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### **Abstract**

This article juxtaposes the Theology of the Cross and the Theology of Glory, or the prosperity gospel, to create a balanced theology in Nigerian Christian Churches. It carries out a general theological discourse on both the theologies of the cross and glory for conceptual clarification. It identifies areas of divergence and the meeting points for Christians in Nigeria. The research uses data from primary and secondary sources. The primary source includes theological applications of some biblical pericope and an unstructured interview with the Bishop Theologian of the Church of Nigerian Anglican Communion. The secondary sources included Bible commentaries, Bible dictionaries, books, journal articles and the Internet. The data collected were analysed using contextual hermeneutics. The research found that the traditional emphasis on the cross underscored basic themes such as suffering, perseverance, reconciliation, love, Christian discipleship, humility, unity and self-sacrifice. The contemporary emphasis of the theology of glory, which some prominent Nigerian pastors are propagating, is on the temporal benefit of atonement, such as prosperity, healing, deliverance, blessing, success, affluence, power, money and fame. This work observes that the teaching of the prosperity gospel had undermined the teachings on the theology of the cross. This research recommends that the basic tenets of the theology of the cross need to be emphasised alongside the theology of glory for a holistic understanding of the Christian doctrine among the Christian Churches generally in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Theology, Cross, Glory, Prosperity, Paradigm shift.

### **Introduction**

The cross of Christ is the essence of the Christian message (Trotter, 136; Hooker, 7-11). Accordingly, Paul's theology of the cross is soteriological (Obijole, 375). By this assertion, the cross is perceived as the symbol of Christ's work for human salvation. Jordan is of the view that there is a deep mystery about the cross, which can never be fully understood (Jordan, 13). The theological implications of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross make the cross an important symbol to Christians (Richard, 204).

The study of the cross in the Bible is concerned with the eternal, cosmic and soteriological significance of Jesus Christ. Theologically, the word 'cross' was used as a description of the gospel of salvation. It is also used to mean reconciliation. Though seen as a symbol of shame and humiliation, it is considered the revelation of God's wisdom and glory (Torrance, 254). It distinguishes between Pauline texts that refer to Christ's death without mentioning the cross and those that explicitly speak of it. In fact, most of Paul's references to Christ's death do not name the cross *per se* (Baker, 198). However, it is important to recognise that when Paul thinks and speaks of Christ's death, he always has the mode of death (crucifixion) in mind (Gorman, 77). The centrality of the cross to Paul's proclamation of the Gospel is grounded in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "We preach Christ crucified (McGrath, 192-197)." Wengenroth opines that the basic text of the theology of the Cross is found in 1 Corinthians. 1:18, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (Wengenroth, n.p.)

Paul's theology is centred on his soteriological interpretation of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus (Motloba, n.p.). Paul's theology of the cross is of sacrifice and discipleship (McGrath, 196). Paul identifies how the cross affects the lives of believers. Some of the additional themes and images include justification, reconciliation, redemption (Romans 3:21-4:25; 5:15-19), salvation, the paradigm of suffering and glory, forgiveness, atonement and discipleship (Romans 8:17; 1 Corinthians 8:11; 2 Corinthians 1:15; 2 Corinthians 5:14-19; Philippians 2:6-8; Philippians 3:9-11). It is argued that these texts, among others, refer to Christ's death with Christians as the subject of the sentence, fulfilling the linguistic role of the actor and the narrative role of the protagonist (Gorman, 77).

### **The Paradigm Shift**

It has recently been noticed that there is a paradigm shift from the traditional emphasis of the gospel. While the traditional emphasis of the church was on the cross and its implications for sacrifice, suffering, perseverance, love and discipleship, the contemporary emphasis in the church is on the temporal benefit of atonement, such as prosperity, healing, deliverance, blessing, success, affluence, power, money and fame (Oyebanjo, 4; Oyebanjo, 20). Historical records showed that the theology of glory, otherwise known as the prosperity gospel, began in the United States of America, featuring many significant personalities in its development and spread (Ogunlusi, n.p.). William Kenyon (1867-1948) is said to have played the formative role and put in place its cardinal principles, while some prominent faith teachers and Pastors such as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, John Osteen, Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar and Robert Morris adopted its doctrine, popularised and commercialised it (Ogunlusi, n.p.). Scholars ascertain that prosperity gospel in Nigeria was identified with and emphasised by Late Benson Idahosa from the early 1980s and popularised by David Oyedepo, George Adegboye, Matthew Ashimolowo, Chris Oyakhilome and several others who are founders of new generation churches (Oyebanjo, 20; Oyebanjo, 4; Ojo, 43; Ayantayo, 203; Folarin, n.p.; Ogunlusi, n.p.). It is also observed that the prosperity Gospel being preached by certain preachers emphasises less on doctrinal issues related to salvation, desire for the kingdom of God and good conduct (Ayantayo, 203; Folarin, n.p.).

The prosperity gospel has been adopted by many churches – which formerly held on to the theology of the cross – in line with the expectation of popular African spirituality (Ayantayo, 201; Kitause, n.p.; Mpigi, n.p.). Many contemporary and some of the conservative, orthodox Churches are actively engaged in this message of the prosperity gospel. It is currently the major preoccupation of the Pentecostals, and it has become a popular expression among Christians. Remarkably, it is currently of great influence within the Nigerian religious space (Ogunlusi, n.p.). The gospel of prosperity in Pentecostalism is relatively new on the religious landscape and is expanding at a breath-neck speed. It is now a force to be reckoned with in Nigeria with a great chance of outliving the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in view of the fact that all classes of people readily and widely accept it for its claims of physical and spiritual temperament. Prosperity gospel claims that prosperous Christians are spiritually rich while the poor are perceived as spiritual paupers. In other words, the prosperity gospel emphasises that every Christian should have access to prosperity in all aspects of his life (Mpigi, n.p.). God created men and women for the best and not to suffer. God's intention is not for his family to experience ignorance, sickness, loneliness, poverty, mediocrity and fear (Kitause, n.p.).

Themes in prosperity theology include health and wealth, seed faith, positive confession, and hundredfold return (Mpigi, n.p.). Some mainline and protestant churches have imbibed the theology of glory, rebranding it with different names: offering time in the church has been tagged 'Blessing time', Gospel crusade and revival programmes organised for conversion of people are characterised with various forms of seed sowing or covenant offerings. Posters, banners, envelopes, and radio and television jingles used for publicity by many of the non-Pentecostal churches today come with the inscription and verbalism of prosperity gospel (Kitause, n.p.). One of such inscriptions reads, "if you are suffering, check your offering; if things are tight, check your Tithe."

Nwibo posits that Western theology's failure to consider African worldviews in its theology's formulations is responsible for the paradigm shift (Nwibo, n.p.). This has brought about the impression,

which prosperity gossellers create in the minds of their audience, that a child of God, the true follower of Jesus, will never for any reason suffer in this world (Ayantayo, 202). Some Pentecostal churches even reject some liturgical statements such as “For better for worse, for richer or poorer...” in the liturgy of marriage used in the mainline churches. Instead, couples are made to say “For better for best, for richer for richest...” or thereafter asked to pray fervently against poverty, sickness and unpalatable situations as professed in the liturgy as this, they claim, is not the portion of true children of God. According to the prosperity preachers, failure, poverty, unhappiness, and other difficulties should not be the lot of any Christian (Ojo, 43).

The basic themes of the theology of the cross include sacrifice, perseverance, life and security (Ojo, 43). It is, however, observed that the prosperity gospel undermines the interpretation and application of the basic themes of the theology of the cross, especially for African Christians (Folarin, n.p.; Kitage, n.p.; Mpigi, n.p.). This paradigm shift has led to the suggestion that Christianity is becoming weaker or producing weaker disciples who may not be able to persevere during difficult circumstances in Africa (Kitage, n.p.). This phenomenon had, in turn, caught the attention of the press, the government and moralists in contemporary Nigerian society (Folarin, n.p.; Mpigi, n.p.). This research, therefore, is a collocation towards creating a balanced theology within the Nigerian Church. It is an effort made towards providing adequate information on the importance of emphasising both theologies for spiritual consumption.

### ***Theologia Crucis and Theologia Gloria: General Discourse***

The *Theologia Crucis*, the Latin interpretation of the theology of the cross, is Martin Luther's most profound contribution to theological thought. Historically, Luther formulated the *Theologia Crucis* five months after he nailed the ninety-five theses to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg (Harm, 1187). The phrase, theology of the cross, originated during Heidelberg's disputation of 1518 in which Martin Luther contrasted a theology of glory, *Theologia Gloria*, which marginalised the cross of Christ (McGrath, 193). For Luther, the cross was not merely the basis of human salvation; it was the basis of God's revelation in which true theology and the knowledge of God alone could be fulfilled (McGrath, 193). The response of Martin Luther on the theology of the cross is to combat the theology of glory (Koeplin, n.p.). Thus, Luther's theology is a response to the prosperity gospel as perpetrated by the Neo-Pentecostal preachers (Yohanna, 2013). Originating from Luther's contribution, scholars posit that central to the Christological background of the Pauline kerygma is the theology of the cross (Prime, 190). The implication of the term in Christian theology is the fact that it describes the painful form of death Jesus endured, and it is more often used as a one-word summary of the good news of salvation, that Jesus died for the Christian's sin (Stott, 42).

There lays the question of the centrality of Paul's theology of the cross among scholars (Motloba, n.p.; McGrath, 192; Trotter Jr, 135). Some agree that the centrality of the cross to Paul's proclamation of the gospel is captured in the enormously suggestive phrase from Corinthians found in 1 Corinthians 1:23 – “we preach Christ crucified.” According to them, the cross of Christ is the centre of the work that God did in Christ. Paul emphasises this work, most notably in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians. Some, however, emphasise Romans 3:21-31 as the centre of Paul's theology in his interpretation of the soteriological meaning of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Motloba emphasises Paul's reflection on the consciousness of a righteous God rather than the pursuing power of the cross, emphasised by McGrath and Trotter. McGrath, however, maintains that the impact of Paul's theology of the cross on the attribute of God is best seen from the analysis in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2, 5 (McGrath, 192). This passage appears to be addressed to a community which has lost sight of the centrality of the cross on account of a preoccupation with a quasi-gnostic notion of resurrection or heavenly existence in the present world (McGrath, 192). Significantly, Paul appears to make the demand that all talk of divine attributes should be grounded in the crucified Christ rather than human preconceptions (McGrath, 192).

In their studies of Paul's theology of the cross, scholars identified with the soteriological and kerygmatic narrative patterns of Christ's death in Paul's texts of the cross. Many of these narrative patterns are distinct syntactical patterns of vocabulary and grammar (Gorman, 82). These narrative patterns are known as themes and images of Paul's messages of the cross. They are as follows:

- i. Obedience and righteousness: Christ's death was an act of obedience and righteousness, that is, a response to the will of God. Recent scholars also suggest that Christ's death is depicted as his act of faith or faithfulness (Gorman, 83). Paul is said to have presented the idea that Christ's faithful death embodies the righteousness of God and constitutes the objective basis of justification (Trotter Jr, 83).
- ii. Love: According to Paul, Christ's death was a demonstration of love. To express this directly, Paul constructs sentences in which the verb, love precedes a reference to Christ's death (Gorman, 82).
- iii. Grace: For Paul, Christ's death is an act of unmerited generosity on the part of God.
- iv. Altruism/Substitution: Numerous passages exchange the semantics of "for sins" for "for persons"; that is, Christ died for their benefits, again at his own initiative as well as his father's.
- v. Self-giving: Christ's death was an act of self-surrender and a chrome gift. The vocabulary of Christ is self-giving, and God giving his son over to death seems clearly to have predicated Paul (Gorman, 83).
- vi. Culmination of a story that includes incarnation and suffering: Although Paul does not frequently associate the verb, suffer with Christ, he does so in some of his texts to the Romans, Corinthians and Philippians. In each of these texts, Christ's sufferings are mentioned as something Paul and sometimes others shared. The cross is an icon for Paul of the full story of Christ's suffering, becoming human suffering and dying, which is a prototype and paradigm of apostolic suffering (Gorman, 82; Motloba, n.p.).
- vii. Sacrifice: Several Pauline texts indicate that Christ died as a sacrifice for sins, at his own and his father's initiatives.
- viii. Reconciliation and Justification: These two Pauline experiences and interpretations of the cross are often associated with the benefits of Christ's death or said to be metaphors to interpret that death.

Other narrative patterns include voluntary self-humbling, paradoxical power and wisdom, interchange, apocalyptic victory, liberation for a new life, transformation (Gorman, 86) and atonement (Obijole, 382).

Scholars in the discourse of the *Theologia Gloria* (Theology of Glory), which opposes the *Theologia Crucis* (Theology of the Cross), identify the danger which the emphasis of the theology of glory has on the present church. Theologians of glory assume that there is basic continuity between the way the world is and the way God is. If strength is demonstrated through raw power on earth, then God's strength must be the same, only extended to infinity. To such a theologian, the cross is simply foolishness, a piece of nonsense (Trueman, n.p.). Horton describes the theology of glory as a theology of victory; he otherwise calls it prosperity gospel, which underscores wealth, health, fame and power (Horton, n.p.). Koeplin submits that the theology of glory perceives and sees the invisible things of God from the works of Creation; it looks upon the world, the works of creation (Koeplin, n.p.).

In line with this description of the theology of glory, Ayantayo and Fatokun call it prosperity gospel (Ayantayo, 201; Fatokun, 145). They opine that the prosperity gospel or theology of glory is characteristic of Pentecostal churches today, which border much on prosperity teaching and less on doctrinal issues related to soul-winning salvation, desire for the kingdom of God and good conduct (Fatokun, 145). It is posited that the prosperity gospel simply refers to strong teachings about prosperity and the need for Christians to be prosperous while on earth (Ayantayo, 202). Within such premises, the emphasis is strongly placed on material possession or acquisition, which could be manifested in the possession of cars, houses, fat bank accounts, cash at hand, clothing, abundant fortune and success in all endeavours. Prosperity is, therefore, portrayed as divine favour that Christians must seek and

possibly pursue with vigour (Ayantayo, 203). With this development, attention is shifted from spiritual prosperity, as emphasised by the pre-and-colonial revivalists, spiritualists, missionaries and Pentecostals, to material prosperity. Thus, Christian spirituality or Christian worth is measured by the number of cars, houses, clothing, shoes and other worldly possessions they have (Ayantayo, 203).

The messages of the prosperity gospel preachers vary from country to country based on the issues affecting each country (Yohanna, n.p.). Most prosperity preachers in Nigeria do not usually preach the message of salvation as based on faith, repentance of sin and sanctification as Jesus proclaimed (Yohanna, n.p.). They emphasise that every believer who wants to inherit the kingdom of God must be born again, and they deserve material prosperity as an outward sign of this. Because Nigerians celebrate well-being, the Neo-Pentecostals believe that poverty is not of God as part of the responsibility of God as a creator is to deliver man from poverty. They believe that God has already met human needs; the only thing required from human beings is a prayer for God to direct them to where their prosperity and destiny are (Yohanna, n.p.).

Scholars point out the implication of the theology of glory on Christian life and the need to rid Christianity of any theology that is not traditional. Koeplin is of the opinion that theology of glory would reduce God to an object, a thing about which one talks and in so doing, pursuing a theology of glory, a Christian is always in danger of losing the true fellowship with God (Koeplin, n.p.). Yohanna further points out that those theologians of glory emphasise personal spiritual experience and have no patience for traditional liturgy nor rules and regulations governing such (Yohanna, n.p.). They believe that members should encounter the gifts of the spirit and also enforce spiritual zeal on all members without paying attention to church traditions (Yohanna, n.p.). Prosperity gospel has serious theological flaws, and this is due to the faulty hermeneutical procedure that the proponents of prosperity adopt (Folarin, n.p.). These preachers have no theological background to help them interpret the Bible correctly; thus, they tend to overlook the teachings of Jesus on simplicity, sacrifice and self-denial (Folarin, n.p.).

However, Luther knew the possibility of perceiving the invisibility of God in creation, as he noted in the commentary to Thesis 19 to perceive God's power, wisdom, righteousness and goodness (Koeplin, n.p.). And the Bible itself does not teach that prosperity is bad (Ayantayo, 213). What Luther seeks is that the perception of God should not change man's relationship with God (Koeplin, n.p.). Hence, there is a need to channel a new focus on prosperity gospelling so as to prevent it from undermining the traditional teaching on the theology of the cross (Ayantayo, 213).

### ***Theologia Crucis and Theologia Gloria: Towards Balanced Theology***

Asaju<sup>1</sup> and Nkwoka observe that the emergence and promotion of the prosperity Gospel is a natural phenomenon in most Orthodox Churches in Nigeria (Nkwoka, 79-94). Folarin adds that the prosperity gospel is a common gospel in Nigeria, which has contributed to the rapid expansion of charismatic churches. It is opined that the prosperity gospel should not be totally demonised. Instead, it should be properly harnessed to meet the needs of the church. Asaju explains that theology, doctrine and worship must always operate in a balance. Over-emphasising a particular area will create commotion in the church. The paradigm shift to prosperity gospel from the traditional emphasis of the cross is from man's orientation, not God. He further explains that complete theology holds the works of a triune God. The Father who created the world, the Son who came to pay the price of human redemption, performed miracles, healed the sick, delivered the oppressed, died and resurrected, thereby offering victory over the devil and death and promising the Holy Spirit- the third element of the triune God, which manifested as promised at the Pentecost. Hence, a balanced theology must recognise the fatherhood of God, the

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<sup>1</sup>Personal interview with Dapo Asaju, Professor of Christian Religion, the Bishop Theologian of Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion and the Diocesan Bishop of Ilesa Diocese 19<sup>th</sup> December, 2021.



Sonship and Lordship of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, which manifests in the gifts and fruits of the spirit. The theology of the cross and prosperity gospel emanated from the ministry of the triune God. The cross focuses on traditional themes such as suffering, sacrifice, perseverance, love and discipleship, just as the prosperity gospel emphasises prosperity, healing, deliverance, blessings, success, power and victory. These themes are a part of the ministry of Jesus and its benefit to the believers.

Folarin, evaluating the prosperity gospel from the biblical point of view, points out that the prosperity gospel makes sense from the context of the kingdom of God. Stating that:

“The healing activities of Jesus (and especially exorcism) and his pronouncement of forgiveness of sin are indications that the long-awaited kingdom has gradually started to manifest among people (Luke 11:20; Matthew 11:21f). By delegating the power of deliverance to his followers (e.g., Luke 10:1ff) and by ensuring the church with the gifts of healing and casting out demons (1Corinthians 12), Jesus shows that the kingdom that started in a new way with his coming to earth is continuing (Folarin, n.p).”

There are merits and demerits of the prosperity gospel. The defects of the prosperity gospel include the propagation method that emphasises materialism and disregards the scriptures' testimony (Folarin, n.p.; Okanlawon, 160). The preachers of the prosperity gospel many times fail to follow the hermeneutical procedure. This is because many of them do not attend standard theological schools that could help them approach biblical interpretation more systematically (Folarin, n.p.). Hence, most Bible texts used in support of the prosperity gospel are interpreted out of context and are not in correlation with the grammar of the texts (Folarin, n.p.).

Also, the prosperity gospel is dangerously taught because it overestimates Satan and his power. Folarin ascertains that in an attempt to stir people to pray for deliverance, they make their congregation fearful of Satan (Folarin, 69-95). They are guilty of creating two equal-power gods, the Christian God and the evil god, Satan. This has brought about bondage instead of deliverance. Prosperity gospel wrongly relieves men of responsibility for sins and their problems (Folarin, n.p.). In addition, the prosperity gospel undermines the messages of holiness. This, in turn, produces spiritually weak Christians in reality, even when the church in Africa is experiencing numerical growth (Folarin, 71).

Besides, prosperity preachers often equate material prosperity with the salvation of souls and material success with divine favour. They view poverty as punishment for sin (Folarin, 71). In other words, anyone who is poor or falls sick is suffering due to his unbelief or disobedience. However, this is heretical (Okanlawon, 160).

Finally, the prosperity gospel fails to annex the gospel with the biblical admonition on endurance, perseverance and suffering, which are the traditional emphases of the church (Folarin, 69). Over-emphasizing material prosperity endangers the great traditional themes of the love of God, sacrifice, humility, perseverance and reconciliation work of Jesus and the grace of the Holy Spirit (Folarin, n.p.).

However, there are merits of the prosperity gospel. One of the merits observed by Asaju during the unstructured interview is that it introduces the Church to the complete message of the cross or completes the theology of the ministry of Jesus by recognising the efficacy of the functions of the Holy Spirit. In addition, it is a fact that themes of the prosperity gospel are also benefits of the cross. Again, the prosperity gospel puts God back in the centre of human experience. It shows God as more than capable of meeting all human needs (Folarin, n.p.). Furthermore, the prosperity gospel acknowledges the potency of the word of God as the revealed truth (Okanlawon, 161). It has also reduced patronage

of African traditional religions for solutions to existential problems (Folarin, n.p.). Finally, it has increased the numerical growth of Christians in Africa (Folarin, n.p.).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The general theological discourse of the theologies of the cross and glory reveals the areas of their divergences and the meeting points for Christians in Nigeria. The traditional emphasis of the cross underscored basic themes such as suffering, perseverance, reconciliation, love, Christian discipleship, humility, unity and self-sacrifice, while the contemporary emphasis of the theology of glory is on the temporal benefit of atonement such as prosperity, healing, deliverance, blessing, success, affluence, power, money and fame.

Based on the observation that the teachings on the theology of the cross had been undermined by the teaching of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria, this paper recommends that the Nigerian Churches should design the liturgy of the church to be all-encompassing. While the church makes an effort to preserve the Ancient rites that align with the theology of the cross, the church should also inculcate rites that promote a theology of glory and the teaching of earthly benefits of the cross in line with sound biblical interpretation.

It is also recommended that orthodox Churches in Nigeria allow various uses of spiritual gifts. Knowledge is increasing, and ministers now have deeper interpretations of the scriptures on the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Giving allowance to priests who are gifted in different areas to operate within the confines of their liturgy will go a long way towards maintaining theological balance and also meet the needs of church members.

In addition, there should be a re-examination of the gospel that centres exclusively on deliverance from sin, suffering and perseverance. Bible scholars and teachers should also examine carefully whether the elements of the prosperity gospel are included in the scriptures. A holistic and all-encompassing gospel of salvation and the physical benefits of the cross should be done. Such a gospel will include salvation from sin, Christian discipleship, self-sacrifice, deliverance from existential problems and the expectation of the forth-coming glory.

The Theological schools in Nigeria should ensure a total review of their academic curriculums to accommodate the traditional emphases of the cross and the temporary benefits of Christ's atonement. It is discovered that most of the theological formulations that are being taught in some seminaries are still in line with Western ideologies. Hence, those who would be saddled with this responsibility should take the African worldview into consideration. This will make ministers prepare fully for the spiritual and contemporary challenges of their African congregations.

Finally, it is necessary to create an avenue for religious understanding in the form of ecumenism among denominations in order to reach a compromise. This will create a level ground in the knowledge of the scriptures. Taking some of these suggestions will help create a balance between the theology of the cross and the theology of glory.

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