

2013

Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross in the Face of the Challenge of the Neo-Pentecostal Movement and Its Prosperity Gospel Message

Hossana Yohanna

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/ma_theses

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yohanna, Hossana, "Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross in the Face of the Challenge of the Neo-Pentecostal Movement and Its Prosperity Gospel Message" (2013). *MA Theses*. Paper 27.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses at Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. For more information, please contact akeck001@luthersem.edu.

MARTIN LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN THE FACE OF THE
CHALLENGE OF THE NEO-PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT AND ITS
PROSPERITY GOSPEL MESSAGE

by

HOSSANA YOHANNA

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

THESIS ADVISER: PROFESSOR GUILLERMO C. HANSEN

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

2013

This thesis may be duplicated only by special permission of the author.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is obvious that a project such as this would not have been possible without the support of so many people. My appreciation goes to my thesis advisor and academic advisor, Dr. Guillermo C. Hansen, whose teaching and theological approach has influenced my thinking and guided me through the process of this work by formulating the topic and adeptly guided me and provided helpful suggestions all the way long so that the work moved to completion. Dr. Lois Malcolm and Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali both offered expert suggestions that improved the thesis greatly.

I am grateful to Mr. & Mrs. Gary and Deanne Sande who were both my parents and friends while in the USA, and Prof. & Mrs. Bradley Holt and all my friends in Nigeria, United States, and St. Paul Reformation Lutheran Church (SPR) for their love, concern and support.

I appreciate my parents; the late Baba Yohanna Dan Rettinya and Mama Maryamu Yohanna, for their parental care and other family members who have help me in many practical and generous ways.

A big appreciation to my beloved wife Mrs. Sarauniya Hossana and children, Rachel Hossana, Luther Adakponsunme Hossana, Glad Inyoh Yohanna and Pillar Hossana, who have all served as my source of inspiration in the cause of this work.

My appreciation is also extended to the my church, The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN), The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for the

scholarship, without which I wouldn't have embarked on this journey. I also appreciate the entire members of the Lutheran Church of Christian Nigeria (LCCN) Ikeja, and the whole of Lagos Division, Abuja Diocese.

Finally, the greatest of all my appreciation is to God almighty, under whose arms I have studied. To him be the glory and honor forever more.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vi
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Definition of Terms	3
Pentecostalism.....	3
Charismatics.....	4
Neo-Pentecostalism.....	5
Prosperity Gospel.....	5
Mainline Protestant	6
Statement of the Problem	8
Purpose of the Research	13
Scope and Limitation of the Research.....	15
Notes on the Chapters.....	15
2. NEO-PENTECOSTALISM.....	17
Origins of Pentecostalism.....	19
Christianity in Nigeria	20
Pentecostalism in Nigeria.....	23
The Beginning of Neo-Pentecostalism.....	26
The Beginning of the Prosperity Gospel	27
The Neo-Pentecostal Prosperity Messages in Nigeria.....	29
3. BRIEF HISTORY OF LUTHER AND HIS THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS	36
An Introduction to Martin Luther’s Theology of The Cross.....	38
Luther’s Theology of the Cross.....	42
4. LUTHER’S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS VERSES THE NEO-PENTECOSTAL ON PROSPERITY GOSPEL.....	49
Pentecostals in Nigeria on Poverty.....	51
Luther’s Challenge of the Prosperity Gospel	54
5. CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	60
Summary.....	60
Conclusion.....	63
Recommendations	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	65

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	British Broadcasting Cooperation
BC	The Book of Concord. Edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis, MN: 2000.
ELCN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
LC	Large Catechism
LCCN	The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria.
LW	Luther's Works Edited by Hilton C Oswald, 56 vols. Saint Louis Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1974.
MFM	Mountain of Fire and Miracle
NRSV	New Reversed Standard Version
SCOAN	Synagogue Church of All Nations
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
SPR	Saint Paul Reformation Lutheran Church

INTRODUCTION

This thesis was informed by the recent changes that emerged within the Christian church, as a result of the introduction of the gospel of prosperity by some neo-Pentecostal preachers with special emphasis on Nigeria. Nigeria, the main focus of this thesis, is a country with a population of 160 million people which is blessed with enough resources to live on, but a few greedy individuals have confiscated the wealth for themselves, leaving the larger population in abject poverty. The neo-Pentecostals have made attempts to find a solution and a means of survival in this rather alarming situation and concluded that the only way out of this situation was to change their message from the saving work of Christ on the cross to that of embracing the Prosperity Gospel. They claim that Prosperity Gospel is relevant for Nigeria because God gave them more than just the Gospel. He gave them his son as an example of how to live, and he gave them the tools (sacraments) to keep them in his Grace. One of the most often repeated teachings in recent times has been centered on the Biblical prophecies which state that "the wealth of the wicked will be given to the righteous" (Prov. 13:22). The prophecies actually go further than this and state that the wealth of the nations will be brought to the righteous. The wealth is not to be hoarded, but passed on to those that are preaching the gospel (Isa. 23:18). They believe these are Biblical prophecies and they will come to pass. This has begun, and we must fight it or we will destroy our churches.

I have noticed with great concern that the wealth that is acquired by the Prosperity Gospel preachers is not used by all, but only by either the preachers themselves or the inner-workers of their churches. This is not far from what is obtainable in the secular society and the government which we frown at. Therefore, this unprecedented prosperity gospel message that has come to our people may destroy the church if nothing is done about it.

This is a sign that Nigeria has gotten itself into a serious church robbery that has changed the entire gospel of our Lord into a money-making venture. Those who knew no stealing are now stealing from their offices to give handsomely to their pastors in expectation of a double measure in return. A shining example of what informed this thesis is an incident that happened in one of the Neo-Pentecostal churches in Lagos, Nigeria, where a member who is known to be poor gave the sum of N24 000,000.00 (which is equivalent to \$154,838.71) as a monthly tithe. Some members of the Church suggested that he be investigated. Finally, it was discovered that the money was meant for a special project which he stole from the company where he works. One will begin to ask where Christ is in this kind of situation. Where is the position of the cross on which Christ died to save us from all our worries? How do we interpret the statements of Christ where he says “Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you” (Jn. 14:1)? And how do we respond to statements like “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33)?

This thesis considers the reality of the set back that the church will experience and the danger that lies ahead of the church should the Prosperity message continue, and concludes that we need a theologian like Martin Luther whose theology has made a large impact on the development of Christianity and has gained world recognition to change this Church robbery and save the church from destruction.

Definition of Terms

Because of the complexity involved in this topic the Prosperity Gospel and the cross, coupled with its connection with ministry, theology, Christian symbols and Pentecostalism, I wish to define some important terminology that will help in the understanding of the entire discussion.

Pentecostalism

According to Hansen, “Pentecostalism represents a new form of experiencing and communicating the Holy distinction from those that see the Holy as contained by the sacred space (Roman Catholicism) or confined to a linguistic event shaping a trustful disposition in consciousness and will (Reformation) or displaced to a future messianic time (Radical Reformation).”¹ It is a movement of the Holy Spirit. While the protestant mainline churches confess their belief in the Holy Spirit and draw attention to the centrality of the Scripture in Christian life and ministry, Pentecostals like to go one step further by insisting that certain experience is the proof for all forms of belief.²

Pentecostalism is drawn from the term “Pentecost,” the Greek name for the Jewish Feast

¹ Karen, L. Bloomquist, *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2008), 32.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

of Weeks. It is a renewal movement within Christianity that places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God through baptism with the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism is a modern Christian renewal movement inspired by the descent of the Holy Spirit experienced by the Apostles at the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2) and is marked by the reappearance of speaking in tongues, prophesy and healing.³ Although all churches are products of the Pentecost experience, this group has decided to name itself “Pentecostal” such that it became their real name.

Charismatics

Sometimes the word “charismatics” is used interchangeably with “neo-Pentecostal.” Although there are beliefs which they share, I don’t think the two are the same, because charismatics is a trend that saw a significant number of people who had Pentecostal experiences choose to stay in their churches, which were often mainline denominations such as Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Nazarene, and Reformed churches, instead of joining traditional Pentecostal fellowships. Charismatics in Catholic churches existed in significant numbers as well. According to David Crystal,

“Charismatic is a worldwide renewal movement is known for their emphasis on charismata or the gift of the Holy Spirit, demonstrative worship, theological fundamentalism, and evocative music. The term was coined by H. Bredesen and J. Stone in 1963 to describe a growing trend that later developed into three separate sectors. Mainline Protestant Churches from 1950, Roman Catholic Church from 1967 and Independent Churches from the late 1960s”⁴

For example, adherents to the Charismatic movement were generally more liberal on issues like dancing and alcohol than traditional Pentecostals. Charismatics tend to

³David Crystal. Ed, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 922.

⁴George Thomas Kurian. Ed. *Nelson’s Dictionary of Christianity: The Authoritative Resource on The Christian World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 148.

accept the doctrines of their mother churches and some of them join local Pentecostal congregations while Pentecostals break off from the Wesleyan Holiness churches.⁵

Neo-Pentecostalism

The position of Neo-Pentecostals is difficult to define because they are situated between the Pentecostals and the Charismatics. They are not as separatist in orientation as the Pentecostals, but they are more separatist than the Charismatics. This aligns with the working definition of neo-Pentecostalism as those who have formed separate churches and denominations rather than stay in mainline denominations as have the Charismatics. Neo-Pentecostals tend to be more economically advanced and socially comfortable than the early Pentecostals. The controversial prosperity gospel is also being preached by Neo-Pentecostalism. Indeed, quite a number of scholars and church representatives have faulted Neo-Pentecostal teachers and pastors for espousing a health and wealth gospel, according to which God intends all believers to prosper both physically and materially.⁶

Prosperity Gospel

Prosperity theology is an immensely significant and highly controversial theological system that continues to influence a large segment of the Christian Church. This religio-philosophic world-view, labeled variously as Word of Faith, Word of Life, Faith Movement, and Positive Confession is particularly important because while it rightly issues a wake up alarm for depressed, apathetic, disbelieving Christian, it nevertheless issues a challenge to orthodox doctrines held by the Christian Church for nearly two millennia⁷

⁵ Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1987), 75-76.

⁶ Stanley M. Burgess Ed, *Encyclopedia of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 332.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 392.

It is a Christian religious doctrine or movement whose emphasis is basically based on the assertion that God wills financial blessing for Christians because our God is not a poor God. It also asserts that one's faith and constructive language, coupled with donations to Christian ministries and programs, add to one's chances of getting material possessions.⁸ According to Stephanie Mitchem,

Based on non-traditional interpretations of the Bible, often with emphasis on the Book of Malachi, the doctrine views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, God will deliver his promises of security and prosperity. Confessing these promises to be true is perceived as an act of faith, which God will honor.⁹

The Prosperity Gospel has so many names depending on the situation and the nature of sermons that are preached every Sunday. Some call them "Word of Faith theology, or the Health, Wealth, Happiness Gospel. Its most public proponents are all televangelists who appeal to their audiences for donations with promises of God's miraculous financial blessing according to the amount donated."¹⁰

Mainline Protestant

Mainline Protestant churches are those churches that were established as a result of the activities of the missionaries. These are churches that have their root from the great church fathers that played various roles in the reformation. Protestantism, therefore, is with respect to the early dominant churches.

Mainline Protestant Churches are those who once occupied the status of formal and, later, informal power in American society. They included Colonial

⁸Stephanie Y. Mitchem, "Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity_theology, (accessed on March 9,2013).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰ Andrew Corbett, "Welcome to the Prosperity Gospel" <http://www.findingtruthmatters.org/articles/prosperity-gospel/> (accessed March 20, 2013).

America's "big three" established churches: Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, joined over time by churches of later waves of European immigrants: the German and Dutch Reformed churches and Lutherans of varying ethnic backgrounds and by Protestant traditions of the expanding frontier, Methodists and Disciples of Christ.¹¹

Roman Catholic Church refers to all church denominations that are products of the reformation as "Protestants" claiming that they protested against the Roman Catholic Church. According to Robert Wuthnow and John H Evans, "Mainline protestant churches share a common approach to social issues that often leads to collaboration in organizations such as the National Council of Churches."¹² The above terminology will be used repeatedly in this thesis. These terms are important for the understanding of this thesis because many people think that all Pentecostals believe and preach prosperity gospel while this is not true. There are many Pentecostals who do not believe in the prosperity gospel, but most Neo-Pentecostals believe and preach the prosperity gospel theology. However, Pentecostalism has been the starting point of all preachers of prosperity gospel.

I want to make it clear that though most churches trace their history back to the Pentecost, the constant reliance that these movements placed on the coming of the Holy Spirit has made them answer to the name "Pentecostalism.

Today there are those who say that the neo-Pentecostal movement is a dangerous religious fraud, while others say that the appearance of Neo-Pentecostalism in Lutheran congregations (particularly in Nigeria) has provided an opportunity to study the scriptures

¹¹William McKinney, "Mainline Protestantism" *Pacific School of Religion 1998*. <http://www.psr.edu/files-psr/craigvillecolloqu> 2012, (accessed March 8, 2013).

¹²Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans, Ed. "The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism" (2002). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mainline_Protestant#cite_ref-6 (accessed on March 8/2013).

and appreciate and rejoice in the working of the Holy Spirit. Let me quote from Andrew Corbett:

Give to my ministry, announced the Televangelist, and Lord will cancel all your debts! These and other claims by “Prosperity Preachers” are also suspiciously linked to the size of the seed someone sows into their ministry. In more recent times this prosperity teaching has even been linked to the collapse in the sub-prime mortgage market and the eventual global economic melt-down! But if the Prosperity Gospel was only about money, we could perhaps tolerate it. But it encompasses much, much more dangerous dogma than that!¹³

Since the gospel of prosperity has attracted so many comments and so much concern from theologians as well as lay people, this thesis wishes to draw these views together by using the cross as a testing point for all views and to see what Luther’s theology of the cross will offer in this scenario. This may help to provide a unanimous view of the prosperity gospel and its relationship to the saving work of Christ on the cross.

Statement of the Problem

The problems this thesis wishes to address include: It is widely understood by neo-Pentecostals that poverty is a sin. David Oyedepo, bishop of one of the Neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigerians “Winners Chapel,” has proposed three points to support his message that poverty is a sin: (a) “Sin brought material poverty,”¹⁴ (b) The atonement replaces the material blessing that have been lost as result of sin,¹⁵ and (c)

¹³ Andrew Corbett, “Welcome to the Prosperity Gospel” <http://www.findingtruthmatters.org/articles/prosperity-gospel/> (accessed on March 20/2013).

¹⁴ Folarin, George O. "Contemporary State of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria." *Asia Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (April 2007): 81. (accessed March 23, 2013).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

Remaining in one's material poverty is a sin against the redemption work of Jesus.¹⁶ Furthermore, from my experience working with Pentecostals over the years, I have noticed that prosperity theology claims that the Bible teaches that financial blessing is the will of God for Christians and anyone who is not financially blessed must have committed an atrocity that made God withdraw his blessings from him. The doctrine teaches that faith, positive speech, and donations to Christian ministries will always increase one's material wealth.¹⁷ Many churches in Nigeria, especially the mainline Protestants, are threatened by the growth of neo-Pentecostal churches and how they steal members from other churches to their movements using the gospel of prosperity.

The Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN) is one of the direct victims of this; People are leaving Lutheran congregations because they feel the Lutheran churches are not preaching about financial breakthrough and all its relevant ingredients, like the assurance of good health and absence of suffering. This has robbed the cross of its focus on salvation for one of physical prosperity. It has also shifted the minds of church members from the mainline churches because some feel that the leaders of the mainline churches are not teaching the right theology and so they opt to search for greener pastures from the neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel preachers. I have observed that those who have left the mainline churches left without proper understanding of the word of God and join the neo-Pentecostal Churches, where emphasis is placed on prosperity, healing and all forms of financial breakthrough, neglecting the true word of God. I think if this is

¹⁶Ibid., 81.

¹⁷ Garber, Kent. "Behind-the-prosperity-gospel" <http://www.usnews.com/news/national/articles/2008/12/15/.U.S. News & World Report>. (accessed December 4, 2011).

allowed to continue, it may result in having large neo-Pentecostal congregations with half-baked Christians.

I wonder where the church is heading to and the position of the cross of Jesus in the message of the prosperity gospel preachers which placed emphasis on financial breakthrough rather than atonement. What is Luther saying about these issues? These are issues I wish to consider in this thesis.

Some people believe that the death and the resurrection of Jesus has formed the dominant theme in the New Testament, and argue nonetheless that the Bible has not mentioned it anywhere that the cross be used as a symbol of this great event in the life of the church. This may suggest that the use of the cross as a symbol was man's initiative to have a handy symbol of the cross on which our Lord Jesus died. This is the real problem of the cross today. L. D. Hammons has this to say:

Under the Mosaic Covenant, many activities and objects symbolized the sacrificial death of Jesus. In the Old Testament, activities pertaining to temple sacrifice were symbols and signs of the Real that was coming. However, the New Covenant contains no physical object-shapes as symbols. Now that the Lord Jesus Christ has come, lived, and died as the Sacrificial Lamb by His atoning and substitutionary death on the cross, the former symbols are no longer needed. When Jesus instituted the New Covenant in His blood at His death on the cross, the New Covenant fulfilled and replaced the Mosaic Covenant. As a result, except for the Lord's Supper and believer's baptism, the New Covenant does not include symbols. Because the Real who is Jesus Christ, has already come and provided a means of forgiveness, shapes are no longer needed as symbols to show the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

This statement has provoked questions like the following: Is this a good way or a wrong way of looking at the cross? Which is the right use of the cross? Which cross is the right one? And what meaning of the cross is best? Many Neo-Pentecostals prosperity

¹⁸ L, D Hammons. "The Cross, the Cross Symbols, and Christianity", www.crucialchoices.com/EnglishSite/BelieverPages/CrossSymbol.htm (accessed on October 13, 2012).

preachers feel that the atonement of Christ on the cross involves the salvation of both the soul and the body. The misinterpretation of the salvation of the body to mean deliverance from sickness, demonic possession, and poverty was something that a lot of people found interesting. In Nigeria, those who are wealthy command respect in the community and the Church as well. And these are people who are appointed by the Government into strategic positions. Therefore, it is always possible for any gospel message that addresses the subject of wealth to prevail in the midst of this understanding.

A better way of understanding a symbol is to list its social, political and cultural uses. In this thesis, I shall explore the symbol of the cross in its strict theological-religious use, namely, as a symbol standing for God. This is how Luther used it. Luther draws a line between what he calls the enemies of the cross and the friend of the cross. He claims that the enemies of the cross hate the cross and its forms of suffering and glory in works. The goodness of the cross they called evil while the evil is called good.¹⁹

According to Luther, Friends of the cross, “say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are dethroned and the Old Adam, who is especially edified by works is crucified.”²⁰ I doubt if we need to discuss what God has already done and completed in full through the death of Jesus on the cross.

The cross represents the misery and agony of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and his humiliating death. Various Christian bodies have attached different meanings to it. In his book *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers*, Martin L. Marty, states that

Paul wanted to be known as preaching nothing but Christ and Him crucified. In the main Church in Wittenberg, Luther’s home town, there is a painting by Lukas Cranach in which on the right Luther is seen preaching, on the left is a

¹⁹LW Vol 31, *Carrier of The Reformer*, 53.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

congregation that includes a picture of his wife and son, and between them is Jesus on the cross. Lutheran pastors often hang this picture in their study walls as a reminder that they should never look at a congregation without seeing it in the light of the cross.²¹

The cross is a testimony that the death of Jesus was vicarious, and a representative of the entire humanity. The biblical teaching concerning the cross and the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is fundamental to Christianity. From the New Testament one will notice that the event of Jesus' crucifixion, along with the resurrection, is the basis of the good news of Jesus Christ and the message of the cross is God's power for salvation. The Apostle Paul made it clear. "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:17-18 NRSV). "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2 NRSV).

This thesis considers one expression of the Neo-Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria that present an understanding of the cross whose meaning aligns with the experience of the church in Luther's time, which brought confusion in the prevailing theological distortion and ecclesiastical disorder in his time, which He calls "a theology of glory."²² If the mainline churches will view the cross as the symbol describing how the church came into being through the suffering of Christ on the cross, then, one will notice that the prosperity theology of the neo-Pentecostals stands in glaring contrast to the theology of

²¹Martin, L. Marty, *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 56.

²²Martin, Luther, Timothy F. Lull, and William R. Russell, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), 58.

the cross. Luther added that “from this you can now see how, ever since the scholastic theology the deceiving...began, the theology of the cross has been abrogated, and everything has been completely turned up-side-down.”²³ Gritsch writes,

In the sixteenth century, Luther rediscovered this God of the Bible and the Bible’s way of talking about Jesus. He called such talk a “theology of the cross” because its focus is on Jesus “the crucified God.” “Learn Christ and him crucified” he told a friend searching for proper God-talk. “To seek God outside Jesus is the devil.” All theology – all God-talk – must be Christ-minded according to Luther, meaning that the cross of Jesus is the only true source of knowledge about God we have. Anything else is mere speculation...²⁴

Since Christianity has recognized the importance of the event surrounding the cross, and trusting in Christ's death as the payment for our sins, I would like to create a clear distinction between Luther’s understanding of the cross as central to Christian faith and experience and the Neo-Pentecostal understanding of the cross as a historical reality not relevant to today’s faith and experience.

Purpose of the Research

The content of salvation offered by Christ on the cross has been distorted and challenged by some of the Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel preachers. The work of the Spirit in the interpretation and application of the work of Christ to the believer, making the objective work of the cross subjective experience of the believer through faith, is in danger and jeopardy. The emphasis of neo-Pentecostals on sin, wealth and deliverance from demonic possession has made many Nigerians think that the world is inhabited by satanic power, causing misfortunes for Christians. Fear of demons and all forms of

²³ LW, Vol 31, 225.

²⁴ Eric W. Gritsch, *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). 99.

satanic power is on the increase. I can recall a neo-Pentecostal Church in Nigeria that named its Bible school “War College.” They claim that,

The Spiritual War College of the Mountain Of Fire and Miracles Ministries is the training ground for all ministers that are representing and will continue to represent MFM in all branches in Nigeria and the world over. It is the spiritual oven where spiritual bread of life is being baked for believers’ consumption and they hunger no more! It is the source of water of life where believers drink from and they thirst no more. Graduates from spiritual war college spiritually provide these and many more symbolic services at their different locations in the world, where they win souls for Jesus.²⁵

They spent time teaching their members various strategies of deliverance and prayer without any focus on the cross and they also taught them how to say the prayers which they call “fire for fire.” I think it is the misreading of Lk. 9:54-55. I wish to use Luther’s theology of the cross and offer a challenge within the framework of the scripture, Lutheran confessions and theology. This will help solve some ambiguities which neo-Pentecostals have attached to the cross.

I hold to the Lutheran position on the cross and to Luther’s theology of the cross and I am sure it has responded to the challenges that the misunderstanding of neo-Pentecostalism with regards the cross and their emphasis on the prosperity gospel. I also wish to use Martin Luther’s Theology of the cross to respond to the challenge of the growth of the neo-Pentecostal movement and its prosperity gospel messages in Nigeria. In this research, I would like to present the cross as the true foundation of the Christian faith, hoping that neo-Pentecostals after reading this piece of work may look at the cross of Jesus as good news for our salvation.

²⁵Mountain of Fire & Miracles Ministries International Headquarters [http://mountainof fire.ipower.com/schools/biblicalmissandvis.htm](http://mountainofire.ipower.com/schools/biblicalmissandvis.htm), (accessed on October 13, 2012).

If the neo-Pentecostals are not challenged theologically, I envision the suspension of the cross and its relevant message of the suffering Jesus on the cross from our churches. These are issues that I wish to tackle in the light of Luther's theology of the cross.

Scope and Limitation of the Research

This thesis is limited to looking at the different uses of the cross, what Luther's theology has offered in terms of the understanding of the theology of the cross, and the views of the Neo-Pentecostal movement in Nigeria with regards to the cross in line with their prosperity messages. The thesis will also consider facts about the growth of the neo-Pentecostal movement in Nigeria.

Notes on the Chapters

The first part of this thesis presents an introduction to the thesis, the statement of the problems that warranted the research, the purpose of the research and what the research wishes to achieve, the limitation of the research, and notes on the various chapters of the research. Chapter One hopes to discuss the meaning of Neo-Pentecostalism, the reason for the growth of the Neo-Pentecostal movements in Nigeria, their teachings as contained in their doctrine of prosperity, their view of the cross and how the cross fits into their theology. Chapter Two will give a brief biography of Martin Luther in connection with suffering and analyze Luther's theology of the cross and its importance to the understanding of the salvific experience and plan of God. Chapter Three will examine the relationship and the differences between Luther's theology of the cross and that of the Pentecostals, and the challenges and gifts that Luther's theology of the cross poses on the prosperity gospel messages perpetrated by the Pentecostals. The

conclusion will give the summary of the thesis and conclusion and finally make suggestions where possible.

CHAPTER ONE

NEO-PENTECOSTALISM

Pentecostalism is one of the most challenging and attractive movements that have taken place within Christianity in recent years. Whether we like it or not, its expansion has constituted a serious threat to other Christian bodies. Pentecostalism has turned Christianity into a market where goods are displayed in a more attractive way in order to gain patronage by the customers; it has made Christianity become a religion of fancy. In another development, those who have come in contact with the early charismatic and Pentecostal movements will agree with me that it has made many Christian denominations more serious and committed to the task of preaching the gospel compared to how they use to be. This is because no one is willing to lose members to the Pentecostal and the charismatic movements because of their inability to preach a good sermon.

Today, a new face of Pentecostalism has emerged called neo-Pentecostalism, with some characteristics and practices that are similar to that of the early charismatic and Pentecostal movements “(e.g., Spirit baptism, belief in spirits and dreams, holy living, Spirit-filled worship), what is distinctive about the neo-Pentecostalism is the emphasis on success and prosperity that is experienced not only spiritually but also materially”¹ Their emphasis on material prosperity has changed the entire message of the gospel to the

¹ Peterson, Cheryl M. 2011. "Pneumatology and the cross: the challenge of neo-Pentecostalism to Lutheran theology." *Dialog* 50, no. 2: 133-142. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 24, 2013).

extent that the church has become a means to an end for believers to find spiritual and material success.

According to J. Kwabena,

Neo-Pentecostalism also refers to Christian group which emphasize salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit, and in which pneumatic phenomena, including speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, miracles in general, are perceived as standing historic continuity with the experiences of the early Church as found especially in Acts of the Apostles, which are sought, accepted, valued, and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experiences of his Spirit.²

Neo-Pentecostals are different from the Charismatics and the traditional Pentecostals. The traditional Pentecostals do not consider prosperity as part of their doctrines; they are questioning the lack of theological consistency on the part of the Neo-Pentecostals. The most important is “the doctrine of initial evidence which holds that reception of the Holy Spirit baptism carries with it a definable manifestation evidence to all present at all the time, namely, speaking in tongues (glossolalia).”³ The Charismatics are really comfortable with the traditional Pentecostals because of their constant reliance on speaking in tongues only, so they “have accepted Holy Spirit reception evidence by any of the nine Spiritual gifts mention in I Corinthians 12:7-11.”⁴ The Neo-Pentecostals emphasize Prosperity Gospel, which addresses the issue of material prosperity or financial breakthrough. The memberships are drawn from both high and low-class people. The high-class neo-Pentecostals would like to maintain their level of prosperity while the low-class neo-Pentecostals would like to be rich. Neo-Pentecostals again differ from the Charismatics because the charismatics emphasize healing prayer. This

² J. Kwabena, Asamoah- Gyadu. *African Charismatics: Current Development within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2005), 12.

³ Charles F. Parham, *Fields White unto Harvest* (USA: University of Arkansas Press, 1988) , 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

movement constitutes people of low class. However, they all share the same understanding of the Holy Spirit; they believe that the Bible is the word of God and they trace their roots from the Pentecost experience.

The Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel preachers were originally inspired by God, but due to their wrong and selfish interpretations of the scriptures and the laxity of their doctrines and their desire to acquire quick and fast wealth, they ended up creating a safe haven for manipulators who hid under the freedom of the baptism of the Holy Spirit to commit their holy evil through the display of their deceptive theology of prosperity. Since neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria started as a Pentecostal movement, it is of paramount importance to discuss the origin of Pentecostalism.

Origins of Pentecostalism

It is difficult for one to lay hands the most reliable history of the foundation of Pentecostalism. However, Pentecostalism started at Charles Parham's Bible School in Topeka, Kansas in 1901 at the Azusa street revival under William Seymour from 1906 – 1909. It is undecided who the real founder of the Pentecostalism was, as both William Seymour and Charles Parham played an important role in the formation of the movement. To respond to this question, one has to look at the composition of the Azusa Street revival. According to Juanne B. Holstein,

The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles was a mixture of the White American Holiness religion and the worship derived from the African American Christian tradition. The worship and praise at Azusa Street used a style that came from the Appalachian Whites and Southern Blacks and included dancing and shouting. The merging of Black and White, men and women and the participation from all of the ethnic minorities of Los Angeles was a phenomenon that was almost unheard of in 1906. It has been described as the color line being washed away in the Blood.

William Seymour became the most influential black leader and is credited as being the co-founder along with Charles Parham of the world of Pentecostalism.⁵

Peter Hocken believes that “because Parham was white (and imbued with racist antipathies) and Seymour was black, this argument is inextricably mixed up with the racial issue and the question of the African-American component in Pentecostal origins.”⁶ Some scholars, although not African-American Pentecostal scholars, suggest that Parham maintains the first position as the founder of Pentecostalism because Parham’s role in the formation of the movement at Topeka coupled with the doctrines he taught, influenced the early doctrines of the Pentecostalism.⁷ With this view it was generally accepted that Pentecostalism began with Charles Parham, an independent holiness evangelist who strongly believed in divine healing and an important figure in the emergence of Pentecostalism as a distinct Christian movement. I also concur with this.

Christianity in Nigeria

To do justice in the discussion of the origins of Pentecostalism in Nigeria, it is important to begin with the history of the origin of Christianity in Nigeria. This is important because Pentecostalism as far as Nigeria is concerned is a later development. Donatus Pius Ukpon, in his article titled “*Presence and Impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria*,” claims that Christianity in Nigeria began in the 15th century with the

⁵ Joanne B. Holstein Azusa (*Asusa*) *Street Revival: Birth of the Pentecostal Movement* http://www.guidedbiblestudies.com/library/asusa_street_revival.htm (Accessed on March 24/2013).

⁶ Peter Hocken, *The Challenges of the Pentecostal, Charismatic and Messianic Jewish Movements* (England, Great Britain: MPG Books Ltd, 2009), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

Portuguese Mission.⁸ The Portuguese missionaries did not record any success as they were interested in buying the Africans and selling them to America and other parts of the world as slaves. The Missionary society and the Anglican Church state of the Crown with great concern for the people decided to pass a bill in 1807 to abolish slavery.⁹ This led to the delegation of some naval offices by the Crown Government to patrol the sea and arrest whoever they found involved in buying and selling slaves from Africa. They sold the captured boats to the rich slaves and set them free.¹⁰ According to Donatus Pius Ukpon,

The arrival of freed slaves into Sierra-Leone in 1841, made Christians in the Great Britain to change the policies of the government. As a result, many Britons saw the evils of slavery and took steps to stop it. William Wilberforce encouraged the British government make slave trade illegal and to send British armed ships on the oceans.¹¹

The freed slaves from West Africa first arrived and settled in Freetown and Rev. Mulvilles an Anglican Priest, came there as a chaplain of the European traders.¹² He was very helpful both spiritually and otherwise, but he went back to Britain to advise the church afterwards.¹³ As the freed slaves were engaged in trading, some of them came to Lagos, Nigeria from Sierra Leone.

After the abolition of slave trade in the eighteenth century, there was division already between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. The Protestant countries like

⁸ Donatus Pius Ukpon, *Presence and Impact of Pentecostalism in Nigeria*
<https://www.google.com/search?q=E.+Isichel.+The+History+of+Christianity+in+Africa+from+Antiquity+to+>
 o+ (Accessed on March 25/2013).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jacob A. Owolabi, "Christianity in Nigeria" (Abuja: National Open University of Nigeria Press, 2009), http://www.nou.edu.ng/noun/NOUN_OCL (accessed March 25, 2013).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Britain initiated and led the struggle to put an end to slavery, the Protestants were the recipients of the credit for the spreading of the Christian faith. This is evident in the fact that Samuel Ajayi Crowther became the last of those ordained as Priest in Britain in 1842, as protestant.¹⁴ According to Awolabi,

Father Borghero and the freed slaves of Nigerian championed the planting of Catholic faith in Nigeria. Bishop Shanahan founded the Roman Catholic Mission station at Onitsha in 1886. He evangelized Oghuli. He built a mission house and School there. Many Nigerians received Bible instructions in the Bible Classes at the various Catholic Mission stations in Nigeria. In addition to these, many Nigerians benefited from the Catholic Mission through the receiving of Western education from them. The Catholic mission spread from Lagos to other parts of Nigeria.¹⁵

Those freed slaves from *Yoruba* (the people of Lagos) land organized themselves and started buying the condemned boats from the freed slaves from Free Town. History has it that one of the boats bought by them was named Wilberforce. The freed slaves could not stay in the same place, but instead, they settled in other parts of *Yoruba* land in places like Abeokuta, the capital of Ogun State, Nigeria. They had the advantage of buying firearms because of their association with the British government. They were not denied the right to Christian worship and preaching in Abeokuta. In fact, they made some converts in Abeokuta.¹⁶

Christian missionaries in Nigeria built Christian faith in the country based on the category of Church-State relationship. The understanding was that the conversion of the Kings will override any attempt of resistance from his subjects.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Today, we have all the branches of the mainline protestant Churches in all the thirty-six states of Nigeria. Though Nigeria may be divided into a Christian South and Muslims North, this is just a generality as both Muslims and Christians are all over the country. The Pentecostals, charismatics, and Neo-Pentecostals in Nigeria are all products of these mainline Churches. None of them grew up as a Pentecostal or Charismatics, but they were all part of mainline Protestantism.

Pentecostalism in Nigeria

Pentecostalism started in Nigeria because some members of the mainline churches felt unsatisfied with the interpretation of the scriptures by the leadership of the mainline churches and the traditional way in which worship were conducted. Some of the members felt that something was lacking in the mainline churches, particularly the boring nature of order of service. O. B. E. Josiah Amata thinks that Pentecostalism was established in Nigeria for the purpose of bringing together Christians who recognized the movement of the Holy Spirit among them, and have identified with the practice of the full gospel message of Acts. 2 to make this body independent of any established Christian denomination.¹⁸

According J.D.Y. Peel, Pentecostalism appeared in Nigeria in 1930-1931, through the first external encounter between indigenous religious groups and foreign Pentecostal churches in Britain. The encounter brought the Assemblies of God in 1939, the Four

¹⁸ O.B.E.J. Amata, *The Nigerian Pentecostal Movement: The People, The Purpose and the Power* 2 edition (Lagos: Pillars House, 2002), 88.

Square Gospel Church in 1941, and the Apostolic Faith Church. 1930s-1940s: Faith Terbernacle in 1930s,¹⁹ According to Allen Anderson,

“In 1932, his movement initiates ties with the Pentecostal Apostolic Church of Great Britain after coming into conflict with colonial authorities, but the association dissolves over the use of modern medicine. In 1941, Babalola founds the independent Christ Apostolic Church, which is estimated to have over a million members by 1990.”²⁰

It was at this point that international protestant movements were introduced.

These include Welsh Apostolic Church (1931).²¹ Celestial Church of Christ arrived in western Nigeria in the 1950s. Pa Josiah Akindayomi, a former member of the Cherubim and Seraphim society, founded the Redeemed Christian Church of God in 1952 Under Enoch Adejare Adebayo,²² one of the most important persons in the history of Pentecostalism is Benson Idahosa, the founder of the church of God mission International in 1972. Most of the Pentecostal Pastors in Nigeria and their churches have him as their mentor.²³ In 1974, the Pentecostal umbrella organization Grace of God ministry was founded in eastern Nigeria. The Deeper Life Bible Church was founded in 1975, and soon became one of Nigeria's largest neo-Pentecostal churches, with an estimated

¹⁹ Allan, Anderson, “*Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.*” <http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Historical-Overview-of-Pentecostalism-in-Nigeria.aspx>, (accessed March 25, 2013).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ukah, Asonzeh, *African Christianities: Features, Promises and Problem* (Germany: Universität Bayreuth, 2007), 10.

²² Anderson, Allen “Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Nigeria” 2001. [http:// www.pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Historical-Overview-of-Pentecostalism-in-Nigeria.aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Historical-Overview-of-Pentecostalism-in-Nigeria.aspx), (accessed March 25, 2013).

²³Gaiya, Musa A.B, “The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria” 2002), <http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Historical-Overview-of-Pentecostalism-in-Nigeria.aspx>, (accessed March 25, 2013).

350,000 members by 1993.²⁴ This figure has increased over the years as the Church has spread all over the world including the United States of America.

In 1986, David Oyedepo founded Living Faith Outreach Worldwide, popularly known as Winners' Chapel. It opened a Faith Tabernacle in the suburbs of Lagos in 1999 that seats 50,000 people.²⁵ The BBC has characterized reporter carries it as follows:

If the charismatic leader of a Nigerian evangelical sect is to be believed, the Guinness Book of Records will have to be re-written, following the recent opening of what is being described as the largest church in the world. The enormous structure, known as the Faith Tabernacle, towers over the sprawling suburbs of Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, and is designed to seat some 50,000 people. A vast hexagonal building with a bright red metal roof, it only took one year to build - and many of the architects and engineers who worked on it gave their services for free. The man behind the Faith Tabernacle is Bishop David Oyedepo, the founder and head of one of the fastest growing religious movements in the world: the Pentecostal Winners' Chapel. In the past 15 years the movement it has spread right across Nigeria and beyond.²⁶

The above churches started in Nigeria by members of the existing mainline churches at that time. Their messages were like that of the traditional Pentecostal churches. There were no messages of prosperity, but only emphasis on the speaking in tongues, baptism of the Holy Spirit and emotional demonstration of the power of miracle.

Today, most Pentecostal movements in Nigeria have mutated and metamorphosed into neo-Pentecostalism and are preaching pure gospel of Prosperity with the exception of the Deeper Life Bible Church, the only existing Pentecostal movement in Nigeria that is maintaining the true theology and practice of the traditional Pentecostalism although not all people are willing to identify with them, despite their popularity in the world. People

²⁴ Ibid., 15.

²⁵ Phillips Barnaby, "Church of the 50,000 Faithful." (*BBC News*, November 30. 15:32 GMT 1999). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/542154.stm> , (accessed March 25,2013).

²⁶ Phillips Barnaby, "*Church of the 50,000 Faithful* (BBC News, November 30. 15:32 GMT 1999).

refer to them as conservative Pentecostals because of their lack of emphasis on Prosperity Gospel.

The Beginning of Neo-Pentecostalism

Neo-Pentecostals have their roots in the Pentecostal movement. However, today they are found in every church denomination. Neo-Pentecostalism emerged in the 1960s not as separate movement outside the traditional Churches but essentially as a revival movement within the confessional traditional Churches.²⁷ According to William Swaton, “In particular, neo-Pentecostals share with their Pentecostal cousin’s belief in baptism of the Holy Spirit and the related gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), healing, and prophecy.”²⁸ Pentecostalism is a group of independent sects formed by faction, while neo-Pentecostalism continues to exist as a movement within the established mainline churches trying to incorporate the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit into the mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church.²⁹ Their change in behavior was not inherited from the Holiness communions, but they come from the existing communions with well-established confessions, traditions and theologies. The membership of Pentecostalism comprise of those who are educationally and economically deprived in the society, while neo-Pentecostalism draw membership from the middle class, upper economic classes, and highly educated people in the society.³⁰

²⁷ John H. Stek, “A study Committee Reports Report 34 Neo-Pentecostalism Arts” http://www2.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/synod73_neopentecostalism.pdf (accessed March 25, 2013).

²⁸ William H. Swatos, Peter Kvisto, Ed, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (U.S.A: Altamira Press, 1988), 81.

²⁹ John H. Stek, Rpt, “A study Committee Reports, Report 34 Neo-Pentecostalism Arts”, 74, 76 Christian Reformed Church, 1971, http://www2.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/synod73_neopentecostalism.pdf (accessed March 25, 2013).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 402.

However, both Pentecostals and neo-Pentecostals share a great stress on individual religious experience and a lack of patience with traditional emphases on liturgy, and lay down rules and regulations on how things should be done. They want to see all the gifts of the Spirit being made visible in the lives of the members of the church. Added to this is the fact that they want to enforce their evangelistic zeal on all members of the church, whether it is part of the church tradition or not. They feel that testimony, prayer, praise, yielding to the Holy Spirit, and a distinct language of faith must all be taken seriously, as they are important for prayer, praise and testimony.³¹

The Beginning of the Prosperity Gospel

One cannot assume that all Pentecostals are advocates of the theology of prosperity, so it would be unfair to think that the early Pentecostal movement embraced prosperity theology. Prosperity Gospel as far as Pentecostalism is concerned is a recent development within neo-Pentecostalism as a recognizable form of the doctrine and theology that sprang up in between 1940 and 1950 as a result of the teachings of the neo-Pentecostal deliverance and healing ministers. They combine prosperity teaching with the desire to foster new interest in faith healing.³² According to Andrew Strom, “The prosperity gospel preachers refer to ‘ask and ye shall receive’ (Matt. 7:7) as the laws of faith and ‘give and it will be given back unto you’ (Lk.6:32) as the laws of divine exchange or reciprocity.”³³ This teaching is more of a give-and-take theology.

³¹ Ibid., 402-403.

³² Andrew Strom. “History of the Prosperity Gospel” (John The Baptist TV, 2012) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity_theology, (accessed March 26, 2013).

³³ Ibid.

Andrew Strom writes,

One prominent early figure in prosperity theology was E. W. Kenyon, educated in the 1890s at Emerson College of Oratory, where he was exposed to the New Thought movement. Kenyon later became connected with well-known Pentecostal leaders and wrote about supernatural revelation and positive declarations. His writing influenced leaders of the nascent prosperity movement during the post-war American healing revival.³⁴

Oral Roberts began teaching prosperity theology in 1947. He explained the laws of faith as a “blessing pact” in which God would return donations “seven fold, promising that donors would receive back from unexpected sources the money they donated to him. Roberts offered to return any donation that did not lead to an equivalent unexpected payment. In the 1970s, Roberts characterized his blessing pact teaching as the “seed faith” doctrine: donations were a form of “seed” which would grow in value and be returned to the donor. Roberts began recruiting “partners”, wealthy donors who received exclusive conference invitations and ministry access in exchange for support.³⁵

Before this time, there were many people who developed their theology within this prosperity theology. Notable among them was A. A. Allen, who wrote on the “Secret to Scriptural Financial Success,” in which he promoted the use of prayer garments and anointing, miracle oil, and “miracle tent shavings.”³⁶ He taught that faith could miraculously solve financial problems and claimed to have had a miraculous experience in which God supernaturally changed one dollar-bills into twenty-dollar bills to allow him to pay his debts.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

As time went on, the prosperity theology continued to experience change in its theology of prosperity such that in 1960s, prosperity became a primary focus in healing revivals. Although nearly all of the healing evangelists of the 1940s and 1950s taught that faith could bring financial rewards, a new prosperity-oriented teaching developed in the 1970s that differed from the one taught by Pentecostal evangelists of the 1950s. This “Positive Confession” or “Word of Faith” movement taught that a Christian with faith can speak into existence anything consistent with the will of God.³⁸

History has it that by 2006, three of the four largest congregations in the United States were preaching prosperity gospel and what made them to control such a large groups of people is their prosperity messages.³⁹ This therefore confirms the fact that Prosperity gospel is found among the neo-Pentecostals not the Pentecostals because the Pentecostals are interested on the activities of the Holy Spirit not Prosperity. This is the same situation in Nigeria.

The Neo-Pentecostal Prosperity Messages in Nigeria

The messages of the prosperity gospel preachers may vary from one continent and country to the other depending on the situation in that part of the world, although there are some characteristics of prosperity messages which are shared by all prosperity gospel preachers in the world. Since this thesis focuses on Nigeria, I wish to describe the messages of prosperity gospel from the pulpit of the Nigerian Neo-Pentecostal prosperity preachers.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

The messages of the Nigerian Neo-Pentecostal prosperity preachers do not include the message of salvation as based on faith, repentance from sin, and sanctification as provided by Jesus. They emphasize that every believer who wants to inherit the kingdom of God must be born again, and material prosperity is an outward sign of being born again. Because Nigerians are fond of celebrating financial wellbeing, the Nigerian Neo-Pentecostals believe that poverty is not the will of God for his children because part of the responsibility of God as a creator is to deliver humanity from material poverty. They think that God has already met human needs; the only thing required from human beings is prayer for God to direct them to where their prosperity and destiny is hidden. Bishop David Oyedepo, a renowned Pentecostal and the founder of the Living Faith Church in Nigeria, was quoted by Dada Oyinloye as saying that “redemption does not stop at cleansing man from sin; it restores him to dignity, health, and wealth.”⁴⁰ So financial prosperity is part of the redemption that Christ has died for; Christ died to redeem us from financial poverty. Many other Nigerian neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel preachers like Joseph Oladapo and Sunday Popoola hold that sin brings material poverty and Christ died to save humanity from the consequences of sin so those who remain poor are those who have not realized and claim their material heritage.⁴¹

One strange phrase that is often used by the Pentecostals is the phrase “breakthrough.” Some call it “financial breakthrough.” This is a situation where a born-again believer receives financial blessings from God, either through his boss in the office,

⁴⁰Dada Oyinloye “A Millionaire through Jesus: 2 Corinthians 8:9 from the Perspective of Some Nigerian Prosperity Preachers” *African Journals of Biblical Studies*, Vol 16 no 1 (April 2001 1): 85. <http://arts.ui.edu.ng/AODada> (accessed March 26th, 2013).

⁴¹M. O Oyategbe. *An Examination of Deliverance in the Christendom with Reference to Holt Ghost Praying Center* (Ilorin: African Theological College, 2005), 54.

success in business, or any other source. They say "give me your money and God will return it to you and bless you many times more."⁴² This understanding has subjected many people to abject poverty because of their struggle to please God so as to have more wealth. Others have sold their houses, land and cars, and handed over the money to the church hoping to receive blessings from God in double measures, but they ended up with nothing to depend on. The Neo-Pentecostals prosperity Pastors in Nigeria are busy buying private jets, flashy cars, and building beautiful mansions while some members are being tortured by hunger and starvation.

I was in Nigeria when a Neo-Pentecostal pastor charged his members and outsiders N1000.00 which is equivalent to \$7.00 each) r as a gate fee for entrance into the church because of the crowd that turned up on an Easter service. When asked why he did that, he said "If I don't charge them, my Pastors may not have seats inside the Church to seat on." I think what they are saying is that "God is obliged to submit to our self-serving choices, desires and greed, that He is obligated to us because of our actions, which sometimes are like investing in lottery."⁴³ But why did they come up with such a deceptive idea? The neo-Pentecostals claim that you can only claim financial breakthrough when you have accepted and embraced Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, or in other words when you are born again. God can only bless a sinner when he wants to get the attention of the sinner or when the sinner makes an ultimate decision to receive the Lord.

⁴² George Markakis. *Christian Development Revival Ministry*, 2004 <http://www.cdrm.org/CDRM/Teaching/Financial%20Breakthrough.htm>

⁴³ Ibid.

The neo-Pentecostals in Nigeria maintain uniformity when it comes to prayer during what they call “alter call.” When an alter call is made by the preacher of the day, those who have financial problems can come up for prayer. An example of such prayer was offered by Femi Emmanuel after a brief comment on Matt. 6:3; he led the “New Converts” in a sinner’s prayer thus:

Lord Jesus, I come to you today. I cannot help myself. Forgive me my sins. Cleanse me with your precious blood. Deliver me from sin and Satan so that I may serve the living God. Today, Lord Jesus, I accept you as my Lord and Savior. Thank you Jesus for saving me. Now I know that I am born again. Amen.⁴⁴

Matthew 6:33, and 3 John 2 are some of the texts of the Scripture that the neo-Pentecostals have given a unique interpretation to support the emphasis on prosperity. They claim that the physical blessing of God is consequential; meaning that material possessions give a Christian opportunity to deal with salvation, therefore God blesses and gives material possessions and wealth only to those He favors. This heresy’s admiration among Nigerian Christians has reverberated recently. Since the prosperity preachers know that people are trooping into their churches for the sake of prosperity, they take advantage of the poor and the needy and make laws that are difficult for them to observe so that when their prayers are not accepted, they will attribute the cause to their lack of obedience to the laws. By mere looking at the messages of the prosperity gospel preachers, one should be able to see it as a foreign theology that has its roots not in the bible.

The prosperity gospel, as it stands, however, has serious weaknesses. Some of these are theological. These weaknesses are the results of the faulty hermeneutical procedure that prosperity preachers adopt. Many of them never attended standard theological schools that could help them approach Bible interpretation more

⁴⁴ Femi Emmanuel 2001 cited in Contemporary State of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria" *Asia Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1: 69-95 (accessed February 18, 2013).

systematically. Unfortunately, many of them also never passed through good Sunday school classes that could have helped them in their formative years. Worse still, many prosperity preachers never underwent discipleship training after conversion. If they had been disciplined, a fair grasp of biblical theology would have influenced their formulation of prosperity theology.⁴⁵

The neo-Pentecostals do not believe that one must be educated before he can receive the call to be a preacher. They think that the Holy Spirit is enough to give a person the gift of leadership and preaching, even without attending any theological school. Folarin writes,

A major problem with the prosperity gospel as presently practiced in Nigeria is that it is not fully delivering on its promises. There are still many sincere Christians who are financially poor, sick, and/or demon oppressed. For Christians who believe in the truth of Scripture, the fault cannot be with God and his promises. It must be the interpretations that prosperity gospel preachers use to justify the theology that are wrong. Some Christians tend to believe that in the attempt to provide answers to the existence of evil on earth despite belief in an all-powerful and all-good God, preachers of prosperity have sometimes ended up creating a truncated gospel of salvation.⁴⁶

Any one in his right senses would raise some questions as to why the prosperity gospel has gained such an overwhelming acceptance in Nigeria. Professor Dannie McCain from the University of Jos Nigeria, in his response to an email, writes,

When I first moved to Nigeria and heard the heavy concentration of prosperity preaching, it would make me angry. How could these preachers so casually overlook the teachings of Jesus on simplicity and sacrifice and self-denial? How could they take a greeting from 3 John and turn it into doctrine? How dare they stand in the pulpit week after week, addressing people who live in humiliating poverty, and promise them that they would be rich? How could those people sit in the pews (or more often sit on low backless benches) and hear these glorious promises of prosperity sermon after sermon and see little if anything change in their lives? How could they continue to attend these churches and continue to

⁴⁵ George O. Folarin, "The Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria, *A Re-Examination of the Concept, Its Impact, and an Evaluation.*" <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj16/folarin.html>. (accessed February 5, 2013).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

respect the “man of God” who was promising so much when they were experiencing so little⁴⁷

The prosperity gospel in Nigeria has often worn the mask of advocating for the poor, but it is actually bad news for the poor because only the leaders or the pastors benefit from all that is collected in the church. This I call moral injustice. It is a seduction into false delusion.

Nigerians through these churches with only one thing in mind, miracles of prosperity. And as result of this, their hopes go beyond mere fulfillment of their basic needs such as health and long life, but reach out grandiosely to hopes of wealth, riches and power: new topnotch jobs, six-figure incomes, flashy cars and even private jets. Twenty first century Nigerian Christians want their enjoyment not in afterlife but now in this world. Their pastors know just what they want and have modified their pulpit sermons to suit popular tastes.⁴⁸

The prosperity gospel promises material blessings to Christians as a sign of approval and salvation by God.⁴⁹ According to John “Poverty is a curse to be banished from the lives of spirit-filled Christians not only through prayer vigils and exorcisms, but also through Christians giving generously to the Church.”⁵⁰

A pastor of one of the largest prosperity gospel churches in Lagos, Nigeria, once said in a television sermon on prosperity, "When you give to God in teaspoonful, he returns blessings to you in shovel loads." These types of messages have provoked many Nigerians to give with high expectations that at the end of the day they will regret their

⁴⁷ Danny McCain. “Prosperity Gospel Through Adopted African”
<http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10942> (Accessed February.20.2013).

⁴⁸ John,Thomas Didymus, Op-Ed: “Nigerian prosperity gospel churches fleece the poor”
<http://digitaljournal.com/article/313930#ixzz2Oesj7tTe> (Accessed on March 27/2013.)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

actions. Today, the Nigerian prosperity pastors are among the richest and most influential men in the country.

From the above discussions, it is obvious that the Christian Church in Nigeria is in great danger and if care is not taking, the Church will be dominated with this rather unfortunate message of prosperity and thereby lead to the closure of some of the mainline protestant churches for lake of membership. In order to rescue this situation, I wish to employ Martin Luther's theology of the cross to save the church in Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

BRIEF HISTORY OF LUTHER AND HIS THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

It will be of paramount important to state in brief the history of this important figure of the reformation, Martin Luther, whose theologies and writings have attracted a lot of attention than any theologian that the world has ever produced. Martin Luther was born on 10 November, 1483 in Eisleben, Germany. His father was a copper miner. Luther studied at the University of Erfurt and in 1505 decided to join a monastic order and become an Augustinian monk. He was ordained in 1507, taught at the University of Wittenberg, he excelled in 1512 to a Doctor of Theology. When he visited Rome on behalf of the 1510 on behalf of the Augustinian monasteries, he was horrified by the social problems he noticed in Rome.¹

Martin Luther had never stopped becoming increasingly angry about the clergy selling indulgences (promised remission from punishment for sin, either for someone still living or for one who had died and was believed to be in purgatory) since he visited Rome on 31 October, 1517. He decided to disclose his thoughts in the words of his 95 Theses, against the sale of indulgences.

Central to Luther is the understanding that Christians are saved through faith and not through their own efforts. This idea made Luther different from any other Monk of his time and it also turned him against the foremost theologies of the Roman Catholic

¹ Fredric Nohl. *Martin Luther: Hero Of Faith* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 1-3.

Church. In 1519-1520, he revealed his interest in Christian liberty and wrote a series of brochures on Christian Liberty, the Freedom of a Christian Man, the Christian Nobility, and the Babylonian Captivity of the Church. His work on the 95 Theses and his other writings spread so quickly through Europe.

Luther's work was a huge awareness to many scholars of his time and it showed that people were dying from ignorance without any one to liberate them. This is seen in the level of challenge the 95 thesis and other writings of Luther has posed on the Roman Catholic Church. Who could have thought that the Reformation would be launched by Martin Luther's Ninety-Five in October 1517 could bring this total change in the life of the Roman Catholic Church.² According to Carl R. Trueman, "The document itself simply proposed the framework for a university debate. Luther was arguing only for a revision of the practice of indulgences, not its abolition. He was certainly not offering an agenda for widespread theological and ecclesiastical reform."³ He had wished that the Church would embrace these proposals so he could enjoy the cake of his proposed reforms as a Catholic.

Luther made many provocative statements in his disputation against Scholastic Theology of September 4, 1517, in which he criticized all the medieval theological understanding for centuries, but there was no resistance, until "some unique combination of external factors social, economic, and political that made the later disputation the spark that lit the Reformation rage."⁴ Since then, Luther's spiritual struggle has continued to

² Carl R. Trueman. "Luther's Theology of the Cross Philadelphia:" *New Horizons*, October 2005. www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH05/10b.html (Accessed on March 26/2013).

³ Ibid.

⁴ McNally, Robert Edwin. 1967. "Ninety-five theses of Martin Luther: 1517-1967." *Theological Studies* 28, no. 3 (accessed on March 3, 2013).

attract and provoke a lot of thought from many theologians all over the world. Many people have used the challenges of Luther to amend some of their theological incapacitations and in respond to the challenges of bad theologies then and now.

An Introduction to Martin Luther's Theology of The Cross

Luther's theology has responded to the understanding of prosperity as perpetrated by the Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel preachers. Before I continue, I wish to state that Luther's theology of the cross was not just a formulation and interest that came outside of the biblical witness but an expression of biblical witness rooted in biblical witness like, Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross. (Phil. 2: 5 -9)

The Greek says ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβῶν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος (Phil. 2:7). He took the form of the slave before emptying himself. Christ opens himself in longing for the community of the world even to death; he took the risk to love. This is pure servant-hood which is no more relevant in the world than in the Church of God. Humility has been left to the poor; a prayer for everlasting life is considered a prayer of poor persons who have nothing to live on than to wait for the call of God Almighty.

Christian spiritual formation is growing in conformity to Christ, Jesus had it all before becoming human, though he was equal with God, he did not exploit his status, nor did he take advantage of his supreme authority for selfish ends. Instead, he emptied himself to others in life and in death. The signs of Jesus' spirituality are humility,

obedience and in recognition of this life of humility and obedience, God exalted him above all others. Jesus then became our model for spiritual formation. Humility pays, though it takes time to be recognized. What dismisses humility from the world is our constant demand for wealth instead of the word of God. Take it or leave it, there is no man whose position in the society or in his religion can be compared with Jesus in any form. Yet this same Jesus humbled himself even to the point of die a shameful death on the cross. Palmer wrote “This is significant because one’s view of God’s nature often determines our own behavior. If God is compassionate, then we too should be compassionate.”⁵ The cross has been the mark of those who have made godly decisions to follow Jesus: “He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Mk. 8:34, 35). The theology of the cross is reflected in this statement. Anyone whose level of obedience does not measure to this statement is not a real Christian.

Theologians should as a matter of urgency advocate for the theology of the cross, or Christianity is likely to lose its image and identity to other religions of the world. The spread of the theology of glory as Luther calls it is a bad omen for the Christian church today. No one wants to associate Christianity with the cross anymore because all eyes pointing to Christ today are full of desperation for material gains. The love of one’s neighbor is no more, and personal interest has dominated the whole of Christendom. Gone are the days Christians will wait for the Lord to reward them. Today all the

⁵ Palmer P Timothy, “Martin Luther’s Theology of The Cross in the Nigerian Context.”. Jos: TCNN Bukuru, http://www.tcn.org/index_files/palmerluther.html. (accessed on November, 23rd 2012).

heavenly reward and packages meant for the believers are being demanded by the saints here on earth. This proves that many who answer to the name “Christian” today do not know the uniqueness of Christianity as a religion. Many of them try to distance God from the cross, making God far away from the cross. The cross is not seen as revelation of the humanity of God’s love at all. Little do they know that the cross reveals the compassionate heart of God that seeks out those who are abandoned and in distress. I consider the theology of the cross as the spring board that lifts a believer and places him into the cure of the Christian redemptive plan of God. It opens the gates of the understanding of God’s intention to save humanity.

If we really want to understand the cross, then we must view the crucifixion of Jesus as a fearful event. Notice that even the disciples of Jesus could not withstand the fear that grabbed them and so all fled from their master’s cross. According to Jürgen Moltman, “Christians who do not have the feeling that they must flee the crucifixion of Christ have probably not yet understood him in a sufficiently radical way.”⁶ May be they are taking the crucifixion for granted. “Why is the church the focus of such hate and violence? Why would Christians glory in such suffering? The answer to both questions is the same: The Gospel. The church suffers persecution because it preaches the Word of God and doggedly insists on the Gospel alone and Christ alone.”⁷

The relationship of the world and God is such that God's Word must be attacked. Our own flesh, the world, and the Devil, all insist that the Gospel be silenced. And they

⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).37-38.

⁷ Robert A. Kelly, “The Suffering Church: A Study of Luther's Theologia Crucis”: (Concordia Theological Quarterly: <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/kellysufferingchurch.pdf> (accessed March 27, 2013).

will use every weapon available to oppose those who insist on proclaiming Christ alone.

Here, Luther makes an important distinction. Luther writes,

The holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord's Prayer indicates) inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God's word, enduring this for the sake of Christ...⁸

This means that the persecution of the church must only be because of the preaching of the Word, not because Christians are involved in behavior of questionable ethics. In addition, it is not mere suffering, but suffering for the sake of Christ and his Gospel which is the church's treasure. Luther thinks that wisdom has nothing to do with the cross because the cross is on parallel lines with the wisdom of men. When Luther quotes Isa. 45:15, he means that God is hidden before those who rely on wisdom. But those who trust in the cross, God is made visible. Luther added

The manifest and visible things of God are placed in opposition to the invisible, namely, his human nature, weakness, foolishness. The Apostle in 1 Cor. 1[:25] calls them the weakness and folly of God. Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of the wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering.⁹

This is exactly what our neo-Pentecostal brothers in Nigeria are lacking. They try to disassociate the prosperity from the cross. They present to the world the generous side of God that and reserve the side of suffering to those who to identify with suffering. This is their confusion and their major error. They lack the knowledge of God hidden in the

⁸Martin Luther, Timothy F. Lull, and William R. Russell, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd / ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005). 375.

⁹LW, *Career of the Reformer*. 52-53.

cross. The only way we can worship the God who is hidden in his suffering is to have the understanding of Luther's theology of the cross.

Luther's Theology of the Cross

One of the writings of Luther that attracted a lot concern in his time was the theology of the cross. This is because no one thought that there was anything good in writing about the cross and its brutality. People make reference to the cross only casually but not as an experience that should provoke any theological discussions. In the days of Luther, the church was characterized by a lot of crises which included the falling down of the great scholastic theological system of Thomas Aquinas, promoting personal advancement and glory, while the glory of God was distant. This resulted in hardship in finding Jesus.¹⁰ The Medieval Church generated the emergence of Scholasticism. It attempted to integrate Christianity with current thoughts and employ the use of reason and faith to understand the gospel. All these attempts failed to give a clear answer to the way of salvation. The medieval church claimed that salvation came through the church and its sacraments, but later there was misunderstanding about one's own salvation and whether or not one can merit salvation. In the early sixteenth century, since the traditional religious culture seemed no longer able to deal effectively with the religious anxiety and idealism of many people, there was massive failure of the Church in meeting the spiritual needs of its people.¹¹ In addition to this failure was immense corruption within the church leadership. The higher authority of the clergy at Rome and elsewhere were engaged in

¹⁰ Timothy P. Palmer. "Martin Luther's Theology of the Cross in the Nigerian Context" http://www.tcn.org/index_files/palmerluther.html (accessed March, 28/2013).

¹¹ Timothy P. Palma cited Steven E. Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1980). 211-216.

political conspiracies to enhance their status. Everyone wanted to exercise authority over the other. Even the “Bishops used their authority to extract money from the lower clergy and the laity; and the priests did the same to the laity.”¹² The crucified Christ was moved to background and the truth of the cross was hidden from the Church. This is what Luther called in his day a “theology of glory.”¹³ Because it stood in great disparity with the theology of the cross as the church authorities including the laity have all abandoned the gospel for personal gains.

One of the claims of Luther that made his displeasure on prosperity so vivid was the whole scam of the sale of indulgencies in 1517. While commenting on his 95 theses, Luther wrote this is evidence that since the scholastic theology (which he calls “deceiving” or “deceptive” theology) began, the cross has been turned up-side- down and there was no recognition of the crucified and the hidden God.¹⁴

When we talk of the theology of the cross, we are referring to the various assumptions of all possible versions of this event that show God’s absolute involvement in the life of the world, the reality of God’s love in the world, and the obligation of God to fulfill creation’s promise as described in John. 3:16: “for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. This love is shown on the cross.”¹⁵ Douglas Hall writes

The theology of the cross, at its most rudimentary, is nothing more or less than a rapt, ongoing contemplation of the commentary upon this foundational claim of Christian faith. Unlike the theologies of glory, which invariably tend to supersede creation in favor of a supramundane redemption, the theology of the cross is

¹²Ibid., 211-216.

¹³LW 31: *Career of the Reformer. HeidelebergDespotation*.53.

¹⁴ Ibid., 225-227.

¹⁵ Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis:: Fortress Press, 2003). 35.

bound to the world in all of its materiality, ambiguity, and incompleteness. It will not-cannot - opt for a doctrine of redemption; however theoretically or spiritually appealing, that in effect bypasses or contradicts the biblical affirmation of creation.¹⁶

What God desires from us is that commitment to his service and not an abstraction. Associating with Jesus is considered to be shameful by those who do not want suffering to be mentioned in connection to Jesus. A shining example is the statement of Antonio Machado, who said “I cannot, nor will I sing to that Jesus on the cross, but to the one who walked on the sea.”¹⁷ By false devotion, he prefers to worship the Jesus who miraculously walked on the sea, but not the Jesus who was crucified on the cross. Luther claims that when you possess the cross, you equally believe that Christians suffer every form of persecution, pain, conscience, and actual persecution.¹⁸ The reason for the suffering must be purely because Christians want to preach only Christ and adhere to God's Word. Jesus in his sermon on the mount said “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt. 5:11-12).

The attachment of scandal and brutality as a description of the cross of Jesus dates back to the early days of Christianity. Some felt that the cross presents a tragic even which creates fear and therefore goes against the ethics of love. Many others rely solely

¹⁶ Ibid., 35-36.

¹⁷ Armand F. Baker, “The final solitude of the poet Antonio Machado” http://www.armandfbaker.com/translations/biography/final_solitude_4.pdf (accessed March 28, 2013).

¹⁸ Kelly, Robert A. "The suffering Church: a study of Luther's Theologia Crucis." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 1986), <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/kellysufferingchurch.pdf> (accessed on March 28/2013).

on the resurrection because it has pushed the scandal of the cross to the background and project the victory of the death of Jesus rather than his death on the cross.

Luther writes, “Just as there is no greater iniquity than the highest iniquity, no greater injustice than the highest justice, no greater loss than the greatest gain, so there is no greater adversity than prosperity and no greater danger than no danger at all.”¹⁹ Luther claims that “Nothing is safe where everything is safe, nothing so sick as when everything is healthy, there is no temptation when all is temptation, no persecution when all is persecution.”²⁰ Since the prosperity gospel has made all things look like good at all times without suffering, Luther thinks that the Devil has succeeded by turning people from the awareness of the presence of persecution and now battles the church using the highest level of persecution so that the church does not recognize persecution.²¹ Luther adds that “Therefore woe to us, who are so snatched away by present things and foolishly do not see the Devil’s trap. We act like the foolish heir who knew only how to squander the magnificent estate left by his parents and did nothing to build it up but always carried away from the pile.”²² For Luther, wealth, power, and lack of persecution are great dangers the church face in his day. He claimed that church security is a trap from the devil leading priests, bishops, and the pope to act like imprudent inheritors who do not add to their inheritance but only waste it.²³

Even in the later years, people were afraid of prosperity and its dangers and people spoke out against it because it constituted a problem in the church. Luther states in

¹⁹ Ibid., 361.

²⁰ Ibid., 361.

²¹ Ibid., 361.

²² Ibid., 361.

²³ Ibid., 361.

the commentary on the Magnificat in 1521, that the church cannot enjoy any defense from the wealthy people because they are not ready to lose their wealth and possessions. This is the kind of attitude that Luther calls “outright idolatry.”²⁴ This was further demonstrated in the church postil of 1522 on the gospel lesson for Epiphany, where Luther challenges the clergy for their prosperity and accuses them of betraying the cross of Christ. This is because the priests have turned real suffering into jewelry: they have set the cross in silver, simplifying its meaning and its message so that it becomes easy to bear without hurting. To their eternal dismay, such a cross cannot ever become a part of their hearts and lives, but a mere decoration of the body.

For Luther, those who thought that wealth is a sign of God’s favor are idol and an obstacle to the true faith, and the Sermon on the Mount is directed against just this heresy.²⁵ I think even the disciples of Jesus thought that Jesus was going to establish a temporal empire and make them lords of the empire as a compensation for all they had left to follow him. People always want to find honor, power, and advantage in the gospel, while Jesus teaches that they have a wrong impression of his kingdom.²⁶ For Luther, the ignorance of the people over the years has made them create problems that have been solved through the death of Jesus.²⁷

To show how Luther hates emphasis on prosperity in the church, Luther prayed that the church should never be prosperous and outwardly successful, for that would

²⁴ Ibid., 361.

²⁵ LW 21, *The Sermon on The Mount the Magnificat*. 11-17.

²⁶ Ibid., 107.

²⁷ LW 27, *Lectures on Galatians*, 280.

surely mean that the message being preached was a message of salvation by works.²⁸ I guess that the prosperity of the church should be more inward than outward because, according to Luther, the glory and power of riches is not the true glory of the church; rather, like Paul the church glory in the cross of Christ. I also think that the sign of the presence of Christ is felt more in the church that was once persecuted than the one that has never experienced persecution.²⁹ Apostle Paul says “for you are called to freedom, brothers and sister; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become a slaves to one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Though many preachers of prosperity gospel may claim to enjoy the wealth which they extort from their members in the name of preaching, Luther is expressing fears that prosperity based on the history of the Church was the genesis of the corruption of the church. Luther compared the trials of the church to the three temptations of Christ: First the church was tried by persecution under Roman emperors, second by heresies, and third by wealth and power under the Pope.³⁰ But I believe that even today, just as it was in the time of Luther, wealth and power are the most harmful viruses that have troubled the church’s expansion spirituality. Since ecclesiastical prosperity has continued to be a hindrance to spiritual growth, it is better for the church to accept suffering, (taking up the cross) just as Christ has suffered for the Church, than to use an unholy and devilish means in order to gain temporary riches. The bible says “For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?” (Matthew 16:27).

²⁸ LW 27, 45.

²⁹ Ibid., 135.

³⁰ LW, 54, *Table Talk*, 79.

The only way Christians can wear the yoke of Christ and feel his burden is by accepting suffering for the sake of the gospel of Christ. Christians must bear the suffering because the world is against the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our willingness and commitment to the preaching of the gospel exposes us to suffering and persecution by those who are enemies of the word of God. Therefore, suffering is part of the spiritual exercise of a believer and God's grace is seen in the suffering of the Church. Because of this, the church's suffering is a gift of grace and is pleasing to God. Over-dependence upon prosperity limits out knowledge of God. Therefore those who are theologians of glory always want to find God outside of Christ should consider the fact that Christ is not a separate being from God.

The cross is more than a fashion to be worn just to celebrate an event. Luther, in his well-articulated claim, writes,

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers, works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said therefore. The friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's.³¹

No one can claim to love Christ if he is an enemy of the cross. All who love Christ and confesses Christ as saviors must accept the reality of the cross.

³¹ Luther, Lull, and Russell, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*.58.

CHAPTER THREE
LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS
VERSES THE NEO-PENTECOSTAL ON PROSPERITY GOSPEL

The soundest Lutheran critique of the prosperity gospel is from the use of the Theology of the Cross as presented by Luther. Luther's theology of the cross does not just limit its challenges to the prosperity gospel, it has also confronts all biblical teachings that use the scripture just to fix a problem of the gospel whose aim is to achieve a particular emphases on holiness, tradition or other enthusiastic variation.

There is contrast between a theology of the cross and the gospel of prosperity as practiced by the neo-Pentecostals. The two, the cross and prosperity, are on parallel lines. While the cross is emphasizing the suffering of Christ for our salvation, some prosperity preachers are making salvation by grace very expensive by going back to works. This is contained in the belief by the neo-Pentecostals that prosperity is a mark of righteousness and giving/donating to the church can add to the person's chance of earning salvation. According to this thinking, financial prosperity is part of the redemption of Christ and Christ died to redeem us from financial poverty. They taught that sin brings material poverty and Christ died to save humanity from the consequences of sin, so those who remain poor are those who have not realized or claimed their material heritage.¹ This shows how shallow and false theology can lead to deception. God is not just present in

¹ Dada Oyinloye "A Millionaire through Jesus: 2 Corinthians 8:9 from the perspective of some Nigerian Prosperity Preachers" *African Journals of Biblical Studies*, Vol 16 (April 2001 no 1), 85. <http://arts.ui.edu.ng/AODada> (accessed March 26th, 2013).

the midst of abundance, growth and excess, but is also found in the midst of the poor beggars, the less privileged, the marginalized, the suffering, the weak, the powerless, the widowed, and the orphaned. This confirms the fact that a theologian of the cross should not expect to find God where human beings think God ought to be. Rather, a theologian of the cross should take as his point of departure the “humility and shame of the cross.”² Only prosperity gospel preachers use glory as their departure point. It is very difficult to limit God to what humans say he is.

One may think that Luther was only challenging the one section of the neo-Pentecostal theology prosperity which has to do with money and wealth, but he challenged virtually all their beliefs which he thinks are contrary to what the scriptures. For example, Luther does not believe in adult baptism, which the Pentecostals call the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He made clear in his explanation of the third article of the creed as contained in the Small Catechism thus,

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sin and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.³

Human beings must depend on God for direction. The Holy Spirit of God is a gift to us by God. We do not merit it, and neither will our possessions buy it for us. God is the provider of all things that are good to those whom he wishes. Luther advised the

² Martin Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation in Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd edition, ed. Timothy Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 57.

³ Martin Luther, *A short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism. A Handbook of Christian Doctrine* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), 123.

Christians in the sixteenth century that “he who is a Christian must also bear a cross. And the more you are wronged, the better it is for you. Therefore, you must accept such a cross willingly from God and thank Him. This is true suffering that is pleasing to God.”⁴ In fact, those who do not understand Luther thought that Luther was encouraging and supporting the system of oppression by demanding self-sacrifice and suffering from the weak, thereby justifying the oppression and abuse of the powerful. Christians instead should resist suffering and not to seek suffering because of the cross. As I mentioned above, what Luther is saying is that we accept the risk of persecution as we engage in the preaching of the gospel.

Pentecostals in Nigeria on Poverty

It is true that poverty has become a serious issue in Nigeria and any effort to fight it will be highly applauded. Neo-Pentecostals have linked some causes of poverty with demonic attacks, spirits and witch craft because they want people to come to them for solution. Since human beings cannot challenge the spirits in a physical fight, many are tempted to go to the Neo-Pentecostal prosperity churches feeling that the mainline churches do not offer healing and deliverance from spirits and witch crafts. Most Neo-Pentecostal churches have testimonies of deliverance that are difficult to ignore. And the constant rush to these churches for solution to the problem of poverty. This has prompted some of the neo-Pentecostal prosperity preachers to take further steps away from Christ in order to search for a diabolic means of controlling the members so that the message of the prosperity gospel can have a proper footing in their lives.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 30, ed. J. Pelikan and W. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 84.

If there is any country in Africa in which prosperity gospel can best be preached, then Nigeria is that country. Prosperity is flourishing in Nigeria because the God's given resources are being shared only by those in strategic positions in Government, thereby leaving the masses in abject poverty. The Scriptures have spelled it clearly in Prov.10: 15b that "...the poverty of the poor is their ruin." these two words, "poverty" and "prosperity," cannot be separated; both cannot co-exist. Poverty can only visit when prosperity is absent and vice versa. I like what Victor says about poverty in Nigeria. George O Folarin cites Dike as saying that, "he who is poor in the West may be perceived as rich in Nigeria and he who is poor in Nigeria is sometimes seen as prosperous in some other African countries."⁵

The level of poverty and the need to be wealthy by all means has contributed to the spread of neo-Pentecostalism. All those who are under torture by poverty will be looking for an opportunity to get out of it. Pentecostals in Nigerian have noticed that the only message of the gospel that will gain acceptance in the midst of poverty is the prosperity gospel and so according to the preachers of prosperity the introduction of neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria and its prosperity message is the only means of poverty eradication. Many other Nigerian pastors are similarly building multi-million dollar empires for their churches. Today, Pastors fly around in private jets, drive fancy cars like Daimlers, Porsches and BMWs, don Rolexes and Patek Phillipes, and own breathtaking mansions all over the world. According to Ronke Badmus, in 2012 the following are the resources of some Nigerian prosperity Pastors: Bishop David Oyedepo of the Living Faith (which is also known as the Winners Chapel) has a net worth of \$150 million; Chris

⁵ George O Folarin. "Poverty in Nigeria": *How valid are the emerging Responses from Three Selected Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria to Poverty* (Journal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research #21, <http://www.ptii.org.cyber/cyber21/Folarin.htm>. (accessed on Feb 21, 2013), 4.

Oyakhilome of Believers' Love world (also known as Christ Embassy) has a net worth of \$30 - \$50 million; Temitope Balogun Joshua of Synagogue Church Of All Nations (SCOAN) has a net worth of \$10 - \$15 million; Matthew Ashimolowo of Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC) has \$6 – \$10 million; Chris Okotie of Household of God Church; has \$3 – \$10 million.⁶ None of these churches is thirty five years old and the pastors are not trained theologians, but experts in their respective areas of specialization.

The desire for wealth has brought about millions in Nigeria flooding to join the neo-Pentecostal churches, where vows of miraculous healing and promises of pending fortunes are attracting the sick and poor. Nigeria is estimated to have the world's third largest population of Pentecostals, with 3.9 million members, following Brazil with 24 million members and the United States with about six million adherents, according to the World Christian database.⁷

Rt. Rev. Nyansako-ni-Nku, having noticed the alarming situation of the growth of neo-Pentecostalism and its prosperity gospel theology, decided to urge mainline churches to rescue people who are being lured by controversial Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel messages, and to protect vulnerable people that are being exploited by the neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel, which he described as “a disease.”⁸

⁶ Ronke, Badmus “List of the Richest Pastors in Nigeria” December 2, 2012 <http://www.nigerianbusinesslinks.com/article/list-of-the-richest-pastors-in-nigeria-2012/>. (accessed March 5, 2013).

⁷ Ethan Cole, “Christian Today” *US Correspondent Posted: Monday, September 17, 2007, 8:26 (BST)* <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/nigerian.pentecostalism.thriving.on.miracles.prosperity.promises/13235.htm> (accessed March 5, 2013).

⁸Wilson, James A. “A Surge of One Disease Called Pentecostalism” Mon, 22 Jan 2007 <http://archive.wfn.org/2007/01/msg00247.html>.(accessed February 20, 2013).

Luther's Challenge of the Prosperity Gospel

Martin Luther's theological background does not compromise or concur with any theology that is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures. He believes in "*Sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *Sola fide* (by faith alone), *Sola gratia* (by grace alone), *Solus Christus* or *Solo Christo* (Christ alone or through Christ alone), *Soli Deo gloria* (glory to God alone)."⁹ These are his grounds for justification and he opposes all forms of heresy, regardless of the source of the heresy. Luther's interpretation of the scriptures is still relevant in our time, which proves how versed he was and how well his theology can challenge modern-day theological mistakes. I believe Luther noticed that prosperity gospel had some theological lapses which involved twisting the words of scripture out of context thereby making the gospel look offensive. His understanding of the canon within the canon informed his teaching of the dual messages of law and gospel. In fact, the canon is not of a personal making, and not how Luther discovered the gospel when he was reading and interpreting the scripture. Within the canon of scripture, not using sources outside of the canon, he found that there exists not only the canon of law but also of grace or gospel and these are two very distinct messages.

One big problem that Luther's theology has noticed within the prosperity gospel is the lack of the distinction between Law and Gospel. Luther's commentary on the Ten Commandments and the Ten Commandments themselves shows how God prohibits covetousness;¹⁰ today the decision to receive what people want depends on the faith of the receiver. According to Samuel Wang, "This misreading of the law into a gospel to be

⁹ Gregg Strawbridge "The Five Solas of the Reformation" 1993 <http://www.fivesolas.com/5solas.htm> (accessed February 25, 2013)..

¹⁰ Ethan, Cole. "Christian Today US Correspondent Posted:" Monday, September 17, 2007, 8:26.

received by faith is at the root of the whole debacle of the wrong interpretation of scripture. Furthermore, the gospel had become good news of material well-being and benefit, feeding the sin of covetousness”¹¹ such that the sin of covetousness can no longer be challenged. Though the gospel may still be good news, it is limited to good news for material possession and aiding the sin of greed.¹² The message and attitude of the prosperity gospel preachers cannot be separated from stealing. Stealing and covetousness can take different forms; any one reading Luther’s theology will understand that what we call “prosperity gospel” today is stealing. Luther writes,

For to steal is nothing else than to acquire someone else’s property by unjust means. These few words include taking advantage of our neighbors in any sort of dealings that result in loss to them. Stealing is a widespread, common vice, but people pay so little attention to it that the matter is entirely out of hand. As a result, if we were to hang every thief on the gallows, especially those who do not admit it, the world would soon be empty and there would be a shortage of both hangmen and gallows. For, as I just said, stealing is not just robbing someone’s safe or pocketbook but also taking advantage of someone in the market, in all stores, butcher shops, wine and beer cellars, workshops, and, in short, wherever business is transacted and money is exchanged for goods or services.¹³

Prosperity gospel preachers hardly condemn a person for not believing in God, but they blame you for not offering for the work of God. As far as I am concerned, there is nothing called “offering” in the neo-Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, but extortion and a complete stealing through threat. I consider all the members of the church as neighbors and friends and if God wants us to love our neighbor as ourselves, then the love of neighbor is not among the prosperity gospel preachers. If I love my neighbor, then I

¹¹ Samuel Wang. “A Lutheran Critique of the False Gospel of Prosperity Lutheran Theology Study Group” <http://lutherantheologystudygroup.blogspot.com/2010/11/lutheran-critique-of-false-gospel-of.html>

¹²Ibid.

¹³Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert Ed, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*.(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 417.

definitely cannot extort money from him in the name of the gospel. This kind of stealing is not forceful, but with diplomacy, so that no calls them thieves. They hate the name thief, and yet practice stealing. Luther writes,

First, we are forbidden to do our neighbors any injury or wrong in any way imaginable, whether by damaging, withholding, or interfering with their possessions and property. We are not even to consent to or permit such a thing but are rather to avert and prevent it. In addition, we are commanded to promote and further our neighbors' interests, and when they suffer any want, we are to help, share, and lend to both friends and foes. Anyone who seeks and desires good works will find here more than enough things to do that are heartily acceptable and pleasing to God. Moreover, God lavishes upon them a wonderful blessing, and generously rewards us for what we do to benefit and befriend our neighbor, as King Solomon also teaches in Proverbs 19:17: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and will be repaid in full." Here you have a rich Lord, who is surely sufficient for your needs and will let you lack or want for nothing. Thus with a happy conscience you can enjoy a hundred times more than you could scrape together by perfidy and injustice. Whoever does not desire this blessing will find wrath and misfortune enough.¹⁴

It surprises me why a pastor can steal from the sheep which God has entrusted into his hands. Luther feels that God is rich enough to supply all our needs such that we he will not let us lack anything. Why can we trust God and yet steal from our neighbors that we are supposed to love? I think the prosperity gospel preachers are not being sympathetic to the church of God.

The other problem is the mistake of wealth and health gospel which I mentioned in my introduction. The advocating of wealth and health gospel is another error of the prosperity preachers; they lack the understanding of the dual nature of the governance of

¹⁴ Ibid., 419-420.

God in this world. This makes the prosperity gospel preachers lie that there is an assurance of healing to all kinds of diseases if only we have faith.¹⁵

There is no understanding that God works through means primarily in the earthly matters of this world, and he heals through the means of nurses, doctors, medication, and so on. Yet he is not constrained by the use of means, he can instead just say the word, or even think the thought and we can be healed. However, that is not always the way God works in this world. He usually and almost always uses earthly means for our earthly good.¹⁶

Therefore, as far as God is concerned, everything he has made is important and he works through them to actualize his set goals. According to Samuel Wang,

But in the spiritual realm, where he uses the gospel there is always the means of grace that God uses, earthly substances such as water, bread and wine can be used as a means of receiving his grace, and he offers us the grace of forgiveness of sins primarily in the spiritual realm through the Word, becoming visible in the waters of Baptism and the bread and wine of the Holy Communion. The only receptor of grace is faith, and you receive spiritual benefits, not earthly ones.¹⁷

Our problems begin when the two ways in which God governs and controls the two kingdoms are mixed up; we become vulnerable to deceptive theology of prosperity. Luther's distinctive separation of the two kinds of theologians in the *Heidelberg Disputation* explains in clear terms that those who glory in the things of this world do not call something for what it is. The theologians of the cross look at God who had chosen to reveal himself, on the cross as our blessed Lord and Savior.¹⁸

The prosperity gospel seeks to free Christians of the reality of life in this world. This teaching transports Christians away from the suffering that one can and will face in

¹⁵ "A Lutheran Critique of the False Gospel of Prosperity Lutheran Theology Study Group." <http://lutherantheologystudygroup.blogspot.com/2010/11/lutheran-critique-of-false-gospel-of.html> (accessed on March 7th 2013).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *The Heidelberg Disputation in Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 58.

this life, and through that suffering to see God in it and drops them into a the paradise of a generous God who knows no suffering or identifies with those who suffer. Those who do not understand Jesus from the point of the cross have missed the special mystery of the cross. The scripture prophesies that,

He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:3-6)

The prosperity gospel is advocating for the exoneration of Christians from the real life that this world provides by moving them away from the suffering in this life so that they don't see suffering as a means through which they can see God. The theologian of glory just like the prosperity gospel preacher presents a God who is not a suffering God and will not subject his children to suffering, but grants all their desires at all times. I doubt if this is the right picture of God. Neither is it the right picture of the cross.¹⁹ The Bible mentions that "he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed (Isa. 53:5 NRSV). This does not mean that Christians are healed by the stripes of Jesus, because the stripes were not for physical benefit but for a spiritual redemption from sin by Jesus, who knew no sin or it involves salvation and God's redemption of creation, new heaven and new earth where there will be no more tears, sicknesses and pain.

¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

The prosperity preachers claim that the stripes of Jesus bring physical healing and financial. Exchanging this redemptive work of Christ for anything else is a theological error.²⁰ The interpretation of the cross by the prosperity preachers is an error because they believe that the healing that one enjoys from the stripes of Jesus is a physical healing from diseases and financial problems. Luther, in his understanding, would not like to put a distinction between the cross and resurrection. For Luther, the resurrection is not the existing misfortune of the cross, but the presentation of its success and the victory it already achieved. This can be achieved only through divine freedom: God is not obliged to embrace fallen creation. Jesus Christ could have said no to the cross, which would mean that God is succumbing to human worldly commonality.²¹ We should not look at the cross as the cross, is not simply the point at which God atones for sin; but through the cross, God has revealed his attitude towards creation.

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*. 235.

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This chapter wishes to review the whole content of this thesis in order to immerse the readers into the reality of what it means to use the theology of the cross to counter the prosperity gospel. The havoc caused by the prosperity gospel preachers on the Christian religion in Nigeria calls for an urgent approach or the Church of God may lose its integrity in A few years to come. This thesis considered Luther's theology as the best response to this scenario.

As stated in the introduction, this thesis is aimed at exploring Martin Luther's theology of the cross in the face of the challenge of neo-Pentecostal movement and its Prosperity Gospel message in Nigeria. The thesis has taken into consideration Martin Luther's early life as a Catholic priest, His understanding of the theology of the cross and how it relates to his entire theology has, taken into consideration his disputation against scholastic theology in 1517, his Ninety Five Theses, Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, and his interpretation of the Ten Commandments. In all these Luther has remained steadfast in his argument that a theologian is not the one who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened. But whoever comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross. Clearly distinguishes between a theologian of glory and the theologian of the cross. Luther claims that a theologian of glory calls evil good and good

evil, while a theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.¹ I call those who preach prosperity theologians of glory, based on Luther's claim that "God can be found only in suffering and the cross."² If one does not recognize suffering as part of the Christian race and experience, but prefers only prosperity, then he is not fit to be called a theologian.

Luther thought that the work of God within the life of a sinner is a work which confirms sinners to the cross of Christ. This is one face of Luther's theology of the cross. God sometimes works in the opposite way. He brings us life and victory by conforming us to death and the cross. Our suffering is being used by God to bring life out of death, hope out of despair, and healing out of hurt. He acts as the healing power in nature as well as in history and he is present in moments of suffering, despair and defeat. So Luther's theology of the cross challenges the prosperity gospel by insisting that Christian faith cannot distance itself from the cross and suffering because the importance of Christian faith is to suffer for others.

No desire for wealth and power is enough to separate a believer from the love of God. There is only one cross on which Christ was crucified and on this very cross our salvation is being assured.

I have a few questions here for the Neo-Pentecostal preachers of prosperity Gospel.

- Did God not promised to meet the needs of his people as an expression of his Fatherly kindness within his sovereign will?

¹ Martin Luther, "The Heidelberg Disputation" in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 257-58.

²Ibid., 58.

- Is God's old covenant not physical blessing to Israel and its kings?
- Is the Bible's teaching of blessing by the will of God expressed through the consequences of wise choices or the consequences of obedience?
- Is God complaining that our demands are too much for him to handle?
- Has God ceased to be our creator, sustainer and provider?
- How do you interpret Psalms 23:1-6?

The Bible teaches us that “we seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness; all these things will be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). This is not an appeal to materialism or the desire for wealth; it is dependence on God and on the freedom of God to provide in whatever situation we find ourselves. God's provision is not a promise to enrich, but to provide as needed for our lives as we live out his Kingdom's purposes.

Yet the Prosperity Gospel preachers presume that God wants us to be rich, that the blessings of the gospel are a guarantee to material and financial blessings now. The mediation of Jesus makes all blessing possible, but it does not guarantee wealth or health, and it has become a denial and replacement of the true meaning of “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11)..

The Neo-Pentecostals manipulation comes in different shapes and colors with the major aim of stripping people their belongings to enrich themselves. The art of worshiping and serving God has wielded out of the Biblical norms to a display of magic and witchcraft. A few people who brand themselves “Men of God” and go about with panache of wealth usurped from the poor masses have milked from the flock and turned the Bible upside down for their purposes.

Conclusion

One of Luther's fundamental statements is *simul Justus et peccator* (We are both righteous/Saints and sinners). In all ramifications, we are 100% sinners and saints. The righteousness Luther is referring to is always an alien righteousness. Our lives as Saints are hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). Some neo-Pentecostals understand their experience with the Spirit as an ambiguous experience, an experience on higher level or order than what other Christians have experienced. It is true that all Christians are righteous and sinners at the same time, but what do we do if a sinner sins against God thinking he is performing an act of righteousness?

This is exactly why Lutherans reject the view of abundant life proposed by the Prosperity Gospel preachers (i.e., if you give God something, God will bless you in return). Then what kind of life is promised to those who are justified and renewed as an aspect of new life that is promised to us? Is this not trying to limit God's blessing to only the rich? Since God can only bless us when we give him something, what becomes of those who have nothing to offer? Are we not suggesting that the grace of God should be expensive rather than free?

Any preacher or church leader in Nigeria or elsewhere in the world whose intention is always to appease his hearers will end up misleading the people. Prosperity preachers will constantly attempt to make their hearers feel good. This is because they care about the number of people in their churches, not the spiritual maturity of the congregation. In fact, today, even an atheist can listen to the prosperity gospel and feel good. They wish to unite the world no matter who believes what. Their focus is peace and happiness instead of God's honor.

Recommendations

I wish to recommend that the most needed thing within the Neo-Pentecostal theology at this point is much patience. This is an important companion for those who live with the theology of glory. They need to hear that life's problems are conquered when we become aware that God loves us for who we are as sinners and not for our glorious imaginations of who we think we are. The consequences of living with a theology of glory leads to difficult paths, feelings of deep guilt one's life doesn't look like the glory they have heard about. Others grow towards various forms of Spiritual superiority over their less-glorified fellow Christians. Either path forms bondage. Freedom from such bondage comes only through the proclamation of the gospel. All Christians love to hear the gospel daily.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Althaus, Paul. *The Theology of Martin Luther*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966.
- Badmus, Ronke "List of the Richest Pastors in Nigeria" December 2, 2012
<http://www.nigerianbusinesslinks.com/article/list-of-the-richest-pastors-in-nigeria-2012/>. (Accessed March 5, 2013)
- Bloomquist, Karen L. *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism*. Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2008.
- Christenson, Larry. *The Charismatic Renewal among Lutherans*. MN: Lutheran Charismatic Renewal Services, 1976.
- Didymus, Thomas John Op-Ed: "Nigerian prosperity gospel churches fleece the poor"
<http://digitaljournal.com/article/313930#ixzz2Oesj7tTe> Accessed on March 27/2013.
- Isichel, E. *The History of Christianity in Africa from Antiquity to Present*, London: SPCK, 1995.
- Emmanuel, Femi 2001 cited by Folarin, George O. 2007. "Contemporary state of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria." *Asia Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1: 69-95. (accessed February 18 2013).
- Ethan, Cole, "Christian Today" US Correspondent Posted: Monday, September 17, 2007, 8:26 (BST) http://www.christiantoday.com/article/nigerian_pentecostalism_thriving_on_miracles_prosperity_promises/13235.htm (accessed March 5, 2013).
- Folarin, O George, *Contemporary State of The Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria* *Asia Journal Of Theology* 21, no. 1: 2007. <http://web-2.oauife.edu.ng/religious/2012-07-23-19-55-31/george-folarin> (accessed Mach 2013).
- Folarin, O. George "The Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria" A Re-Examination of the Concept, Its Impact, and an Evaluation.
<http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj16/folarin.html>. (accessed February 5, 2013}.
- Fretheim, Terence E. *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. *Renewal Services*, 1976.

- Garber, Kent. <http://www.usnews.com/news/national/articles/2008/12/15/Behind-the-prosperity-gospel>". U.S. News & World Report. (Retrieved December 4, 2011).
- Ganderton, "How is a Pentecostal church different from other doctrines of Christianity?" http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_is_a_Pentecostal_church_different_from_other_doctrines_of_Christianity (accessed on March 26/2013).
- Gibson, E Lois "UPC Beliefs" LCC Associates Program Sep 12 2012 <http://www.spiritualabuse.org/upcbeliefs.htm> (accessed March 27, 2013).
- Green, Chris E. "The Crucified God and the Groaning Spirit: Toward a Pentecostal Theologia Crucis in Conversation with Jurgen Moltmann." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19, no. 1, 2010. <http://libra.msra.cn/Journal/17999/journal-of-pentecostal-theology>(accessed March 7, 2013).
- Gritsch, Eric W. *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.
- Hall, Douglas John. *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World*. Minneapolis:: Fortress Press, 2003.
- Luther, Martin, Timothy F. Lull, and William R. Russell. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. 2nd / ed. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. 1st U.S. ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Ozment, Steven E. *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven: Yale U. P., 1980.
- Markakis, George. "Christian Development Revival Ministry", 2004 <http://www.cdrm.org/CDRM/Teaching/Financial%20Breakthrough.htm> (accessed March 26th, 2013).
- Marty, Martin E. *Lutheran Questions, Lutheran Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007.
- Maxwell, David J. *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism & the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement*. Oxford; Harare; Athens, Ohio: James Currey; Weaver Pr; Ohio Univ Pr, 2006.
- McCain, Danny "Prosperity Gospel Through Adopted African" <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/conversations/detail/10942> (accessed February.20.2013).
- McNally, Robert Edwin. 1967. "Ninety-five theses of Martin Luther: 1517-1967." *Theological Studies* 28, no. 3: 439-480. (accessed on March 3, 2013).

- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1974.
- Ngien, Dennis. *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's "Theologia Crucis"*. American University Studies. Series VII. Theology and Religion; V. 181. New York: P. Lang, 1995.
- Nohl, Frederick. *Luther: Biography of a Reformer*. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003.
- Oyategbe, M.O *An examination of deliverance in the Christendom with reference to Holt Ghost Praying Center*. (Ilorin: African Theological College, 2005).
- Oyinloye, Dada “A Millionaire through Jesus: 2 Corinthians 8:9 from the perspective of some Nigerian Prosperity Preachers” *African Journals of Biblical Studies*, Vol. 16 (April 2001 no 1), 85. <http://arts.ui.edu.ng/AODada> (accessed March 26th, 2013).
- Ozment, Steven E. *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe*. New Haven: Yale U. P., 1980.
- Palmer, P Timothy, *Martin Luther's Theology of The Cross in the Nigerian Context*. Jos: TCNN Bukuru http://www.tcnn.org/index_files/palmerluther.html (accessed November, 23rd 2012).
- Perry. Chang, *Recent Changes in Membership and Attendance: Presbyterian Church U. S. A*. Nov. 2006. Web: Presbyterian Church U. S. A <http://www.pcusa.org/resource/recent-changes-membership-and-attendance-mainline/> (accessed March 8, 2013).
- Peters, Ted. *God, The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Rhodes, Seyi “Nigeria's Millionaire Preachers” <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/unreported-world/articles/nigerias-millionaire-preachers-video-extras>.(accessed 03/17/2013).
- Stek, John H., “A study Committee Reports Report 34 Neo-Pentecostalism Arts”, *Christian Reformed Church*, 1971, 403. http://www2.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/synod73_neopentecostalism.pdf (accessed March 25, 2013).