time.

3.5. Summary

This chapter looked at various ways in which PT seemed to be positive. The researcher noted that there are positives aspects within the movement however, these positives are clouded by the erroneous hermeneutical issues that surrounds PT. Moreover, evangelicals should not just sit back and criticise PT because they are doing what they think is best within the parameters of their theology. The criticism offered of PT should be met by equal efforts to address the realities of people’s lives rather than just holding out an intellectual gospel without making any practical value.

It has also been noted that PT must not be criticised for the good things it does, especially in trying to motivate people to seek better living standards or helping the poor and oppressed. The good works someone does should be commended,

even by their opponents. Criticism of PT arises mostly because of erroneous theology and misplaced priorities. First, the theology is built on faulty biblical foundations. That is, Scripture is twisted to advance other agendas. Secondly, the gospel is not faithfully proclaimed, instead other inducements are used to make the gospel attractive. For example, people are told that they can live a victorious life or they can overcome all the challenges that life offers, but in order to attain this they must “invite Jesus” into their hearts by means of a “simple prayer.” Thirdly, their programmes which are meant for social engagement are not properly managed and unskilled people run them with the result that they often fail to be effective.

Evangelism and church growth have also been noted among the positive aspects of PT. But there is again the issue of theology that comes to the fore and calls into question the methods used for evangelism and church growth. Contextual relevance was also raised and examined here and the researcher noted that it is important that every Christian ministry be a contextual one but that contextualisation must not be driven by cultural or social force. It must stem from Scripture. The desire to be contextual should not cause us to sacrifice the meaning of Scripture.

An important aspect that arose in this chapter is that any true care for humanity should be demonstrated by our concern for their eternal destination. This means that Christians desiring to care for the needs of others cannot just be mere humanitarians but they are to be first and foremost evangelists of the gospel of Christ. The highest form of care for our neighbour is our concern about their eternal suffering.

In response to the above points it is appropriate to ask: if PT does have certain commendable aspects and raises issues of serious concern for the church and society where has it gone wrong and how can we respond to its error biblically?

CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF PT IN NAMIBIA

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided overview of PT's activities and a short critique of each. This chapter will provide a critical theological examination of PT in the light of Scripture. Because of the influence this theology wields it is prudent to critically examine it within the Namibian context. Since it is a wide spread and widely acceptable theology justice can only be done by carefully examining its theological stands and measuring them against Scripture and Christian history. There are over forty thriving prosperity-teaching churches in Windhoek with satellite branches around the country. In addition there are many who do not directly publicly preach wealth and health, but hold to PT in a diffused form.

4.2. Scriptural justification for PT

We have established that PT has its roots in the WoF movement which began in the United States of America (McConnell 1995) and in ATRs (Chilongani 2007). Therefore, the justification for PT is rooted in the theological understanding of WoF and its forerunners. This section will examine the methods of biblical interpretation used by PT advocates and the passages used to advocate this theology. The researcher seeks to provide a biblical critique of the methods of interpretation used with the hope that those who promote this theology will examine their own view through systematic study and application of Scripture.

4.2.1. *PT's method of biblical interpretation*

The majority of PT advocates have no formal theological training and much of their exegesis is borrowed from one another or largely based on the ideas of Kenneth Hagin and Kenneth Copeland. Some who have Bible training did their training in Bible schools which used the books of the founders as the main textbooks, as is the practice at the Crenshaw Christian Centre Bible school in Windhoek. Those in Africa have also borrowed most of their theology from these American icons. Some of them even receive aid of one form or another from American PT churches. These American churches have also helped to create studying opportunities and the founding of church-based Bible schools. In Namibia, although the percentage is not known it is estimated that the greater majority of those who advocate PT have no formal theological training and have had most likely no formal advanced schooling. The lack of theological training amongst PT advocates provides a better understanding of the sort of hermeneutics that dominate this movement.

PT advocates are often criticised for their proof-texting techniques. That is, the practice of using isolated Bible text to establish a specific doctrine. Only when Scripture is used correctly can it serve a remedial purpose and lead believers in truth. While proof-texting uses Scripture, it is often used only with the purpose of promoting subjective preconceptions. Below are few examples of this kind of proof-texting:

- (a) Billy Lubansa writes, "People of God, you must believe that when the gospel is preached to the poor it helps them to grow rich. This is because that is how God intended to deal with the poverty issue" (2004:19). He continues, "the gospel is a prosperity building message!" (2004:19). The text used to support this interpretation is Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to *proclaim good news to the poor*. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."
- (b) Haruna Goroh writes, "You have to use your tongue to declare what you want before it is done for you" (2009:92). He continues that "Whatever

trouble you may be in today can change through what comes out of your mouth. Do not undermine the power of your words. Your tongue is the key to the door of your destiny” (2009:92). He uses John 16:24 “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full,” to advocate his view of positive confession.

- (c) David Oyedepo writes, “Jesus was slain to restore back to us all that was lost through the sin of the first Adam. However, though these packages [referring to wealth, health etc] are yours by right, for them to become yours indeed, you must ‘take them by force.’ Even Jesus knew that we would need to always contend for what belongs to us” (2007:205). This is said to be the interpretation of Matthew 11:12 “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.”
- (d) Joel Osteen interprets Psalm 8:5 “Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” that “God wants to make your life easier. He wants to assist you, to promote you, to give you advantages. He wants you to have preferential treatment” (2004:38).

The study of each of the above quoted passages in their contexts contradicts the interpretations offered by these PT advocates. These interpretations harm the context of the passage and they are used to advocate personal agendas. We acknowledge that writers of commentaries are not authorities of the meaning of the Bible but they are respected for their determination to study Scripture in its context. There is no trusted scholarly Bible commentator or serious scholar who would agree with any of the above interpretations (France 1985; Kruse 2003; Paschall and Hobbs 1972).

For example, it is difficult to imagine any honest and well trained scholar of Scripture agreeing with the interpretation that Oyedepo gives on Revelation 5:12, “saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’” Oyedepo argues from this passage that the redemptive work of Christ “brought us seven powerful

inheritances – power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and blessing” (2007:67). He argues that these things were lost through Adam’s disobedience, now Christ came to receive all these back for the Christian (2007:67) so that they can be experienced in the here and now. Oyedepo’s obsession with the message of wealth and health has led him to obscure the meaning of this apocalyptic text.

The passage in its overall context is a doxology of praise directed towards Jesus Christ who is seated on the throne. It is praise from the four living creatures and twenty-four elders in recognition of Christ as their Creator and God (cf. John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16). The passage affirms Daniel’s vision “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13-14; cf. Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:8-11). Morris (1987:102; cf. Utley 2001:57) comments on Rev. 5:12 that,

The angels use seven expressions (the perfect number is probably significant) to indicate the wonder of the Lamb. The first four are qualities he possesses, the last three express the attitude of people to him. Though there is no quotation there are resemblances to the praise of God in 1 Chronicles 29:10–12. Almost all the qualities here are ascribed to Christ elsewhere in the New Testament: *power* (1 Cor. 1:24), *wealth* (2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 3:8), *wisdom* (1 Cor. 1:24), *strength* (Eph. 6:10; 2 Thess. 1:9), *honour* (Heb. 2:9; cf. Phil. 2:11), and *glory* (John 1:14; Heb. 2:9). ‘Blessing’ (NIV *praise*) is not specifically used of him, but the corresponding verb is (Mark 11:9-10; cf. Rom. 15:29).

These passages show that Jesus Christ has received all authority and is the sovereign ruler who is worthy of all praise. To read the message of wealth and good life into this passage is an abuse of the text to advance one’s own private agenda. The passage is not an address to believers but to Christ who was slain but now lives forever.

However, this is the method of interpretation used and advocated in PT and it makes it easy for its advocates to propagate their own ideologies. With a crowd that is largely unversed in Scripture these interpretations become the authority. This method of interpretation, however, is problematic and destructive as it bends

Scripture to fit contexts it is not addressing. These interpretations are consonant with deconstructionism and pluralism. In the former Scripture is made to mean whatever the interpreter thinks it means, and in the latter every interpretation is acceptable and does not require any evaluation.

In the attempt to address the issue of poverty biblically, prosperity advocates fail to recognise the various methods of communication God has provided in Scripture. D.A. Carson writes,

Scripture boasts many communicative acts: history, letters, proverbs, wisdom utterances, warnings, songs, questions, discourse, diatribes, gematria, apocalyptic, legal codes, moral exhortation, threats, promises, commands, laments ... Some of these are recognized and recognizable genres others are admittedly genres, but with very fuzzy borders. Some are genres found within several other genres. And genres have their own interpretive 'rules,' learned by observation and practice (1996^a:189).

To be able to make these differences of the Bible's mixed genres does not come naturally, one needs a trained mind. Therefore, it is important to be aware of these various genres because,

...[T]his will provide the needed correction to propositional and metaphorical theology alike: the Bible does not merely give us atomistic propositions about God, nor free-floating metaphors, but ways of processing and organizing propositions and metaphors into meaningful wholes. The forms of biblical literature are the bridge between canon and concept we seek (Vanhoozer quoted in Carson 1996^a:190).

Mary Gerhart writes: that as, "[w]ith generic analysis, biblical theologians will understand themselves to mediate between genres" (quoted in Carson 1996^a:190). This lack of understanding the genres of the Bible and many other hermeneutical practices is the root cause of teaching prosperity in a way that is biblically unsound. PT appears to be generally justified by poor exegesis which in this case is not simply rooted in the failure to recognise the various genres of Scripture but is also a system that exercises a selective "use of evidence that other evidence has been illegitimately excluded ... [this] tendency to select only part of the evidence, prematurely construct a grid, and so filter the rest of the evidence through the grid that it is robbed of any [biblical] substance" (Carson 1989:98-99).

4.3. Examining Scriptures used in promoting prosperity teaching

There are several key passages of Scripture used to advocate prosperity teaching. We will not be able to interact with them all but will select a few popular ones. The passages used to advocate PT are many and (as we have noted) the advocates of this theology can find a prosperity theme in almost any passage they choose. This is because their concept of prosperity seems to be the unifying theme of Scripture in their minds. The following texts are not in any specific order of importance but are separated into OT and NT.

4.3.1. Old Testament texts

Much of PT's teachings are rooted in the OT especially in God's promises to Abraham and the children of Israel. We have already pointed out that PT advocates do not follow any particular rule of interpretation except that which they invent to advocate their own views. This gives them apparent authority to make false or misleading claims.

One of the primary texts used is that of Abraham's wealth "Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2). The text is inter-used with that of Galatians 3:6-9. The argument is that since God blessed Abraham for his faith, all who believe in God are entitled to the same, and even more (material) blessing because of their covenant with God through Jesus Christ. Because we follow in the footsteps of Abraham, we will have material blessing and because we have believed in Jesus Christ we will receive a double portion of that material blessing as well as spiritual blessings – especially that of eternal life. This kind of association of the concept of what blessing is mistreats the text. Moreover, Abraham's materials blessing is nowhere said to be transferrable to those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul actually makes it clear that the blessing believers will receive as that of Abraham is justification and not material blessing. The concept of material blessing is beside the point to Paul's argument and purpose of writing to the Galatians, his central message is on salvation by grace through faith. Paul uses Abraham as the proto-type that all the nations will be justified purely by faith in Christ "who is the

subject of the promise” (Jamieson *et al* 1997). Thus it is then said that if we have believed in Christ we are blessed with faithful Abraham, that is, we are justified not by works but by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ.

Deuteronomy 8:18 “You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day,” is often used to advocate that God enables believers to obtain wealth because of His covenant established through Jesus Christ. Upon this passage, believers are encouraged to pursue wealth because wealth is good and is from the Lord. Moreover, such wealth is said to affirm the presence of God – establishing his covenant sworn especially through Abraham. But does this passage speak to the believers of today in an God-Israel relationship? The answer is no. The passage itself does not promise wealth to anyone but states that providence is of the Lord. In other words, if anyone were to become rich they should not think that it is because of their smartness or hard work but that God has graciously provided (Deut. 8:17). In fact, it stands against the self-glorying attitude propagated by PT. Thompson (1974:154) wisely writes,

Hence Israel was to remember that it was Yahweh alone who gave her the strength to acquire wealth. Moreover, every blessing she enjoyed was the result of his covenant with her and the outcome of his promise to her forefathers. This lesson for Israel has wide implications for all mankind. Wealth and prosperity can never be regarded as a natural right. They are the gift of God. Since the majority of people in the world lack wealth, those who are wealthy need to beware lest pride in their own achievements possess them and bring about their ruin.

Another passage used to advocate a wealth theology is Isaiah 45:3, “I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.” Here it is said that God promised to give hidden treasures or wealth to the church, when in reality this passage is a prophetic word spoken to Cyrus who as a heathen king showed great mercy and kindness towards Israel in various ways. For example, he allowed them to rebuild the temple, restored the temple vessels, which were looted by Nebuchadnezzar and funded the importation of cedars. This prophecy is specifically to Cyrus and was fulfilled when he conquered various nations and

carried away their hidden treasures, including that of Babylon (Jer. 50:37; 51:13). Jamieson et al (1997) commented concerning the treasures promised,

“[T]reasures of darkness—that is, hidden in subterranean places; a common Oriental practice. Sorcerers pretended to be able to show where such treasures were to be found; in opposition to their pretensions, God says, He will really give hidden treasures to Cyrus (Je 50:37; 51:13). Pliny...says that Cyrus obtained from the conquest of Asia thirty-four thousand pounds weight of gold, besides golden vases, and five hundred thousand talents of silver, and the goblet of Semiramis, weighing fifteen talents.

Above all, this prophecy is Messianic (Is. 45:1; see Is. 44:28) but it does not promise wealth to Christians in the here and now.

The examples of the patriarchs are often used to justify the prosperity doctrine. That is, because God blessed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon and Job with wealth believers today are also entitled to live such lives. However, they fail to take into consideration that there were numbers of biological Israelites who never experienced any material wealth, although they were children of the covenant. Throughout the OT, we see God reminding the Israelites to care for the poor (Deut. 15:11). The Law which God gave through Moses had numerous places which addressed how the poor were to be cared for (Lev. 19:10; 25:25,35). This care was not to turn the poor into multi-millionaires but to give them hope that they would be able to gather sufficient food to feed themselves and their families and also have seed for the next sowing season so that they might be able to produce food for themselves. Even the sacrificial system was given in such a way as to accommodate for the poor (Lev. 7:5). We even see the mother of Christ giving the sacrifice of a poor person (Luke 2:22-24). But PT advocates ignore such aspects and want to deal only with examples that appear to be grandiose and are by nature anomalies of life.

Admittedly, these passages (Gen. 13:2; Deut. 18:8; Is. 45:3) by themselves could be read to advocate material prosperity (Carson 1989:99), however, as one reads the OT it is difficult to ignore the fact that there were many poor people, even those who lived righteously. Moreover, although Jews related material blessings to the presence of God, it is nowhere evident in the OT that all righteous people

received great wealth. Instead we are told that many righteous people were persecuted (Matt. 5:12; cf. I Ki. 18:4,13; 19:2,19:10-14; 21:20; 22:8,26-27; II Ki. 1:9; Neh. 9:26; Jer. 2:30; 26:8,26:21-23) for their faith and that circumstances were not necessarily favourable to them. This does not imply that there were no people whom God prospered materially in the OT (that is self-evident), but it is also evident from Scripture that material prosperity was not the universal status of all who served God.

4.3.2. *New Testament texts*

Considering the nature of the NT one might actually think that there would not be any passage that justifies a life of material wealth, in the way that the OT describes for specific individuals. But PT advocates, find prosperity in seemingly impossible passages. The prosperity message in the NT is primarily rooted in the understanding of the atoning work of Christ. That is, the redemptive work of Christ was not only to redeem mankind from sin but also from economic suffering or poverty. Oyedepo does not mince his words when he uses II Corinthians 8:9 to say “Redemption is a cure for poverty, as it gives you access to the cure for poverty. When you were saved, you were redeemed from the plague of poverty, because your Father is very wealthy” (2007:74).

Goroh in his book denies that suffering might come from God and sees suffering as simply the work of the devil. He does not define what kind of suffering he is referring to and his wording is ambiguous but from the context of the book, he seems to mean that whatever is not good is not from God, for God only gives good gifts to his children. He argues, “Jesus suffered so that we do not have to suffer” (2009:19). Surely, this is true as far as salvation is concerned. No one will have to pay for his or her own sins anymore because they can find justification with God by trusting in the finished work of Christ. However, it is an error of understanding to say that because Christ suffered on the cross that the believer does not have to suffer in this life. This sort of hermeneutics denies the reality of our daily lives which are filled with suffering of one sort or another. How much more suffering should we also expect as we follow Christ?

There is a general misunderstanding and misapplication of Christ’s work on the cross. Instead of seeing the beauty of the suffering of Christ, which was meant to

redeem mankind from sin, PT advocates have turned this into a platform for advocating their own economic agendas. For example, Oyedepo uses Gal. 3:13-14 to say that “You must be redeemed by Christ in order to connect with the prosperity delivered to Abraham” (2007:193). What exactly does he imply? In simple words “Salvation is the gateway to a world of covenant abundance” (2007:194). That is, once you are saved, you are guaranteed wealth. But is this true for the majority of the Christians in the world? Is it true for the majority of the members in Oyedepo’s mega-church? Should we begin to cast doubt on the validity of the salvation of those who claimed to be saved but are also poor?

None of the passages used by PT advocates in either testament advocates a theology of wealth for the believer. Although some do address issues of material wealth, they were not meant to be universal promises. While this is perhaps a good attempt to claim biblical promises, they do so by appealing to wrong passages. We have no passage in the New Covenant (NC) promising us material wealth because of our faith in Christ and where we will see such believers – it is an anomaly. The reality of economic shortcoming amongst believers cannot be swept under the carpet by appealing to passages of Scripture, which instead of addressing the issue of poverty are downplaying it and thus rob us of how we could be of a great blessing to the poor amongst us.

Irresponsible hermeneutics overlook the reality of poverty and use the Bible to make it sound as if it does not exist or downplay its reality by appealing to false accusation such as “poverty exists because people are ignorant of certain principles of faith” or because they have not yet understood God’s Word in context. It is at best an escapist attitude from reality, especially when the concept of positive confession comes into play. Moreover, this escapism frees PT advocates from having to face the harsh realities of dealing with the problem of poverty.

4.4. Prosperity teaching and the plight of poverty

What practical solutions does PT offer to the plight of poverty in Namibia? This is a difficult question, as PT does not have a unified objective concerning the plight of poverty. This could be because it is a system that borrows from many sources, such that it has not been clearly thought through how to fight poverty

strategically and practically. Moreover, its theologians have not explored various biblical views on the subject of poverty in order to make a well thought out advance in addressing it. PT derives many characteristics from liberation theology especially the reactionary spirit. The latter has undergone formal theological formation and has therefore been able to be accepted by many in mainstream churches in Namibia. However, PT is much more of a theology of comradeship rather than a scholarly system. Its ideologies are derived from the conclusions of those who have been influenced by people like Hagin and Copeland.

We noted earlier that PT is the product of an over-realised eschatological emphasis. This ultra-optimism does not seem to serve any positive purpose but could be the cause of why PT fails to address the problem of poverty seriously from Scripture. While they do attempt to teach and motivate people to begin small-scale projects – many of these practical attempts are overshadowed by their unrealistic optimism. For example, certain churches motivate their people to become millionaires in a specified short period. For example, Goroh (2009) writes about one's needs being met at a time of great struggle such as the current rising global economic crunch. At the conclusion of one of his chapters he gives a quasi-magic-confession "right now I speak your [God's] supernatural touch over these needs. I receive a miracle right now. I command every need met: I command every negative situation to turn in my favour" (2009:82). Similarly, Oyedepo motivates his readers to believe that their spiritual position in Christ warrants a life of comfort. Although he motivates people to engage in business or other forms of exchanging services (2007:99-102), these business engagement ideas are overshadowed by the statements of miraculous breakthroughs that will come simply because one is a Christian. He writes, "[T]he Bible says Jesus has raised you up, and made you sit together with Him in heavenly places. As an ambassador of heaven here on earth, you are to enjoy heavenly supplies and provisions, thereby, granting you immunity from lack and want" (Oyedepo 2007:40).

This is not to dismiss the positive activities carried out by PT when it is advocated that churches do things such as, building of universities, helping pay tuitions fees, buying school uniforms, providing meals and housing to disadvantaged people. However, there is a need for more tangible measures to assist the poor apart

from giving them hand-outs which are occasional or poorly administered. People like TB Joshua seem to go out of his way to really provide tangible means in helping the poor, for good works he should be commended and so also for all who are providing substantial assistance in alleviating poverty. Because poverty is a reality the poor experience everyday of their lives, optimism alone (as done by many in the Namibian context) will not help nor can it help change their situation. The sort of optimism PT offers to address the issue of poverty is fundamentally based on reductionist principles. That is, they suggest several principles upon which if practiced will result in wealth or actuate people from poverty into wealth. These principles come in various forms:

Creflo Dollars' (1999) in his book *Total Life Prosperity* suggests fourteen principles which he believes if adhered to one will attain (economic) prosperity. They are: 1) ensure that the Lord is with you; 2) know God's ways and how He operates; 3) renew your mind with the word of God; 4) release words with your mouth; 5) meditate upon the word; 6) begin the process of seedtime and harvest; 8) stay consistent and committed; 9) recognize the difference between multiplied seed and harvest; 10) act as if it's so; 11) obey God's word; believe and trust in your man of God; 12) diligently seek and practice the presence of God; 13) quickly repent when necessary and; 14) learn how to intercede.

Joel Osteen (2004) in his famous best-selling book *Your Best Life Now* suggests seven principles or steps which he believes that will catapult people's lives from zero to hero including their economic status. The steps are: 1) enlarge your vision; 2) develop a healthy self-esteem; 3) discover the power of your thoughts and words; 4) let go of the past; 5) find strength through adversity; 6) live to give; 7) choose to be happy.

The above two examples are perhaps remote from Namibia but are influential through the television and radio media which broadcasts the teachings of Dollar and Osteen. Goroh (2009) who is based in Namibia writes suggesting the following steps as principles if acted upon will cultivate a victorious life especially of economic abundance: 1) knowledge of what God's word has to say about your wealth as a believer (pp. 21-24); 2) right positioning; 3) making God number one; 4) trust God

instead of man (pp. 41-50); 5) Giving (pp.53-60); 6) faith (pp. 61-70); 7) take God at His word; 8) right confession (pp. 93-110).

These principles of faith as they are called are not helpful in practically addressing the plight to poverty. Instead, they play on people's emotions and make them feel good as if the way out of poverty is simply a matter of keeping to the prescribed steps. These steps in reality increase the burden of worry for PT followers such that if one of them fails to attain the said results they are to blame for not keeping "faithfully" to these prescriptions. This is because poverty "has many dimensions encompassing income/expenditure/consumption, low human development, social exclusion, ill being, lack of capacity and function, relative deprivation, vulnerability, including uncertain livelihoods and lack of means to meet the basic needs" (NPC 2007:8). Considering the complex nature of poverty, the strategies applied to alleviate it need to be biblically sound, practical and realistic.

In their attempt to alleviate poverty through the prescription of certain principles, they might actually contribute to the furthering of poverty in the lives of their poor members and cause serious untold harm. This furthering of poverty and harm can be seen in at least three ways:

(1) Psychological

PT creates two classes of Christians – those with sufficient faith and those with little or no faith. The first class reaps the benefits of God's promises of wealth the second class remains in poverty because of their faithlessness. As a result of this dichotomy the second group often ends up deeply disappointed with the blame of why they are not prospering. Moreover, they are overtaken by feelings of failure and guilt for not succeeding because the preacher has assured them that these principles ought to work for everyone (Avanzine 1987; cf. Dollar 1999; Osteen 2004). The idea behind it is that if these principles are not working for them then they must have done something wrong. These sorts of psychological messages often lead to despair (Williams 2001:221). Moreover, it demotivates people who are sincerely and eagerly working towards escaping the grip of poverty. If they are spiritually unacceptable to God and their faith is insufficient, why should they continue trying?

These people tend to see themselves as second class Christians and perhaps not even Christians at all.

(2) Material loss

PT teaches that with sufficient faith one can have whatever you desire. In fact the desire is already present, therefore to activate whatever it is that you need, one must demonstrate it through sowing financial seeds. The failure to sow these seeds would be considered to be great unbelief and the blessings will be withheld. Since there are promises of receiving a hundred-fold for one's giving, the natural drive of people for riches makes them give excessively. Even to the extent of obtaining bank loans with the expectation of reaping bumper financial harvests. When the desired or expected financial harvests do not come, people end up very disappointed having accrued extra debts in the process or having lost large amounts of money sometimes even leading to bankruptcy (Williams 2001:222).

It is sad that PT encourages its poor followers to sow financial seeds, which they cannot afford. Where they are able to access finances, it is often not enough for sustaining themselves and their families, but PT would say "anytime you have a need, then you need a seed. Where there is no seed; no need will be met" (Goroh 2009:55; cf. Avanzini 1989:83-94; Copeland 1999:57-86; Dollar 1999:63-69). By so doing it is taking from the poor, even the very little they have to try to meet their most basic needs.

Surely there is no excuse as to why the poor should not give or share what they have with those who are less fortunate nor are they exempted from showing gratitude to God for His gifts to them. However, to employ principles of giving that exploits the poor is going against the warning of Scripture "do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart" (Zec. 7:10). That is, instead of promoting justice and mercy they use the Bible to further oppression and take from the poor.

(3) Spiritual

The greatest damage this theology has caused is that of people losing their faith because of these disappointments. People do not just lose trust in the teachings

of PT but lose their faith in the God of the Bible altogether. “It goes without saying that this is a very serious matter and gives the proponents of this a lot to answer for” (Williams 2001:222). Numerous people, both Christians and non-Christians, have been so disappointed by the practices of PT that they now think it is God that has disappointed them.

The above issues also raise serious moral concerns against PT advocates and its practices stand opposed to biblical standards of justice, love and mercy.

4.5. Theological Examination

Having looked at various aspects in the previous pages it seems clear that PT owes its growth to an element of biblical truth, however, it has systematically distorted this truth and gone astray. Its reaction against the extreme theology of poverty which equated poverty with godliness, has led it to fall into the other extreme of a Faustian covenant, embellished with insatiable materialism and consumerism (Boesak, Weusmann and Amjad-Ali 2010:46) that characterises the Western materialism and African traditional beliefs. With the pendulum swinging off balance and crossing the biblical stipulations on issues of wealth and poverty, PT could rightly be termed a heresy (Williams 2001:225). Moreover, there are serious ethical issues that arise as this teaching defies “God’s covenant by excluding the poor [and] the vulnerable” (Boesak et al 2010:43) from experiencing the true meaning of the fullness of life. For if it were true that God’s will for the believer is wealth and health, where does this leave the poor believer? On this logic, the poor should then not be called Christians because they are evidently not living in the will of God.

Yet, in spite of obvious theological, biblical and ethical dangers PT poses, its advocates continue to think of anyone who opposes their theology as being pro-poverty. This refusal to listen to criticism, regardless of how biblically sound it may be, has led to them labelling their critics as those who believe that God desires poverty, sickness and suffering for the believer. These conclusions may hold some truth in the case of those who advocate a theology of poverty as a sign of godliness. However, this label is not true of the majority of those who oppose PT. For example, many who oppose PT are in no way pro-poverty (Carson 1996^b; Chacko 2010;

Chilongani 2007; Piper 2007), instead they have great concern for the poor and are doing their utmost to assist the poor.

Acknowledging that there are some positive elements within PT, does not exempt us from providing a critical theological examination of its practices. While certain sociologists of religion have come to see PT as a relevant approach in fighting poverty and bringing development (Southall and Rule 2008, do so on a simplistic understanding of good works). They fail to see that the good works of any movement that claims to be Christian needs to be established on correct theology. There are three things which needs to be addressed in this section:

4.5.1. The unbiblical nature of PT

Although we have noted that PT appeals to Scripture, one cannot overlook the reality of its systematic destructive methods, which appear to have little regard for Scripture. First, PT is unbiblical in that it claims that Christianity is a religion that ought to improve one's economic standards. This claim ignores the reality of the suffering that the majority of Christians around the world are faced with and it is not practically helpful in the cause of helping the poor both in the church and outside the church.

Secondly, PT fails to differentiate God's covenant with Israel that entailed some material blessings and the NC, which entails spiritual blessings and makes no specific promises of material blessing. Even in the Old Covenant (OC), the material blessings were not given to every individual and the OT is full of passages revealing to us that there were many poor people amongst the physical descendants of Abraham (see Ex. 23:1-6).

... [T]he very narrowing of the essence of Christianity to living a life of unlimited material abundance and physical wellbeing is a serious distortion of the Biblical message. [True] ... Christian theology requires that Bible passages be treated ... with [a] clear appeal to the entire canon of God's revelation and not merely a citation of favourite portions. Prosperity preachers not only tend towards reading and interpreting Bible passages without a focus on context but also introduce several dangerous assumptions in their approach to the Scriptures, consciously or unconsciously (Kigame 2010).

Thirdly, PT is a this-worldly theology, which encourages its members to be this-world focused and have a very low view of the afterlife (for a number of them heaven it is just a translation into a higher degree of prosperity). This kind of theologising misses the point of Christianity. A Christianity that has little to do with eternity or minimises its importance cannot be called Christianity in the biblical sense of the word. While many of its proponents use Christian and biblical lingo to advocate their theology they sadly give the impression that godliness is a means of gain (I Tim. 6:5). “Too many prosperity preachers not only give the impression that they ‘peddle God’s word’ and make ‘godliness a means of gain’ but actually develop a bogus theology to justify their extravagant displays of wealth (Piper 2010:30).

Fourthly, PT at its best only benefits those who teach it. The congregants, especially the poor are not assisted in any meaningful way, instead they are told to serve their leaders with the little they have in the hope that their own lives will improve. Yet in the final analysis, the lives of the poor do not improve.

4.5.2. Trivialising human suffering

It should be accepted that PT advocates acknowledge the reality of suffering, however, acknowledging the presence of suffering is rendered obsolete if unhelpful answers are provided that rely on quasi-magical-faith, positive confession, and sacrificial giving to escape poverty or suffering in general. Considering the Namibian context in which poverty is high even in churches, it is important to acknowledge the reality of people’s economic sufferings and provide a thorough and well-thought out theological response. Moreover, with proper theological structures in place ways of caring for the poor in their midst can be worked on that do not drive them further into the grip of poverty.

The issue that keeps coming up is the use of the Bible in PT. Probably the worse form of trivialising human suffering is that which happens when the Bible is used to foster ideas, which will in the end destroy people’s trust in God. Various passages are used to promote the idea of prosperity which in fact do not support it, for example, III John 2; II Pet. 1:3; Is. 53:5; Luke 6:38. None of these verses promises that God will make us rich and prosperous in this world, yet they are some of the key passages used to advocate PT. When people take the passages to mean

what the PT teachers say they mean, the chances of them facing disappointment increase. This theology dashes the hopes of people and fails to offer real answers to the issue of poverty.

Propagating a theology that taunts the poor is inhuman and unchristian. The prescribed principles of PT, which are said to catapult the followers into wealth, are making light of the condition of the poor who work hard at keeping up with those principles but achieve nothing in the end, except disappointment and further suffering.

4.5.3. *A drift towards materialism*

There is nothing wrong with having material things in this world and we find no biblical encouragement to must become ascetical as Christians to the extent that we demonise wealth. Extreme asceticism leads to irrelevance to the world in which we live. The other extreme is PT's strong emphasis on materialism which encourages its members to accumulate as much as they can to prove God's goodness. This encouragement has made many people see Christianity as a means of obtaining the best of things this life has to offer. PT advocates encourage their followers to pursue the best cars, houses, clothes, food etc. This goes beyond addressing the problem of poverty, it paints an ideology of greed rather than need. PT advocates, like the modern materialists, fail to warn their members to crossing the line between "God help me," and "God make me rich," instead, they advocate materialism as if this line does not exist (Piper 2010:24).

What is it about Christians that makes them the salt of the earth and the light of the world? It is not wealth. The desire for wealth and the pursuit of wealth tastes and looks just like the world. Desiring to be rich makes us *like* the world, not different. At the very point where we should taste different, we have the same bland covetousness that the world has. In that case, we don't offer the world anything different from what it already believes in.

The great tragedy of prosperity preaching is that a person does not have to be spiritually awakened in order to embrace it; one needs only to be greedy. Getting rich in the name of Jesus is not the salt of the earth or the light of the world. In this, the world simply sees a reflection of itself. And if they are 'converted' to this, they have not been truly converted but only put a new name on an old life (Piper 2010:24-25).

When the line of need has been crossed and the emphasis becomes that of greed, those involved have failed the biblical command of helping the poor. First, it deprives them of contentment and secondly it corrupts Christian standards of living. The greatest concern that comes with this emphasis on material accumulation is spiritual. Instead of pursuing after Christ and finding satisfaction in Him, He is reduced or made less satisfying than material gain, therefore they see Him simply as a Giver of gifts (wealth). Moreover, this kind of motivation makes Christ simply a means of gaining wealth, health and prosperity. It also mocks Christians who seek after Christ as the one who satisfies their souls “even when there is no health, wealth and prosperity” (Piper 2010:31).

This theology overlooks all the warnings Jesus gives concerning riches and instead of doing the same, it encourages people to pursue riches. That is, it is encouraging people to pursue destructive habits (Luke 8:14; I Tim. 6:9-10). As John Wesley wrote,

Riches, either desired or possessed, naturally lead to some or other of these foolish and hurtful desires; and by affording the means of gratifying them all, naturally tend to increase them. And there is a near connection between unholy desires and every other unholy passion and temper. We easily pass from these to pride, anger, bitterness, envy, malice, revengefulness; to a headstrong, unadvisable, unreprouvable spirit – indeed to every temper that is earthly, sensual or devilish. All these, the desire or possession of riches naturally tends to create, strengthen and increase (quoted by Withrow 2007:31).

4.6. Brief summary on biblical prosperity

It is worth mentioning that this research does not say that prosperity is evil and needs to be shunned. The general outline reflected in the previous sections affirms that the desire to offer help to the poor is in itself a concept that favours prosperity. Therefore, it is only fair to provide a brief discussion on what biblical prosperity is, as opposed to the prosperity theology advocated by a number of neo-Charismatic and Pentecostal churches in Namibia. It needs to be clear that when someone speaks of prosperity, it would be misleading to conclude that they are automatically promoting the erroneous teaching of tele-evangelists and other PT advocates. It is possible to speak on the subject of prosperity in a biblically appropriate and God honouring way without being heretical.

The fact that a number of evangelicals oppose PT does not mean they believe that Christianity is a call to poverty and unnecessary suffering. Instead, Scripture neither makes poverty a virtue nor does it promise wealth to every Christian. The Bible gives us examples of people who were wealthy (Abraham, David, Solomon, Job) and those who were poor (Jesus, Zechariah, John (the Baptist), Mary) to prove this point. Think of Solomon who was very wealthy and did not have to work hard for his wealth but Paul who had to make tents for a living.

Moreover, Christians are not entitled to wealth in this world as if it were a right, instead wealth is a blessing from God to be accepted with gratitude and humility. The fact that wealth is a gift from God means: 1) we are to share these blessings with fellow believers and also unbelievers who do not have; 2) we are not to set our hearts upon them and forget the Giver. Surely, Scripture does not condemn wealth as being ungodly and sinful but the NT seems to have a strong warning about the dangers of wealth (Matt. 13:22; Mark 10:23; Luke 18:24-25; I Tim. 6:9-10). A materialistic world teaches that wealth is to be sought after but the NT teaches that true prosperity is not having material possession but spiritual wellbeing (Js. 1:9-10). Jesus did not condemn material prosperity yet strongly warned against its dangers and how it can take possession of one's soul (Luke 12:15).

What makes this [prosperity] gospel particularly dangerous is its propensity to claim innocence of any motive other than fulfilling God's will for human beings. All people have opportunities to make life better and the only reason some people remain poor is because they do not exert enough effort to promote their own success. They are considered lazy, ineffectual or misdirected and, therefore, *unblessed*.

The temptation that presents itself even through the church for power and wealth is not one overcome easily in the United States or in Two-Thirds World countries. The fact remains that the gap continues to widen between the rich and the poor ...

In this state of growing economic disparity based on an ethic of prosperity the church is called to redefine success in light of the Gospel message that commands love of God and love of neighbor as one would love self. In the twenty-first century, the vast majority of neighbors are living in poverty. [Only biblical] ... ethics provide insight for the church's necessary challenge to the prosperity gospel and notions of success (Withrow 2007:28)

PT advocates should not be discouraged from teaching that people can obtain better living standards. On the contrary, they should be warned to watch out for the dangers of wealth and warn the people against them. They should be admonished to search the Scriptures and apply them correctly if they are going to provide helpful counsel regarding the plight of poverty. They should encourage people to desire more of God rather than seeking material things and using God as a means to their economic ends. Scripture is full of prosperity but that prosperity as we will see in the concluding chapter will not be fully realised in this world. Thus, we may experience only glimpses of prosperity by seeing a handful of Christians prospering materially but material prosperity is not a universal promise to those who follow Christ. The statement of Christ, “[f]or the poor you always have with you...” (John 12:28; cf. Deut. 15:11), is a fact the Christian church will have to live with on earth. However, the statement of Christ is not a call to be unresponsive to the quandary of poverty. Scripture gives us examples of how believers fought poverty in the early church such that “[t]here was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:34). Instead of promoting numerous principles about how to be wealthy, the church has a moral duty to care for its poor in practical and meaningful ways. Our challenge lies in the outworking of these practical ways. That is, while many Christians agree that we have a moral duty towards the poor, the practical outworking or the methods that should be used have not been agreed upon.

4.7. Summary

This chapter has examined the theological content of PT and there is no denial that PT owes a great part of its existence to Christian theology. It is clear that PT engages Scripture to advocate its ideologies. We have examined the various passages of the Bible used to advocate the idea of material prosperity in the here and now and we have looked at the hermeneutical principles used to advocate this theology. While it appears to be positive in that it appeals to Scripture, PT poses a serious and dangerous problem because its advocates employ a selective approach to Scripture to push certain ideas, even though it does an injustice to the overall context of the Bible. This careless handling and application of Scripture raises serious questions about the biblical authenticity of the movement. Various Bible researchers and scholars have concluded that the teaching itself is a mixture of

Christian theology and ideologies of metaphysical cults, such that it should be described as a heresy (Carson 1996; Horton 2008; McConnell 1995; Williamson 2001).

We have also noted that although PT may at times portray a great concern for the poor, it actually does very little to really help the poor. Moreover, because of its presupposition that individual wealth comes by sacrificial giving, it takes advantage of the poor by asking them to give away that which they do not have. They give the little they have with the hope that they will receive back their money in multiples of thirties, seventies and hundreds. This kind of philosophy is a furthering of oppression and pushes people further down the grid of poverty. An unchristian practice. PT may be a platform to motivate people to a better life but because of the high demands it places upon its followers, it actually discourages people who follow it, especially if the promised outcomes do not materialise.

This leads us to various reasons why PT is not a helpful means of addressing the plight of poverty experienced by Christians within the church. While the idea of prosperity is not altogether rejected, the kind of prosperity advocated by PT calls us to reject it. But if we do reject PT, what biblical measures can be set in place to address the issue of poverty? Since PT, is not helpful, although it may spark serious concern for the problem of poverty, how can Christians engage meaningfully in the fight of poverty without sacrificing the truth of Scripture?

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. Overview

Realistically, PT has failed to live up to its claims and does not seem to have tangible solutions to the problem of poverty. The majority of its members, who follow it because of the benefits it promises, continue to be amongst the poorest of our society. Even after nearly two decades in Namibia, PT has done little to substantively improve the lifestyles of its poor. Secondly, PT fails the theological test as those who advocate it practice poor biblical scholarship and make false claims. Because of their persistence in this error and unwillingness to repent PT is heretical. Considering the dynamic nature of PT, I suggest that further studies and discussions in the Namibian context be continued, as there is much ground to cover on the subject. I therefore hope that this project will serve as groundwork for future research work. However, my analysis and critique has indicated that PT is not a helpful theology for the poor it claims to be reaching. It has blinded its adherents to the truth of Scripture such that people hold to views that are unbiblical with the hope of bringing wealth. It teaches a false theology of bliss in this world and that the Christian is entitled to be rich, healthy and happy. It is a cruel theology for committed Christians who live in poverty because it attributes their circumstances to a lack of faith. Conversely it is an arrogant and self-congratulatory theology for the rich as it makes a mockery out of the less prosperous ones (Doss 2011:152).

Although PT has some relevant aspects which we can all learn from such as, evangelism, church growth and seeking for better living standards, it fails in its biblical application of these areas. Thus, its positive aspects are overshadowed by faulty hermeneutics, preying on the destitute of their communities and unethical

conduct (Lioy 2007:60). It is also overly-simplistic in that it advocates quasi-magical-methods such as positive confession, seed-sowing and unbiblical faith in addressing the plight of poverty. Because PT is generally unrealistic in dealing with the issue of poverty, I have the following recommendations to make so that the church and individual Christians can engage with the issue of poverty without turning to PT's ideologies.

5.2. Practical recommendations for helping the poor

“Every generation of Christians looks to the Bible for answers to questions as to how they ought to live [within their given generation]” (Harries 2008:4). Thus, it is the responsibility of the church in each cultural and historical setting to interpret and apply the Scriptures to its own context (Doss 2011:148) “through the guidance of God the Holy Spirit” (Harries 2008:4). This is because we want to do the will of God. However, it is not an easy exercise as many things are grey rather than being black and white. For example, the practical ways in which we help the poor is one of those areas that are difficult to agree upon as Christians. As we attempt to work in practical ways, one could easily point to the works of Jesus feeding the poor but this does not mean that the issue is then settled because “[t]he practice of Jesus himself could support diverse positions in this regard. How did he respond to people whom he met?” (Harries 2008:4).

As we think of the issue of poverty, how did Jesus attend to the poor? We read Him feeding the five-thousand and four-thousand (Matt. 14:21; 15:38) miraculously because they had followed Him all day long. Should we then conclude from these examples that Jesus was teaching us to feed the poor and hungry amongst us? I do not think that this application is right, for we are not told of Jesus running hunger and poverty alleviations programmes for the poor in Israel. Or should we also deduce that since Jesus healed the sick, opened blind eyes, raised the dead, walked on water and calmed storms then these things should be common in the believer's life? We know that miracles do not happen often in the lives of believers, and therefore we cannot take the feeding of the five-thousand and four-thousand as a standard for attending to the needs of the poor. Anyone dedicated to the faithful study of God's will notice that Jesus' miracles of feeding the hungry was

not meant to be a normal order of addressing the needs of the poor and needy in the church and the world in general.

As we study the OT, it tells us in various places of God's concern for the poor (see Lev. 19:10,15; 23:22; 25:25, 35, 39, 47-48; Deut. 10:18; 14:28-29; 15:4,7,9,11; 24:14,17,19-21; 27:19). I believe that His concern for the poor in the NT has not changed. God had clearly instructed the Israelites to care for the poor (widows, orphans, strangers etc) amongst them. Therefore, I believe, that as Christians we should be concerned for the poor in general but specifically for the Christians (Gal. 6:10; I Tim. 5:18-19). Moreover, it is specifically for the Christians not because we do not care for the world outside the church but simply because our charity should begin amongst ourselves before we can extend it to the outside world. Scripture tells us that we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ, "[b]y this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him" (I John 3:16-19).

Considering the passage above, it is then important to state that the Christian community's primary responsibility in providing aid should be towards fellow Christians – primarily those in the local church. It is when our priorities are misplaced that the church neglects its own poor in the name of winning the poor outside of the church. While I do not question God's sovereignty in saving people through the exercise of such acts of mercy, we should not prioritise it above our own poor and needy within the church. Moreover, God's means of growing His church is not through charity programmes but through the preaching of the gospel (Acts 2:41; 4:4). In addition, where we exercise acts of mercy, it should not be to lure people into the Christian faith but simply because we are concerned for the poor as those who are also created in the image of God.

To address the issue of poverty in the church I suggest that there be programmes in place to address the immediate and long-term needs of the poor in our own churches and better ways to equip them to fight their own poverty. The

inward focus which is geared towards the poor Christians within the church is something I believe needs to be grounded in NT church practice. First, although the church of Jerusalem had different motivations for having one pool of resources, I believe that one of the reasons was that no one amongst them was to be in want (Acts 4:34^a). Secondly, when the church in Jerusalem through persecution became poor, it was the responsibility of the apostles (Paul and Barnabas at least) to solicit resources to help the poor (Gal. 2:10), it was such an important thing that Paul would halt his evangelistic plans just to bring aid to the believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-28). Thirdly, although we are encouraged to be of help to all men, the biblical preference is upon our fellow believers, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and *especially to those who are of the household of faith*” (Gal. 6:10). This is because our fellow believers are brethren of the same household and for us to jump their needs in order to meet that of an outsider is unbiblical (Gen. 30:30; II Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:16). Fourthly, there is no definite biblical command to run fully-fledged mercy ministries for the unbelievers, instead it seems clear that we have an obligation to care for fellow believers who are poor (I John 3:16-19) and the unbelievers would become secondary beneficiaries.

5.2.1. Preach the gospel realistically and applicably

As we consider ways to combat poverty it is important to realise that “[t]he battle against hunger and poverty is really a spiritual battle, not a physical or social one as secularists would have us believe” (Yohannan 2003:28). Therefore, as Christians we should not forget that humanity’s greatest need is not economic empowerment but Jesus Christ. If man’s life will ever be affected in a profound way it is important to address his true need.

I have hope that there is a biblical and effective way for the Church to serve the poor. I want you to have that hope as well. As Christians, we don’t have the option to ignore true poverty, and we must not waste our time and resources on approaches that ignore the pervasive presence of sin in every heart (Armstrong 2011:13).

The gospel is powerful enough to bring some form of prosperity and “social change” (Yohannan 2003:112). How? First, the gospel corrects man’s relationship with God. Secondly, it teaches ethics which may lead to prosperity, for example,

honest work is encouraged and theft condemned (Eph. 4:28; I Thess. 4:11), and laziness is condemned and honest work is encouraged (II Thess. 3:10-12; cf. Gen. 1:26; 2:15-16). It is therefore important that our discipleship courses amongst people who are economically marginalised, need address issues of poverty and wealth. A number of conservative evangelicals are guilty of neglecting the felt needs of people in the proclamation of the gospel by simply focusing on the future life.

There is no dispute concerning the future life of heaven, both Jesus and the apostles spoke about it. However, we are not yet there and as we patiently wait for the dawning of the New Jerusalem, there is need to preach the gospel in such a way that we address the things facing us on this side of eternity. In our making of disciples there is a need for us to also address the issue of poverty, its causes and practical solutions. For example, we need to address one of the root causes of poverty in Namibia – laziness. Some Namibians despise small-scale income activities and many are aiming to hold office jobs even though they are not qualified for these roles. There are many young (mature) people who are Christians who stay at home doing nothing that is economically productive and live off other people such as their parents, older siblings or extended relatives. These young people should not only be taught to grow in their knowledge of God and mature spiritually also but need to be reminded of the reality of the present world, that they need to work in order to eat (II Thess. 3:11). This will instil in them a sense of accountability to God and the entire Christian community and motivate them to take the responsibility of becoming economically productive citizens through hard work rather than being lazy (Kunhiyop 2008:157-158). The apostles worked with their own hands too, to make a living. Their jobs were not necessarily the most envied but they set an example for the believers of all ages to follow (Acts 18:3; I Thess. 2:9; II Thess. 3:6-9).

Thus, the gospel which challenges our spiritual lives should also be employed to challenge and address the underlying attitudes which cause poverty. It should be made clear that laziness is a vice that should never be tolerated in the church of God. The apostle Paul was very hard on lazy believers to the extent that “if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (I Thess. 3:10^c). This should be the guiding principle upon which relief is distributed (see 5.2.2.), so that the church does not run

into meeting artificial necessities and in so doing minister to someone who continues in their slothfulness.

Many people in our churches are not lazy but they are unfairly treated by those who employ them. Those who pay such low wages that people cannot make decent living from them. Part of the church's role for its members is to advocate for fair wages. We are to use the legal means of our labour laws to provide advocacy for fair payment. Many of the poor in our churches do not know what the minimum wages are for their kind of jobs, therefore, with the help of knowledgeable Christians we can explore these areas to speak out for our brethren by directing them to and linking them with the right people who can help with such matters (Kuhinyop 2008:158-159). This may extend in time to Christians also assisting non-Christians who are victims of exploitation by their employers.

Better-focused anti-poverty campaigns and the implementation of superior development strategies are important. But these cannot begin to touch root, the underlying cause of poverty. Ultimately, poverty can only be addressed at the heart level, one person at a time, as salvation through the shed blood of Christ pushes back against the fall of man. The ultimate answer to poverty is circumcised hearts, hearts that know the God who forms and keeps covenant with poor underserving sinners (Armstrong 2011:40).

5.2.2. Establish church-based relief funds

Significant numbers of churches in Africa struggle to have funds but many churches in Namibia are in a better position compared to those in other countries. Having a "relief fund" is not a strange concept to Christianity as this is what Paul practiced in helping the impoverished church of Jerusalem "Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem" (1 Cor. 16:1-3).

The relief fund should serve as a means of attending to emergencies and helping the most needy, those who do not have a way of helping themselves. For example, it could assist in paying for short-term expenses such as medical bills,

funeral arrangements, school fees, food etc. This kind of fund is only a temporary relief and where it is used in cases of assisting someone to get food, it should be made clear that it is temporary and will cease when that person gets a job and they should be encouraged to get a stable job so that they have an income and can sustain themselves. With such funds in place churches can ensure that their most needy are taken care of. This is part of the church's discipleship making. This is not a permanent solution and has its own disadvantages, because it can increase dependency.

5.2.3. Provide community development training

There have been recent positive developments in a number of theological training institutions across Africa in providing community development courses. Seeing that many of our communities are poor and that the majority of our seminary graduates are thrust into these communities to do their pastoral work, it is necessary that they are equipped with knowledge about how to start community development projects. This has several benefits. First, it equips people with skills which they can use in turn to make a living. Secondly, it creates a sense of independence, so that people are able to do something for themselves without needing to depend on others to help them. Thirdly, the people in turn can transfer these skills and this knowledge to other members in their communities who are not Christians.

Seminaries are the "training backbones" of the church and should therefore have community development courses in their curriculums. With this knowledge, people can solicit development aid from government, local businesses and international development aid agencies. "[T]rue development is wider than mere economic growth; it includes [various] dimensions of human experience which are of great concern to Christians" (Stott 1990:131). These community development training projects are ways of teaching people "to fish for themselves" rather than continuously giving them fish. Again, emergency relief is good in its own right but it can also increase dependency and is most likely to make people to remain in poverty whereas development aims to end it (Stott 1990:131). It is also worth mentioning then that overseas Christian donors should desire to fund such programmes

because it will reduce the financial strain of having to send aid to Namibian churches.

5.2.4. Donate to Christian charity organisations

There are various Christian charity organisations in Namibia for example, Baby Haven, Church Alliance for Orphans (CAFO), and Imago Dei which are involved in caring for the needy at various levels. Christians who are financially well off but do not know where they could invest their money can donate to these organisations which provide care for the poor on a larger scale. This giving should not be limited only to those who are rich. Even those who are poor can give from the little they have, following the Macedonian model.

This is a great opportunity to feed and care for the poor on a larger scale outside the local church. And this is where the passage of “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone” (Gal. 6:10) comes into play. These Christian organisations have a wider audience and have strategically identified the needy of the community. Through giving to them we will be fighting poverty on a larger scale. Considering that the poor people in these communities are not European or American, it is the responsibility of the Namibian people to care for their own poor. Above all, since these organisations are not foreign we cannot expect foreign missionary organisations and churches to sustain them to do their work.

If the root of poverty is sin, man-made solutions won't bring [an] end [to] it. Christ will be the one to end poverty, first spiritually and finally materially in the new creation. Therefore, look to [or for] organizations that are committed to the church and are faithfully proclaiming the gospel in word, even as they minister to the physical and relational needs of the poor (Armstrong 2011:81).

5.2.5. Help educate the youth

Education in Africa is a general challenge and although it has increasingly become available across the continent, yet it remains inaccessible to a number of people because of high financial costs involved. Now no church has sufficient funds to educate every young person in its church but by identifying the neediest it can invest in educating some. This is a long-term project but one that will yield great results and which will help many of these young people become self-sustaining as

well as helping their family members. Namibia has a high number of grade 10 and 12 dropouts and many of these youth go to church or belong to a church. For those who are poor their parents cannot afford to pay the tuition costs to rewrite exams but there are several churches in Windhoek that could help dozens of youth to enrol and rewrite their exams. Moreover, there are significant numbers of qualified Christian teachers who can avail themselves in providing academic assistance to the youth.

This is an important aspect that churches need to look into. They need to begin assisting in the education of the young people from their own centres. Some may not want to rewrite their final examinations but may be interested in gaining practical skills. For those who feel this way there are numerous vocational training centres in the country which are not very costly. Churches can help these youths to go to such centres and gain practical “hands on” skills in things such as carpentry, bricklaying, welding, plumbing, motor mechanics etc. Many churches in Namibia can afford to help educate these young people and this is a powerful and lasting long-term investment in the fight against poverty. Considering the wide range of opportunities open to educate the youth the Namibian churches should not hesitate to make such investments.

5.2.6. Social reformation

Edward F. Campbell (2000:1) rightly states that the Bible is a crucial resource that gives insight into the human condition and motivation to deal with the present harsh realities of life and especially issues that concern the poor. Because of this biblical motivation Scripture provides, it would be a contradiction if Christians were to leave the poor to solve their own problems alone. Christians ought to see helping the poor as part of their duty. We are to combat poverty creatively together with the poor in a way that will make the poor want to succeed (Campbell 2000:5).

I wish the church as a whole could engage in reforming society but this is not the mandate of the church. This does not mean that the church is to withdraw from the public arena and leave social issues to human rights activists and politicians. Believers ought to be concerned with poverty in their society and the church’s role is to motivate its members to partake in social reformation activities. This should be done on the basis of the grace of God which we have received in Christ Jesus. In

other words, we must become concerned with the needs of those in our society and seek to rectify the problem of poverty because we have received grace from God.

The grace principle is more powerful in a Christian's life than appealing to OT commands, for example, which were specifically given to Israel for self-governance. While the OT is full of passages related to justice, we cannot escape the fact that this concept of justice was limited to the land of Israel. Only those within the borders of Israel benefitted from it. Therefore, if we want to be engaged in social reformation, we should turn to the NT for answers. The NT provides a much stronger argument for why we ought to be concerned with the needy of all kind as individual believers. The emphasis is on individual believers because we do not see Christ or the early church running poverty alleviation programmes for the unbelieving world. They did not build shelters for the poor or defend them before magistrates etc. However, as individual believers we are admonished to be concerned for the needs of the needy – not out of duty but as an act of mercy.

Therefore, individual Christians should be involved at various levels of society in influencing policy. They are to engage in politics, community leadership, local government, charity programmes so that they can make a wider impact outside of the local church. Some may believe that this would extend the kingdom of God on earth or establish it in some way, but that is an over-stretching of the biblical idea of God's kingdom. Not all political and social activity should be invested with kingdom connotations (Carson 1996^a:410). Others say we should do so for evangelistic purposes. This is a good motivation but is also inadequate, because we run the risk of using material means as bait to attract people to Christ. Yet others say that social involvement is a means of validating the gospel, but this is problematic as it implies that the gospel requires our works of mercy in order to be valid. I believe that Christians should engage in reforming society as an expression of God's grace because all people are created in the image of God.

The suggestions I have provided above are meant to combat the unrealistic suggestions of PT which are in practice not doing much to help the poor come out of their poverty. PT thrives on taking from the poor and raising their expectations

through providing quick-fix methods and pop-psychology, but fails to deal with the issue of poverty practically.

Therefore, to provide a better option than PT there need to be far-reaching and practical measures to address the needs of the poor and get them out of poverty. As Christians reject PT because of its theological bankruptcy and modern materialistic tendencies, we need to come up with practical measures to address the poverty of the poor in our own churches. To address social issues in our society the church must first address the poverty of its own members. Church members come from communities and if they are well equipped, they can become potential catalysts of change within their own communities. In this way, the church can be involved in social action through its individual members, who in turn engage in various social reform programmes.

I am aware that seeking practical means to address the poverty issue does not guarantee a fruitful outcome. Nor are any of these suggestions fail-proof as there could be many factors working against them. Therefore, I leave room for various other practical ways to be suggested which could be adopted to fit specific situations. I am a child of my generation and having lived all my life in urban areas, I do not believe that my suggestions could be equally helpful to those in rural areas where resources are scarcer.

As we think of these practical ways, Armstrong (2011:80-81) gives us practical reminders to keep in mind on the issue of serving the poor:

- 1) Not all Christians are called to serve the poor in the same way or to the same extent.
- 2) You are not called to meet every need.
- 3) Don't allow selfishness to masquerade as humility.
- 4) Look for simple, practical ways to serve.
- 5) Work with experts you can trust.
- 6) Spiritual problems require spiritual solutions.
- 7) Trust God for the results.

5.3. The now but not yet

The issue of poverty may appear to be largely a sociological or economical issue but, we cannot dismiss the reality of its theological dimensions. In its theological nature, the issue of poverty alleviation is eschatological. When theologians speak of poverty they employ a lot of legal language for example, justice and mercy. However, as Christians, we are aware that there will never be absolute justice in this world. Even if we work hard towards the furthering of justice, we will never be able to establish absolute justice. We know that God is at work through various believers who are fighting for justice both for their fellow Christians and for non-Christians. In that sense, we can say that people are experiencing justice now. Through these actions we also see glimpses of material prosperity in some areas of the world.

PT falsely seeks to establish an earthly utopia in which Christians are to live in wealth, health and happiness. Scripture tells us however, that true prosperity will only be experienced in the afterlife (Rev. 7:16; Is. 49:10). While we may see some glimpses of that good life here, we are to wait for the dawning of this truly good and fulfilling life. God in His sovereignty and manifold wisdom has revealed to us glimpses of this life through an exiled and suffering apostle John on the island of Patmos. This is what John wrote, "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him" (Rev. 22:1-3).

Thus, it is only in a state of absolute absence of sin that true prosperity can be manifested, as it was in the Garden of Eden. We await the creation of a place where no sin abides. Therefore, on this side of eternity, living in a fallen world, we are not immune to the painful consequences of the fall, such as disease and poverty. Some Christians may be temporarily relieved from the scorch of poverty but for the great majority, poverty remains as a reminder of the sinfulness of our world and the degree to which it has been affected by the sin of Adam.

Unlike PT that seeks a perfect heavenly manifestation on earth, Scripture does not ignore the reality of human suffering, especially of poverty. Moreover, the Bible is not ashamed to let us know that poverty will not be completely dealt with in this life. This will only happen when Christ returns and establishes His eternal reign over all His enemies (death, sin and Satan). As long as these enemies are still active there will be suffering. Therefore justice is needed but that justice needs to come from the one who is just. John following along the same lines as the OT prophet Isaiah wrote, “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 21:16-17; cf. Is. 49:10).

In the use of these metaphorical expressions, John is telling us the reality of what heaven will be like. First, it is a perfect state in which the saints will be free from want, the sense of want and they would be free from any form of displeasure (persecution, disease, poverty etc). Secondly, it is a state in which God will care, satisfy, protect and meet the believers’ needs. Thirdly, in respect of their former earthly sorrows, He will cause them to forget it all and will eternally keep them from experiencing any sorrow. What makes heaven heavenly is the fact that there will be eternal happiness and freedom from all the evils of this world but above all because we will forever be with Jesus Christ.

There is no way any caring Christian can downplay the reality of the scourge of poverty and when all attempts to lift the burden of poverty has failed, we can only remain hopeful of the promise of God through Jesus Christ of our final redemption. While we wait for Christ to return, we should continue doing our best to fight the presence of poverty, especially amongst our fellow Christian brothers and sisters. Those whom God has blessed should use their various blessings to serve the needy amongst them and extend such generosity even to non-Christian members of their community.

It is ultimately because of Christ that we are motivated to do all that we can do on this side of the Parousia. Nullens writes, “Christ lived and died vicariously, and so his disciples are called to vicarious actions out of responsible love. Through Christ’s

representative actions, a new reality has been created which has now become the life principle of all Christians” (2011:66). Various believers in church history who built hospitals, housed the homeless, developed education and literacy programmes, and fought for the rights of the oppressed were motivated to do such works not simply because society was needy but because of Jesus Christ and His gospel. However, we should not be overly idealistic or optimistic, in thinking that our efforts will usher in the Kingdom of God or prepare Christ’s return. God’s Kingdom is not built by our efforts nor can we cause it to come. It has already come with the first coming of Christ and is presently here but will be fully realised at the return of Christ.

We do not aim or dream of ending poverty in our generation as such an aim will fail to provide a lasting solution to serve the needy. However, we need to be constantly reminded of God’s promise that one day Christ will end all poverty. “We live in the in-between times of God’s reign, a time of war, where there are casualties. God’s will is being done on earth as in heaven, but it is not completed yet. This will end and Jesus will win, but for now the battle rages on...” (Barker 2009:136). The bedrock hope for the poor in our time is in the coming new creation and we should share this hope in all our undertakings. We should therefore do away with all empty promises and earthly wisdom of how to succeed and proclaim the gospel of Christ and that people will trust in Him. In the meantime, we should continue to show mercy and give help to those who desperately need it (Armstrong 2011:78). “Some of his people suffer now, but they ‘shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore....For the Lamb...will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water” (Armstrong 2011:79).

5.4. Further research

This subject has not received adequate academic attention in Namibia – especially amongst evangelical theologians. A great weakness I see in this research is the lack of a practical component and I believe that field study would have created a more engaging account. Moreover, this would have led to a clear and direct dialogue with the churches that advocate PT. Although Bradley Koch (2009) and Robert Mbe Akoko (2007) look at PT from a sociological perspective, their kind of practical work would have added more value to this thesis. I would have loved to have gathered data from those who advocate PT but none were willing to give an

interview. However, I feel that this practical component is vital in providing a concrete perspective. Therefore, I see a need to carry out research on a similar subject in doctoral studies. This would mean thinking through various ways of how one gathers data from subjects to provide a qualitative component. I believe that the subject of prosperity and poverty would benefit a great number of believers and will help clear up confusion about prosperity and ministry to the poor.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: PT POSTERS



Mount Zion Embassy
presents

NIGHT WONDERS

Come and receive power to overcome Nightmares, Bareness, Fear, Marriage problems, Business challenges, Suicide and Death Spirits, Spiritual Husbands and wife experiences, Stress, TB, Diabetes, Heart, Eye, Ear, Kidney problems, Ulcers, Asthma, Cancer, HIV & AIDS

This Friday 30 September 2011

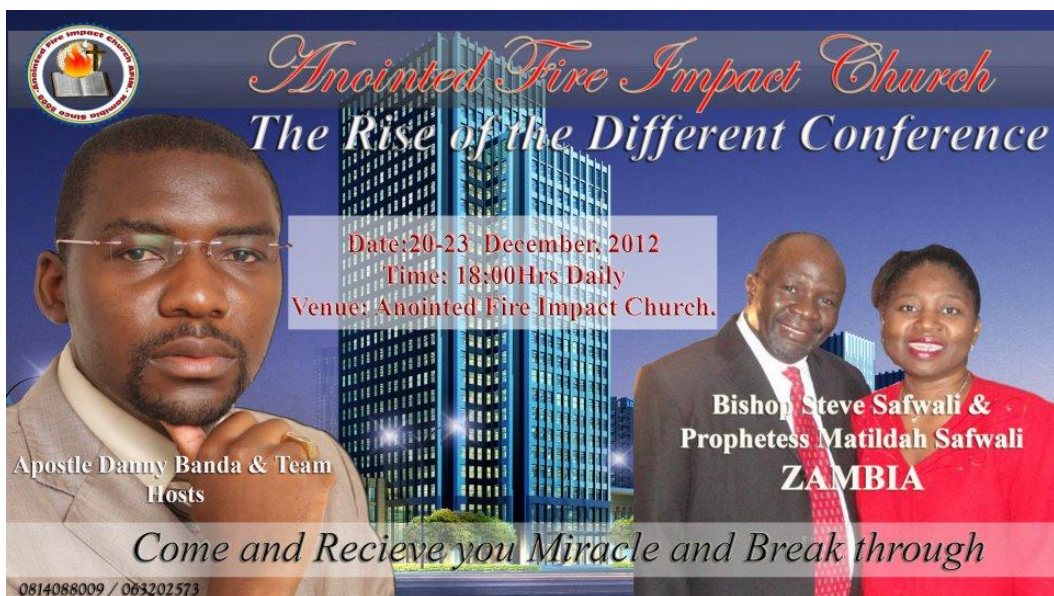
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APPENDIX II: A STATEMENT ON THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

“A STATEMENT ON THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL”

From the Lausanne Theology Working Group, Africa chapter at its consultations in Akropong, Ghana, 8-9 October, 2008 and 1-4 September 2009

Note: This is a statement, offered as a discussion starter for further reflection (theological, ethical, pastoral and missiological, socio-political and economic) on the phenomenal rise of prosperity teaching around the world at large and Africa in particular. The points below are a digest of many points made in the course of the discussion of three papers at the Oct. 2008 and ten papers at the Sept 2009 consultations.

We define prosperity gospel as the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings. We recognize that prosperity teaching is a phenomenon that cuts across denominational barriers. Prosperity teaching can be found in varying degrees in mainstream Protestant, Pentecostal as well as Charismatic Churches. It is the phenomenon of prosperity teaching that is being addressed here not any particular denomination or tradition.

We further recognize that there are some dimensions of prosperity teaching that have roots in the Bible, and we affirm such elements of truth below. We do not wish to be exclusively negative, and we recognize the appalling social realities within which this teaching flourishes and the measure of hope it holds out to desperate people. However, while acknowledging such positive features, it is our overall view

that the teachings of those who most vigorously promote the 'prosperity gospel' are false and gravely distorting of 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 means of eternal salvation. In such dimensions, it can be soberly described as a false gospel.

We call for further reflection on these matters within the Christian Church, and request the Lausanne movement to be willing to make a very clear statement rejecting the excesses of prosperity teaching as incompatible with evangelical biblical Christianity.

1. We affirm the miraculous grace and power of God, and welcome the growth of churches and ministries that demonstrate them and that lead people to exercise expectant faith in the living God and his supernatural power. We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit.

However, we reject as unbiblical the notion that God's miraculous power can be treated as automatic, or at the disposal of human techniques, or manipulated by human words, actions or rituals.

2. We affirm that there is a biblical vision of human prospering, and that the Bible includes material welfare (both health and wealth) within its teaching about the blessing of God. This needs further study and explanation across the whole Bible in both Testaments. We must not dichotomize the material and the spiritual in unbiblical dualism.

However, we reject the unbiblical notion that spiritual welfare can be measured in terms of material welfare, or that wealth is always a sign of God's blessing (since it can be obtained by oppression, deceit or corruption), or that poverty or illness or early death, is always a sign of God's curse, or lack of faith, or human curses (since the Bible explicitly denies that it is always so).

3. We affirm the biblical teaching on the importance of hard work, and the positive use of all the resources that God has given us – abilities, gifts, the earth, education, wisdom, skills, wealth, etc. And to the extent that some Prosperity

teaching encourages these things, it can have a positive effect on people's lives. We do not believe in an unbiblical ascetism that rejects such things, or an unbiblical fatalism that sees poverty as a fate that cannot be fought against.

However, we reject as dangerously contradictory to the sovereign grace of God, the notion that success in life is entirely due to our own striving, wrestling, negotiation, or cleverness. We reject those elements of Prosperity Teaching that are virtually identical to 'positive thinking' and other kinds of 'self-help' techniques.

We are also grieved to observe that Prosperity Teaching has stressed individual wealth and success, without the need for community accountability, and has thus actually damaged a traditional feature of African society, which was commitment to care within the extended family and wider social community.

4. We recognize that Prosperity Teaching flourishes in contexts of terrible poverty, and that for many people, it presents their only hope, in the face of constant frustration, the failure of politicians and NGOs, etc., for a better future, or even for a more bearable present. We are angry that such poverty persists and we affirm the Bible's view that it also angers God and that it is not his will that people should live in abject poverty. We acknowledge and confess that in many situations the Church has lost its prophetic voice in the public arena.

However, we do not believe that Prosperity Teaching provides a helpful or biblical response to the poverty of the people among whom it flourishes. And we observe that much of this teaching has come from North American sources where people are not materially poor in the same way.

- a) It vastly enriches those who preach it, but leaves multitudes no better off than before, with the added burden of disappointed hopes.*
- b) While emphasizing various alleged spiritual or demonic causes of poverty, it gives little or no attention to those causes that are economic and political, including injustice, exploitation, unfair international trade practices, etc.*
- c) It thus tends to victimize the poor by making them feel that their poverty is their own fault (which the Bible does not do), while failing to address and*

denounce those whose greed inflicts poverty on others (which the Bible does repeatedly).

- d) Some prosperity teaching is not really about helping the poor at all, and provides no sustainable answer to the real causes of poverty.*

5. We accept that some prosperity teachers sincerely seek to use the Bible in explaining and promoting their teachings.

However, we are distressed that much use of the Bible is seriously distorted, selective, and manipulative. We call for a more careful exegesis of texts, and a more holistic biblical hermeneutic, and we denounce the way that many texts are twisted out of context and used in ways that contradict some very plain Bible teaching.

And especially, we deplore the fact that in many churches where Prosperity Teaching is dominant, the Bible is rarely preached in any careful or explanatory way, and the way of salvation, including repentance from sin and saving faith in Christ for forgiveness of sin, and the hope of eternal life, is misrepresented and substituted with material wellbeing.

6. We rejoice in the phenomenal growth of the numbers of professing Christians in many countries where churches that have adopted prosperity teachings and practice are very popular.

However, numerical growth or mega-statistics may not necessarily demonstrate the truth of the message that accompanies it, or the belief system behind it. Popularity is no proof of truth; and people can be deceived in great numbers.

7. We are pleased to observe that many churches and leaders are critical and in some cases overtly renounce and cut the links with specific aspects of African primal or traditional religion and its practices, where these can be seen to be in conflict with the biblical revelation and worldview.

Yet it seems clear that there are many aspects of Prosperity Teaching that have their roots in that soil. We therefore wonder if much popular Christianity is a syncretised super-structure on an underlying worldview that has not been radically

transformed by the biblical gospel. We also wonder whether the popularity and attraction of Prosperity Teaching is an indication of the failure of contextualization of the Gospel in Africa.

8. We observe that many people testify to the way Prosperity Teaching has in fact impacted their lives for the better – encouraging them to have greater faith, to seek to improve their education, or working lives. We rejoice in this. There is great power in such testimony, and we thank God when any of his children enjoy his blessing.

However, we observe equally that many people have been duped by such teaching into false faith and false expectations, and when these are not satisfied, they ‘give up on God’, or lose their faith altogether and leave the church. This is tragic, and must be very grievous to God.

9. We accept that many prosperity teachers mostly have their roots in evangelical churches and traditions, or were brought up under the influence of evangelical parachurch ministries.

But we deplore the clear evidence that many of them have in practice moved away from key and fundamental tenets of evangelical faith, including the authority and priority of the Bible as the Word of God, and the centrality of the cross of Christ.

10. We know that God sometimes puts leaders in positions of significant public fame and influence.

However, there are aspects of the lifestyle and behaviour of many preachers of Prosperity Teaching that we find deplorable, unethical, and frankly idolatrous (to the god of Mammon), and in some of these respects we may be called upon to identify and reject such things as the marks of false prophets, according to the standards of the Bible. These include:

- a) Flamboyant and excessive wealth and extravagant lifestyles.*
- b) Unethical and manipulative techniques.*
- c) Constant emphasis on money, as if it were a supreme good – which is mammon.*

- d) Replacing the traditional call to repentance and faith with a call to give money.*
- e) Covetousness which is idolatry.*
- f) Living and behaving in ways that are utterly inconsistent with either the example of Jesus or the pattern of discipleship that he taught.*
- g) Ignoring or contradicting the strong New Testament teaching on the dangers of wealth and the idolatrous sin of greed.*
- h) Failure to preach the word of God in a way that feeds the flock of Christ.*
- i) Failure to preach the whole gospel message of sin, repentance, faith and eternal hope.*
- j) Failure to preach the whole counsel of God, but replacing it with what people want to hear.*
- k) Replacing time for evangelism with fund raising events and appeals.*

First draft by Rev. Dr. Chris Wright (Chair of the Lausanne Theology Working Group); edited by Rev. Dr. John Azumah (Member of the Lausanne Theology Working Group); in collaboration with Rev. Prof. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Chair of the Akropong Consultations).

Source: With permission from Naomi A. Frizzell, (The Lausanne Movement Chief Communications Officer www.lausanne.org, nfrizzell@lausanne.org) to attach the referenced document as an appendix.

APPENDIX III: THE DANGERS OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN NAMIBIA

“THE DANGERS OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN NAMIBIA”

By Basilius M. Kasera

Previously published in The Namibian newspaper (www.thenamibian.com.na 14 June 2011) – with some editions.

I believe that many people across the nation had the opportunity to watch the show hosted by NBC on Talk of the Nation (06 June 2011). Because there was not sufficient time given to define the prosperity gospel and its consequences, I will here give a broader view of the subject. I need to state at the beginning that because prosperity gospel is not a creedal theological system, it is difficult to pin it down as its proponents interpret and advocate it differently. Therefore, my definition here is a broad one but one that focus on the issues of wealth, health and success. It is not new to many Namibians that there are churches that make extreme financial requirements on their members with the promise that God will in turn give them a hundred fold back or catapult them into wealth.

The prosperity gospel comes in two forms: 1) *the militant form (radical)*; 2) *the diffused form (subtle)*. The former advocates that God's will for every Christian is wealth, health, happiness and success. The latter is more motivational, creates the impression of a world with limitless possibilities and victories and without suffering. These two forms definitely overlap each other in many ways. Regardless of their apparent differences, they both teach that true Christianity is marked by wealth, health, happiness and unlimited victorious living.

With these triumphalist promises people are manipulated into giving their money so that situations might turn out to their advantage. This brand of theology started in America when tele-evangelists were in search of funds to pay for their programs. They employed these manipulative methods to get crowds to give and later this developed into a fully-fledged prosperity preaching movement which came to Africa in the late 1970s and to Namibia in the early 1990s. “The extent of the teaching in Africa is remarkable” (Piper 2010:19). What is dangerous about this theology? Here is my brief critique:

First, it makes material blessing the primary goal of the Christian faith. While I do not deny that God, out of his goodness, may manifest his goodness by giving Christians health and riches, these things are secondary. Secondly, it ignores Jesus’ warning about the dangers of wealth. While many prosperity preachers rightly claim that Jesus spoke more about money and material possessions than he spoke of heaven, they fail to realize that Jesus’ message was mainly a warning against them rather than an encouragement to pursue after them (Matt. 6:19-24).

Jesus said, ‘How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ His disciples were astonished, as many in the ‘prosperity’ movement should be. So Jesus went on to raise their astonishment even higher by saying, ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’ They responded in disbelief: ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus says, ‘With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God’ (Mark 10:23–27) (Piper 2010:21-22).

Thirdly, it teaches that God is obligated to bless us because of our faith. This theology at its best undermines God’s sovereignty and sees God as existing for our benefit, rather than us existing for His glory.

My biggest concern about the effects of the prosperity movement is that it diminishes Christ by making him less central and less satisfying than his gifts. Christ is not magnified most by being the giver of wealth. He is magnified most by satisfying the soul of those who sacrifice to love others in the ministry of the gospel.

When we commend Christ as the one who makes us rich, we glorify riches, and Christ becomes a means to the end of what we really want—namely, health, wealth, and prosperity. But when we commend Christ as the one who satisfies our soul forever—even when there is no

health, wealth, and prosperity—then Christ is magnified as more precious than all those gifts (Piper 2010:31).

Fourthly, it holds to a false view of 'blessedness.' It defines 'blessedness' in terms of material things and health, it teaches that God is bound to bless all who have faith in him with these things. But this view ignores the Scriptures that speak of the sufferings of the followers of Christ as a badge of honour, and a means of producing endurance and testing genuine faith (Phil. 1:29; Rom. 5:3-5). Fifthly, it teaches a false theology of giving. It teaches that when people give to the service of God they will have riches, health, happiness and success in return. In this way it has erected a superstructure similar to that of many gambling houses. Sixthly, it is representative of 'pyramid schemes.' Those who teach this theology are becoming rich at the expense of their audiences. They drive better and bigger cars. They live in wealthy neighbourhoods and can afford the luxuries of life, while often their members are struggling to put bread on their own tables and afford basic transportation. Seventhly, it undermines the efforts of the church, government and non-governmental organisations engaged in the fight against poverty. By providing simplistic principles of faith and giving which are unbiblical and defy both reason and the principles of economics and they exploit people's ignorance.

Moreover, this theology, besides being unbiblical, is an unjust system that oppresses the poor, who give away their money to these churches at the expense of their families and in the hope that they will receive thousands or even millions of dollars in a couple of months. It should be clear that this theology is irresponsible both in the manner in which it is conducted in dealing with the rampant issue of poverty in our society and is ungodly in the way it makes false claims about the limitless possibilities of miracles that could happen to anyone that follows it.

Because majority of the proponents of this teaching are theologically untrained, they give authority to their teachings by claiming that they have received a supernatural calling – directly from God. They give to themselves titles such as apostle, bishop, prophet(ess) etc. Their influence through psychological manipulation is so strong that people who do not know the Bible well enough to examine these claims will follow them as if they are true interpreters of Scripture. This theology poses serious dangers for the Christian faith both in the present and the future, in

that it is contributing to the rise of atheism as many will lose their faith because of disappointments.

The fact that this issue has now come on national television is an indication that it is no longer something happening somewhere in America or Nigeria, it is right here in our backyards and the victims of it are our friends and families.

I call upon pastors and church leaders who are serious about teaching people God's Word to start to speak out against this 'spiritualised' and 'Christianised' evil and teach people God's truth. Moreover, the presence of the prosperity gospel is a wake-up call for the church to give serious attention to the issues of poverty in our society and come up with practical ways of helping to alleviate poverty. We should be engaged in caring for the poor (Keller 2008^a:7) as this is an outward "evidence of true heart commitment to God" (Keller 2008^b:14). "The good news of Jesus Christ will never allow us to be smug and other-worldly in the face of suffering and evil" (Carson 1996:83). However, unlike the prosperity preachers "we do so from the centre out, i.e. beginning with full-orbed gospel proclamation and witness and passion, and then, while acknowledging that no one can do everything, doing our 'significant something' to address the wretched entailments of sin in our world" (Carson 1996:83).

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