

THEOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY, KAMPEN

BENEFITS OF SALVATION AND ESCHATOLOGICAL TENSION: NIGERIAN BAPTISTS  
IN CONVERSATION WITH PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGIANS (WOLFGANG VONDEY &  
OGBU KALU) AND REFORMED THEOLOGIAN (HERMAN BAVINCK)

MASTER'S THESIS FOR THE MASTER OF INTERCULTURAL REFORMED THEOLOGY  
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BY

OLUFEMI POPOOLA

SUPERVISORS:

DRS. JOS COLIJN

PROF. DR. HANS BURGER

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated

To the Triune God, who has granted me the opportunity to pursue the MIRT programme

and

To my beloved wife and our children: Adebisi, Oluwademilade, Oluwadamolami and  
Oluwadolabomi

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## ABSTRACT

Salvation has been regarded as the central and the most comprehensive doctrine of the Bible. This presupposes that every Christian tradition must be faithful to the proclamation of biblical salvation since this is the ground for the Christian faith. To this end, I have endeavoured to investigate the biblical understanding of the blessings/benefits of Christian salvation and the eschatological tension of God's kingdom for the recipient of salvation in the Nigerian context of the Prosperity Gospel. This research, therefore, seeks to answer the following underlying questions: are the 'blessings' the Prosperity Gospel preaches the same as the benefits of salvation in the Reformed theology; and are all the blessings of salvation in Christ realised here and now?

In answering these questions, Wolfgang Vondey and Ogbu Kalu who are theologians of Pentecostalism and African Pentecostalism were engaged to speak in a conversation with Herman Bavinck, a Dutch Reformed theologian.

From the conversation, it was found out that the Prosperity Gospel's understanding of the blessings of salvation focused more on the physical, material, social, and financial well-being of an a believer and this understanding resulted from the socio-religious context of the African Traditional Religious understanding of salvation. It was also discovered that the notion of eschatological tension in the Prosperity Gospel suggested that the kingdom of God has come and the believer is to enjoy the full blessings of salvation here and now. This was found to be incompatible with Bavinck's Reformed theology whose theological and practical understanding of the benefits of salvation point to the believer's restoration from sin to union with the Triune God and all the implications of enjoying a right relationship with God such as regeneration, justification, conversion, faith, repentance, and sanctification; and that the full benefits of salvation are not enjoyed fully on earth but at the eschaton.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Motivation/Background to the Study

Charles C. Ryrie has observed that “Confusion abounds with respect both to the content and presentation of the Gospel of the grace of God. Some do not present it purely; some do not present it clearly; some do not present it sincerely.”<sup>1</sup> This observation captures in its entirety the situation with most of the Nigerian churches’ proclamation of the Gospel of salvation in Christ, Being a Baptist pastor for close to two decades in Nigeria, I have been able to notice that a biblical understanding of the application of the blessings/benefits of salvation in Christ is at stake. This brings to memory the story of a supposed believer in our church. The woman had requested to share the testimony of her conversion story. She began by stating that she was born into a Christian family but she did not know the Lord. Her encounter began when she realised that things were very difficult financially for her and she was also getting very sick. Then one day, some Christians came to her on an evangelistic mission and she shared her poor and sick conditions with them. They assured her that if she could accept Christ and come to church, her situation would definitely change because Christ died for her total restoration from sin, poverty, sickness, and suffering. As she claimed, that was how she got converted and came to be saved. She thereafter started coming to church and all her sickness and poverty disappeared. In her testimony, salvation in Christ brought her healing and financial prosperity. Unfortunately, that testimony fails to contain any mention of sin, repentance, justification, and sanctification in Christ. Less than three months thereafter, this woman disappeared from the church and every effort to bring her back to church

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<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 387.



proved abortive. Her reason was that the pastor failed to preach about the kind of blessings of salvation that interested her- the Prosperity Gospel of wealth and health. One then is prompted to ask: what are exactly the blessings of salvation?

This is one of many such accounts of people's understanding and expectations of Christian salvation. It has become very common with many Nigerian churches to style their preaching to salvation blessings that bother on the need to be saved from socio-economic, material, and physical needs. While the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are in the lead in this movement<sup>2</sup> with some mainline churches joining the train. The Nigerian Baptist Convention is not left out of these waves. The influence has touched on both the Baptist doctrinal beliefs and practices as biblical preachings are focused essentially on health and wealth as well as 'this-worldly' week in and week out. This I believe, calls for an urgent need for a true understanding of the blessings/benefits that salvation in Christ brings to believers. This is the motivation and focus for this research.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Salvation has been regarded as the central and the most comprehensive doctrine of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> This presupposes that every Christian tradition has a duty to be faithful to the proclamation of biblical salvation since this is the ground for the Christian faith. In as much as the Nigerian churches have continued therefore to proclaim salvation blessings with great emphasis on the Prosperity Gospel, there seems to be some controversy as to what is the biblical understanding of the blessings of salvation. Among the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches who are commanding large

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<sup>2</sup> Renee Neh Chinkwo, "Poverty, Prosperity and Faith: An Analysis of the Prosperity Gospel in Neo-Pentecostal Church Winners Chapel International in Bamenda, Cameroon" (M.A. Thesis in Religion, Society and Global Issues. MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2017), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Sawyer, "Salvation (Soteriology)" Faith Baptist Church NY. 5. [www.StudyGodsWord.com](http://www.StudyGodsWord.com), (accessed July 5, 2023).

followership, salvation blessings are to be understood essentially as a matter of physical, financial, material, and social well-being one gets here and now while believers from other Christian backgrounds especially, among the evangelicals of which the Nigerian Baptists stand out think that salvation blessings are to be understood primarily as restoration of the sin-damaged relationship between God and man with all the spiritual blessings/benefits associated with Christ's death and resurrection.

To this end, a theological conversation is being created between the Prosperity Gospel and the Reformed theology in order to attempt a biblical understanding of the blessings of salvation. Due to the broadness of the doctrine of salvation, I have limited myself in this thesis to focusing just on the blessings/benefits of salvation and eschatological tension. The underlying questions are: are the 'blessings' the Prosperity Gospel preaches the same as the benefits of salvation in the Reformed theology? Are these views of salvation conflicting, contradicting, overlapping, or complementary? Are all the blessings/benefits of salvation in Christ realised here and now?

I want to compare and contrast the understanding of the blessings/benefits of salvation with the idea of eschatological tension from both the Prosperity Gospel and the Reformed theology for the purpose of helping Christians in general and the Nigerian Baptist congregation, in particular, to find out if there could be something missing in both the Reformed and the Nigerian Baptists views of salvation. To this end, I have therefore chosen conversation partners for both the Prosperity Gospel and Reformed Theology. Wolfgang Vondey and Ogbu Kalu are chosen to represent the Pentecostal theologians on the subject matter while Herman Bavinck is chosen as representative of the Reformed theology. The choices are based on the fact that Kalu Ogbu is an African theologian with extensive work on African Pentecostalism and Charismatic movements while Wolfgang Vondey is a Western theologian and editor of the *International Handbook on Pentecostal*

*Theology* that contains other contributors like Milton Grace. The perspective that the Pentecostal movement has its origin in the West (although this has been argued vehemently against by some scholars) also informed Vondey's choice.<sup>4</sup> The Pentecostal movement shall be taken up later on. That notwithstanding, both are found to be in the best position to represent the movement as a result of their vast knowledge of the movement.

The renowned Dutch theologian, Herman Bavinck on the other hand, has been chosen because of his popular Reformed Dogmatics and the high respect he commands in the Dutch Reformed theology. Reformed theology has been a popularly accepted tradition that has made much impact on the Christian faith worldwide with its relevance still being very much felt to date. It is strongly believed that the Reformed theology has the potential to speak to any emerging theology such as the Prosperity Gospel today given its wider acceptability and its near-perfect biblical doctrines.

Moreover, this research notes the assumption that some African ideas and notions rooted in the African Traditional Religions (ATR) might have been adapted into the African Prosperity Gospel and make it easy for African people to accept it.<sup>5</sup> This, therefore, necessitates the need for this research to pay close attention to the relationship between the Prosperity Gospel and the African Traditional Religions (ATR) in order to elicit some understanding of the African context of the Prosperity Gospel.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

As pointed out earlier, "the benefits of salvation" are an important element in Bavinck's Reformed theology. Similarly, the Prosperity Gospel has also placed much emphasis on the blessings of

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<sup>4</sup> Kalu Ogbu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 4, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Kalu Ogbu, *African Pentecostalism*, 261.

salvation. This research aims to investigate the benefits/blessings of salvation with special attention to the eschatological tension thereby creating a conversation platform between representatives of the Prosperity Gospel and the Reformed theology for the Nigerian context in which the influence of the African Traditional Religions is still very much predominant. Specifically, the research intends to:

- i. discuss the historical background of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria.
- ii. examine the possible relationship shared by the Prosperity Gospel and the African Traditional Religions (ATR)
- iii. identify the blessings of salvation as contained in Vondey's *Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* and Kalu's *African Pentecostalism*
- iv. identify the benefits of salvation as contained in Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics.
- v. compare and contrast the Prosperity Gospel's views of the blessings of salvation with the Reformed Theology of benefits of salvation and eschatological tension.
- vi. evaluate the positive and negative points of the Prosperity Gospel and what the Nigerian Baptist Church can learn from it.

#### 1.4 Main Research Question

What can the Nigerian Baptist congregation learn from a theological conversation on the "Benefits of Salvation and Eschatological Tension" between the Prosperity Gospel and Bavinck's Reformed theology in the Nigerian context dominated by ATR?

Sub-questions:

- i. What is the reception and effect of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria (Africa)?

- ii. What are the blessings of salvation in Prosperity Gospel according to Vondey Wolfgang and Kalu Ogbu?
- iii. How does ATR influence the reception of the Prosperity Gospel in relation to the concept of salvation?
- iv. What are the benefits of salvation in Reformed theology according to Herman Bavinck?
- v. To what extent does the Prosperity Gospel's view on the blessings of salvation align with the Reformed theology's benefits of salvation?
- vi. How should the Nigerian Baptist congregation relate to the Prosperity Gospel

### 1.5 The Significance of the Study

First and foremost, this study's significance is to contribute to a better academic understanding of various theological positions regarding the blessings of salvation and eschatological tension. Moreover, it is perceived that a theological distance exists between the Pentecostal churches in Nigeria and the mainline churches especially, the Baptist congregation. No matter the doctrinal view of each denomination, there should be an avenue for meeting together in order to compare notes for the total well-being of the Nigerian churches at large. To this extent, this research is significant in that it will help to initiate a conversation among representatives of the Nigerian Baptist Church, the Prosperity Gospel, and the Reformed tradition that could help close the gap. Also, the significance of this research is hopefully demonstrated in that it will help to address the questions the Prosperity Gospel is putting on the agenda of the churches in Nigeria.

### 1.6 Delimitation

Since it is practically impossible to study all the doctrines of the Prosperity Gospel for the shortness of the time frame of this work, this research has limited itself to the Charismatic understanding of the "blessings of salvation" as presented in Wolfgang Vondey's writings (*Handbook of Pentecostal*

*Theology*) and Kalu Ogbu's (*African Pentecostalism*) in conversation with Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatic on the benefits of salvation and eschatological tension.

## 1.7 Research Design and Methodology

First and foremost, this research is domiciled within the purview of Systematic Theology. It is intended to be purely literature research. Relevant studies from papers, articles, theses, dissertations, and theological texts will be consulted and opinions and views will be extracted for thorough investigation and analysis of the subject matter.

It is to be noted particularly that these three texts: Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* vols. 3 & 4, Ogbu Kalu's *African Pentecostalism*, and *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (where Pentecostal theological views are synthesized) are used as primary sources of data.

## 1.8 Defining Operational Terms

### 1.8.1 Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism has been widely acknowledged as a global phenomenon as attested by such scholars as Allan Heaton Anderson,<sup>6</sup> Amos Yong,<sup>7</sup> and Adebisi A. Adenekan-Koevoets.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, there is a great need to seek to understand what it is meant. I shall therefore briefly examine the meaning of the concept before I later attempt to delve into the controversy that surrounds its origin.

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<sup>6</sup> Allan Heaton Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religion Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing Ag, 2018), 3

<sup>7</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Adebisi Anne Adenekan-Koevoets, "Nigerian Pentecostals and 'Reverse Mission' in London and Amsterdam" (A Ph.D. Thesis, Humanities, University of Roehampton, 2021), 97.

Robeck Jr. and Amos Yong observe that defining Pentecostalism is as elusive as a grain of sand in a desert.<sup>9</sup> They, however, define Pentecostalism as the movement with an encounter with the Holy Spirit or baptism in the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues.<sup>10</sup> Allan Anderson also notes that Pentecostalism as a term is extremely precarious to be defined because the movement has evolved over time, and as such Pentecostals have defined themselves by so many paradigms. He asserts that global Pentecostalism is more diverse than any other Christian expression as its different roots are rooted in local contexts.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, he recommends that for the term to be defined from a social science perspective, theological and historical, there is a need to employ a family resemblance analogy.<sup>12</sup> Having noted this, he defines the term “Pentecostal” as referring to all churches and movements that place emphasis on the workings of the Spirit, both on phenomenological and theological grounds.<sup>13</sup>

Ogbu Kalu while considering the complexity and fluidity of the term Pentecostalism describes it as notorious. He states that Pentecostalism can be ambiguous because of its dynamism and capability to wear different colours in different parts of the world because ‘it goes native’, whenever it crosses borders.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, he regards Pentecostalism as a movement characteristic of variety, flexibility, and an expanding continuum of adaptive social inventions

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<sup>9</sup> Robeck Jr, C.M. and A. Yong (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>12</sup> Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Cambridge, 2014), 103.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 103-104.

<sup>14</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 21.

linked to its ministerial formation, liturgy, economic practices, organizations, and infrastructure.<sup>15</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu defines Pentecostalism as Christian groups which emphasize salvation in Christ to be a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit in which pneumatic phenomena such as speaking in tongues, prophecies, visions, healing, and miracles, in general, perceived to be standing in historic continuity with the experience of the early church contained in the book of Acts of the Apostles are sought, accepted, valued and consciously promoted among their members as signifying the presence of God and experience of His Spirit.<sup>16</sup> William Kay describes Pentecostalism as a renewal movement within Christianity in line with a continuation of a series of renewal movements from the earliest days of the church.<sup>17</sup> One thing that cannot be missing from all the definitions above is the fact that the Spirit experience with such physical manifestation as speaking in tongues, visions, ecstatic outbursts, and the like are common elements in the definitions of Pentecostalism. As a result of this, I will define Pentecostalism as comprising a group of Christians who believe in the ecstatic operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. This is because Pentecostalism views Christianity as that which pertains to the Spirit's influence and extraordinary physical manifestations.

### 1.8.2 Origin of Pentecostalism

Having attempted the definition of Pentecostalism, I shall now turn to discuss the origin of Pentecostalism. R. Rhodes is one of the scholars that have attributed the Pentecostal movement to

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<sup>15</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 12.

<sup>17</sup> William K. Kay, *Pentecostalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2011).



the Asuza Street revival which was led by Seymour.<sup>18</sup> Of course, it must be acknowledged that there has been much debate about the actual root of Pentecostalism. As Allan H. Anderson points out that there is no single point of origin for Pentecostalism but revival movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on restoring a primitive and powerful Christianity in order to evangelise the world before the second coming of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

The general perception has been that Pentecostalism had its root in the West after the Asuza Street experience,<sup>20</sup> but this has been vehemently contested by many scholars. Ogbu Kalu in his reaction to this view contests that Asuza Street experience was a North American event and that other regions experienced the move of the Spirit independently.<sup>21</sup> L.A. Amechi in alignment with Ogbu Kalu, notes that the origin and development of the Pentecostal movement are so diverse in nature and cannot be pinned down to one event or an individual.<sup>22</sup> It is based on this notion that Warrington calls for Pentecostalism to be identified in the plural form “Pentecostalisms” in order to represent an adequate framework of the movement globally.<sup>23</sup> We can understand from those arguments that Pentecostalism can be traced from different parts of the world including Africa. It

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<sup>18</sup> R. Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations: Understanding the History, Beliefs, and Differences* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), p. 397.

<sup>19</sup> Allan Heaton Anderson, Pentecostal Theology as a Global Challenge: Contextual Theological Constructions in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* Wolfgang Vondey (ed.) (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Z.M. Gbote, and Selaelo T. Kgatla, “Prosperity Gospel: A Missiological Assessment” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70: 1 (2014) 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 4-13

<sup>22</sup> L. A. Amechi, *The Pentecostal Challenge of the Concept of Salvation in Liberation Theology* (A Ph.D. Thesis, Theology, North West University, Potchefstroom Campus, 2014), 105.

<sup>23</sup> K. Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 336.

needs to be noted that since African Pentecostalism is critical to this thesis, the sources of African Pentecostalism will be also dealt with in the classification of Pentecostalism.

### 1.8.3 Pentecostalism and its Classifications

Having established the fact of the multiplicity of Pentecostal groups on the global scene, it is considered worthwhile in this thesis to make some clarification on how Pentecostalism has been classified. This will take us to the classifications of the Pentecostals. Allan Anderson has classified the Pentecostals into four broad groups which are listed below with their different characteristics and soteriological understandings:<sup>24</sup>

- i. Classical Pentecostals: These are those whose faith can be traced to the evangelical revival and missionary movements of the early twentieth century, particularly in the Western world. This category also includes (a) *Holiness Pentecostals* of the nineteenth-century holiness movement with a belief in the second work of grace called “sanctification” and the third stage called “baptism of the Holy Spirit”; (b) *Finished Works Pentecostals* who see sanctification as a consequence of conversion to be followed by Spirit baptism as a second work of grace; (c) *Oeness Pentecostals* who reject the doctrine of Trinity and posts a Unitarianism that accommodates the deity of Christ; and (d) *Apostolic Pentecostals* incorporate both Oeness and Trinitarian and emphasize the authority of the present day “apostles” and “prophets” found in West Africa.
- ii. Older Church Charismatics: They include Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and various Protestant Charismatics. These approach the subject of Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts

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<sup>24</sup> Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 5-7.

from a sacramental perspective and are widespread. They also differ from each other in the same ways their denominations differ in theology but they remain within their churches without creating schism.

- iii. Older Independent Churches: In this category are found the Chinese “Old Three-Self Churches,” contemporary house churches in China, Indian Pentecostal Churches from the (Ceylon) Pentecostal Mission, and all the “Spirit churches” of sub-Saharan Africa.
- iv. Neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic Churches: These are “Charismatic” independent churches that include mega-churches often overlapping with (a) “Word of Faith” that places emphasis on physical health and material prosperity by faith (b) “Third Wave” churches which associate Spirit baptism with conversion and see spiritual gifts as available to every believer (c) New Apostolic Churches, and (d) other different independent churches that overlap and vary remarkably in their theology between Third Wave, Word of Faith and Classical Pentecostals. They are regarded as the largest group.

#### 1.8.4 African/Nigerian Pentecostalism

At this point, the discussion is being narrowed down from global Pentecostalism to African Pentecostalism and finally to Nigerian Pentecostalism. This is important as this research focuses on the Nigerian situation. Adebisi Anne Adenekan-Koevoets identifies three broad types of African Pentecostal churches.<sup>25</sup> The first type is identified to include the early African independent or African-initiated Churches (AICs) which arose during the first decades of the twentieth century and were named *Aladura* churches in Nigeria. They are also known as “White Garment Churches”

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<sup>25</sup> Adebisi Anne Adenekan-Koevoets, “Nigerian Pentecostals and the “Reverse Mission” in London and Amsterdam”, 56.

because their members wear white robes to worship services. They are also known for certain practices that align with African Traditional Religious practices such as divination, healing rituals, and sacrifices. Although the Neo-Pentecostals try to promote the exclusion of the African-Instituted Churches Kalu argues that there are links and parallels based on the perception that there is a pneumatic common denominator to both of them.<sup>26</sup> The second type is the Classical Pentecostals which has already been discussed earlier. The third type comprises the Neo-Pentecostal and Neo-Charismatic Churches that bring under one umbrella the Word of Faith and emphasis on physical health and material prosperity, Third Wave, New Apostolic, and different independent churches. Their major characteristic is the common emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, signs and wonders, and power encounters.

Nigeria has the largest population in the whole of Africa with nearly one-third identifying as Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians.<sup>27</sup> It is also noted that those three types mentioned above cover what obtains in Nigerian Pentecostalism. Therefore, this needs no repetition again. However, the periodization of Nigerian Pentecostalism has to be discussed.

Ogbu Kalu while examining the periodization of Nigerian Pentecostalism points out three marked periods in the historical development of Pentecostalism in Nigeria.<sup>28</sup> The first period spanned the time before 1980 which promoted the message of holiness and sanctification in preparation for the end times. It was also the time of separation from the AICs and mission churches, and also the period of the economic oil boom in Nigeria. The second period fell within the 1980s when there

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<sup>26</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> Pew Research, [Christian Movements and Denominations | Pew Research Center](#) (accessed June 5, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 88-84.

was an increasing alignment with the Prosperity Gospel which coincided with the time of economic downturn in Nigeria. The third period from the 1990s marked the time when the movement began to emerge as an important source of economic and social power in the country as social and spiritual resources were being harnessed to meet members' aspirations for the challenges of modern times. The acquaintance with this periodization has been considered very much useful for an in-depth understanding of the nature of Pentecostalism within the Nigerian context. It has to be noted that the earliest Pentecostal period in Nigeria focused on holiness, sanctification, and economic boom in the nation followed by the period of the 1980s that marked the beginning of economic recession and the embrace of the Prosperity Gospel while the last era that continues to the present time has made the Nigerian church prominent in terms of economic, social and political power. This last point can be said to differentiate Nigerian Pentecostalism from American Pentecostalism as identifying as a Pentecostal member today produces some kind of social importance in Nigeria.

The discussions so far on Pentecostalism from the global level to African and Nigerian Pentecostalism have served to lay a good foundation for this research. It must be emphasised also that this research's interest is connected to the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic churches which are the main drivers of the Prosperity movement in Nigeria.

#### 1.9 Salvation and Prosperity in African Traditional Religion (ATR)

Africa is one of the many places that Christianity has traversed and since salvation is a central Christian concept in this research, it is considered appropriate to give particular attention to the African religious context by seeking to understand its view of salvation and prosperity. It is anticipated that this understanding will also shed more light on the Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic version of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria. To this end, this section is being undertaken.

African Traditional Religion (ATR) can be understood as “the indigenous religion of the Africans.”<sup>29</sup> This has also assumed the label of African Religions or African Indigenous Religions to reflect the plurality within the continent’s religious landscape.<sup>30</sup> ATR is based on the belief in the active presence of spiritual beings, and spirits of ancestors.<sup>31</sup> S.S. Maimela, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and associate professor of Systematic Theology at the University of South Africa, offers a very significant insight into understanding African perception of salvation as he notes that the traditional African people experience both emotionally and spiritually problematic areas (sins) that require salvation or relief.<sup>32</sup> Quoting Sawyer, he identifies these problematic areas (sins) as (1) the oppressions and anxieties that come from day-to-day problems of life- droughts, floods, etc. (2) anxieties that are borne out of the fear of evil spirits and malicious people- witches, sorcerers (3) evil and injustice towards the ancestors that can undermine their rank and, (4) threats by the possibility of a loss of vital power.<sup>33</sup> Going from Maimela, sins are viewed from the perspective of problematic situations, offense to ancestors, and threats in Africa. This surely contrasts with the notion of sin in Christianity which necessitates salvation to impact every aspect of human life. However, the way out of all these problematic areas of life has been found in African Traditional Religious design of a variety of protective rites, rituals, and sacrifices to immunise potential victims against evil forces and occurrences; to cleanse from

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<sup>29</sup> Oyeronke Olademo, *Theology of African Traditional Religion* (Nigeria: National Open University of Nigeria, 2008), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Boikanyo Joel Modiboa, “The Confusion in Understanding Salvation in Christian Religion by African Christian People as it Relates Salvation in African Traditional Religion Hampers the Building Up of the Local Church” (Master’s Thesis, Practical Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria, 2007), 30.

<sup>32</sup> S. S. Maimela, “Salvation in African Traditional Religions”, 1985, [https://hdl.handle.net/10520/AJA02569507\\_30](https://hdl.handle.net/10520/AJA02569507_30), 67-68. Accessed June 24, 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 68-69.

defilement; to forestall failure in business or another enterprise; and to enhance personal success.<sup>34</sup> This view is affirmed by David Bosch as he observes that the word used for “sin” in several African languages connotes “spoil” especially to spoil or harm human relationships. In this regard, the witch is a sinner not necessarily because of his or her deeds, but because of the evil consequences of these deeds such as illness, barrenness, disruption of relationships in the community, misfortune, poverty, and so forth.<sup>35</sup>

Salvation, therefore, is viewed in terms of relief or help in times of trouble or crisis in the present life. Salvation is believed to be healing, driving away evil spirits, empowerment, fertility, and success in life ventures.<sup>36</sup> According to John Mbiti, a foremost African theologian, salvation in African Traditional Religion deals with physical and immediate dangers that threaten both the individual and the community’s survival, good health, and general prosperity or safety.<sup>37</sup> This is further attested to by Tokunbo Adeyemo as he points to the ritualistic and utilitarian nature of salvation in African Traditional Religion.<sup>38</sup> Henry J. Mugabe, a Baptist African theologian from Zimbabwe also posits that salvation in the African context means to wrestle with issues that constitute hindrances to Africans here and now from reaching their full potentials which include diseases, oppression, neo-colonialism, poverty, disease, ethnic tensions, starvation, sexism, and

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<sup>34</sup> S. S. Maimela, “Salvation in African Traditional Religions”, 69.

<sup>35</sup> David B. Bosch, “The Problem of Evil in Africa: A Survey of African Views on Witchcraft and of the Response of the Christian Church” in *Like a Roaring Lion: Essays on the Bible and the Church and Demonic Powers*, ed. P.C. R. de Villiers (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987), 50.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> John Mibiti, “Some Reflections on African Experience of Salvation Today” in *Living Faiths and Ultimate Goals* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1974), 63-67.

<sup>38</sup> Tokunbo Adeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, (Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 85.

racism.<sup>39</sup> It should be noted that the African Traditional Religious view of salvation lacks the understanding of sin as the root cause of all human problems.

Boikanyo J. Modiboa in his doctoral dissertation points to the fact that salvation in ATR is tied to its meaning and thus, salvation is having a sense of security, and an act of deliverance from any kind of difficulty that may be experienced in life; salvation is a good and acceptable way of life here and now.<sup>40</sup> In short salvation in African Traditional Religion is essentially understood and applied as something that affects the physical life and is mainly for immediate existence. Perhaps this is why some African Christian theologians have argued for a broad concept of salvation that accommodates African Traditional Religion's view of salvation. An example is M.M. Maimela who states that any religious understanding of salvation which is exclusively pre-occupied with the salvation of the soul from hell and eternal damnation, as the Christian faith often suggests will be inadequate to meet the needs of the African people as long as there is no promise of happiness and prosperity now.<sup>41</sup> To justify this view, Henry Mugabe notes that many African Christians embrace both Christianity and African Traditional Religions in order to serve a dual purpose. While ATR is perceived to meet the real and immediate needs of this world, Christianity is sure to take care of the hereafter.<sup>42</sup>

Before closing on this section, it is essential to comment on ATR's view of eschatology. Quoting John Mbiti, Bienvenu Mayenba, states that it is generally held that ATR lacks the belief in a future

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<sup>39</sup> Henry J. Mugabe, "Salvation from an African Perspective" (A Paper presented at Baptist International Conference on Theological Education, Johannesburg, South Africa, August 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Boikanyo J. Modiboa, *The Confusion in Understanding Salvation in Christian Religion by African Christian People as it Relates Salvation in African Traditional Religion Hampers the Building Up of the Local Church*, 30.

<sup>41</sup> S.S. Maimela, *Salvation in African Traditional Religions*, 73.

<sup>42</sup> Henry J. Mugabe, "Salvation from an African Perspective", 33. [\\*Salvation from African Baptist theologian.pdf](#) Accessed June 23, 2023.



resurrection of the body as such, but African people have the belief of life after death that is lived in the invisible world or the village of the ancestors where all the righteous dead people meet and dwell to enjoy their personal and collective immortality.<sup>43</sup> The access to this invisible world is determined by the quality of life lived while living and how much value or worth is given to the faithful respect of ancestral traditions, customs, and the remembrance of the clan's dead which binds the community together in communion with the dead and fellowship with one another to guarantee the survival of the future generations.<sup>44</sup> This shows that eschatology is not a prominent concept in ATR.

As I conclude this section, it may be noted that the concept of salvation as found in African Traditional Religion shows that salvation mainly points to deliverance or safety from all that affects bodily existence such as disease, poverty, barrenness, and so forth; and also, that African Traditional religion is less concerned with eschatological matters. In chapter three, I shall investigate some aspects that may be shared by African Traditional religion with the Prosperity Gospel of the Neo-Pentecostals.

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<sup>43</sup> Bienvenu Mayenba, "The Notion of Eschatology in African Ancestral Religions: A Category of Deliverance, Promise, Remembrance" (Unpublished Work, Theology Department, Boston College University, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, 2009), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Bienvenu Mayenba, "The Notion of Eschatology in African Ancestral Religions: A Category of Deliverance, Promise, Remembrance" 4.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PROSPERITY GOSPEL IN NIGERIA

#### 2.1 Preamble

The Prosperity Gospel has been described by different appellations such as ‘prosperity theology,’ ‘the health and wealth gospel,’ ‘the gospel of success,’<sup>45</sup> as well as ‘name it and claim it,’ and ‘Word of Faith Movement’<sup>46</sup> Those appellations tend to point to the different aspects of the meaning associated with the Prosperity Gospel. In this chapter, we will examine the origin, definition, the historical background of the doctrine of the Prosperity Gospel, and how it has developed over the years in Africa in general, and in Nigeria in particular. What impact has it made on the general understanding of the blessings of salvation and how has it become a predominant motif in the Christian faith in Nigeria? All these questions shall form our guiding posts in our discussion in this section.

#### 2.2 An Overview of the Prosperity Gospel

J.K. Ayantayo, is a professor and a theologian of Christian Ethics at the Premier University of Ibadan, Nigeria, he is a member of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC). He defines Prosperity Gospel as strong teaching that moves Christians to be prosperous on earth and emphasises material acquisitions that are manifested in the acquisition of such material things as cars, houses, fat bank accounts, cash at hand, clothing, abundance, fortune, and success in all endeavours, and all of

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<sup>45</sup> Moses Kumi Asaomah, “Penteco/Charismatic Worldview of Prosperity Theology” in *Africa Educational Research Journal* Vol. 1 (3), 2013, 198.

<sup>46</sup> Renee N. Chinkwo, 27.

which makes prosperity a divine favour to be sought and pursued with vigour by Christians.<sup>47</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah, a Ghanaian theologian, appears critical in his definition as he describes the Prosperity Gospel as a movement that distorted the preaching, teaching, and interpretation of the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ to satisfy the human ego-centric need in a self-serving manner that places its emphasis on consumerism to prove that possession of the material things of this world is a necessary sign of genuine Christianity and God's approval.<sup>48</sup> According to Deji Ayegboyin, a Nigerian Baptist theologian, prosperity preachers present themselves as entrepreneurs and by so doing, they lay emphasis on a victorious or prosperous and healthy living in both physical and spiritual realms. God is projected as a god of abundance who is able to provide abundantly because the silver and the gold belong to Him.<sup>49</sup> Peter Young, a lecturer at Gindiri Theological College in Nigeria, attempts a theological summary of the Prosperity teaching in the "Word of Faith" as he points out certain common elements in the teaching:<sup>50</sup>

- i. Foundational Affirmations: The main element of the prosperity teaching is that all Christians are entitled and have the responsibility to be prosperous in all areas of life including financial well-being and physical health.
- ii. Scriptural Basis: The biblical authority for the teaching is sought from many proof texts interpreted with the view that these biblical texts can stand alone as prescriptive

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<sup>47</sup> J.K. Ayantato, "Prosperity Gospel and Social Morality: A Critique" *Creativity and Change in Nigeria Christianity*, David Ogungbile and Akintunde Akinade eds., (Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd., 2003), 34.

<sup>48</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah, Presentation on Lausanne Movement, 2010, Cape Town, South Africa.

<sup>49</sup> Deji Ayegboyin, "A Rethinking of Prosperity Teaching in the New Pentecostal Church in Nigeria" *Black Theology*, 1 January, vol.4 (1), (2006), 70-86.

<sup>50</sup> Peter R. Young, "Prosperity Teaching in an African Context" [\\*Young - PROSPERITY TEACHING IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT.pdf](#) (accessed June, 2023).

- statements with no reference to the context or original intent as Isaiah 53:4-5, Gal. 3:14a.
- iii. Faith and positive confession: Prosperity teachers stress that the faith of Christians makes God obliged to answer them.
  - iv. Giving and receiving: This teaching makes giving a potential avenue for the material enrichment of the giver.
  - v. The scope of prosperity teaching reveals that the promise of material blessings extends beyond provision, but to an abundance that approaches luxury.
  - vi. Poverty and sickness: Prosperity Gospel teaches that poverty and sickness are not only evil in themselves, but those found in such situations must be in a state of sin.

From the foregoing, we can understand that the main concept and teaching of the Prosperity Gospel focus on the material, financial, physical, social, and total well-being of Christians embedded in the gift of salvation believed to be promised in the word of God. Salvation in Christ Jesus is thus believed to give physical, social, and financial comfort to believers.

### 2.3 Historical Background and Development of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

Ogbu Kalu asserts that the Prosperity Gospel has a much longer history but its great popularity never began until the 1980s.<sup>51</sup> The history of the Prosperity Gospel has been woven around some individuals such as Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Robert Tilton, Oral Robert, T. L. Osborne, and others as it is noted that its historical roots are connected to the United States of America in the mid-1960s both ideologically and sociologically.<sup>52</sup> There is speculation however

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<sup>51</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 256.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Young, *Prosperity Teaching in an African Context*, 4.

that Essek William Kenyon an American evangelist and President of Bethel Bible Institute, was the pioneer teacher of the Prosperity Gospel teaching which was alleged to have been adapted by him from the Unity School of Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Some maintain also that the Prosperity Gospel had its root in the faith teaching of second-century Gnosticism<sup>54</sup> while the historical American record has it that the origins of the Prosperity Gospel are traced back to the Healing Revivals of the 1950s its theology could be traced to the New Thought Movement.<sup>55</sup> One thing is crystal clear from all these accounts, American society plays a prominent role in the origin and development of the Prosperity Gospel by popularizing the teaching and exporting it to some other parts of the globe.

Coming to Africa and Nigeria in particular, Kalu maintains that the Prosperity message flowed into Africa (including Nigeria) apart from the United States of America as prosperity preachers from Southeast Asia, the West Indies, and the United Kingdom came with their different versions of the Prosperity Gospel to a ready consumers' African market.<sup>56</sup> It is not very clear how the Prosperity Gospel evolved in Asia, the West Indies, and the U.K., but it may be conjectured that the American Prosperity Gospel first reached those places before Africa and they in turn having adapted it to their context began to export it to Africa. Some elements of this version especially as linked to David Yonggi Cho's book *Fourth Dimension* (a late South Korean Prosperity Gospel preacher), include the power of imagination, visualization, and positive confession in addition to the faith movement of the American version.<sup>57</sup> The popularity of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa

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<sup>53</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 256.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> David Bishau, "The Prosperity Gospel: An Investigation into its Pros and Cons with Examples Drawn from Zimbabwe" (Paper presented at Vice Chancellor's Day, Open University, Zimbabwe, 2013), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 259.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 257.

(Nigeria in particular) was pinned to the 1980s on several counts.<sup>58</sup> First was the influx of foreign ministries and evangelists that moved to Africa. The second was connected with the Fire Convention held in 1986 by Reinhard Bonnke in Harare while the third bore on the changing face of African Pentecostalism through easy access to electronic and print media. The propagation of the Prosperity Gospel through some African pastors within the continent via the Bible schools that offered scholarships to a number of African students also contributed to its spread. Finally, the fact that the Prosperity Gospel message is found to resonate with African indigenous concepts of salvation, abundant life, and goals of worship contributed to its spread. I will later examine the factors that are responsible for the attractiveness of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria in the next section of this chapter.

It must be mentioned that Benson Idahosa played a major role in the development and growth of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria. Benson Idahosa was converted in the early 1960s in Benin City, Nigeria.<sup>59</sup> His enrollment in theological training in Christ for All the Nations Bible Institute in the United States of America in 1972 linked him with the American Prosperity Gospel. This resulted in his eventful adoption of the Prosperity Gospel<sup>60</sup> and he became the pioneer and crusader of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa.<sup>61</sup> Three factors influenced Idahosa's adoption of the Prosperity Gospel: his personal experience of tough economic realities; his orientation to the African religious cosmos; and his belief in an omnipotent God.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>59</sup> Ogbu Kalu, p. 91.

<sup>60</sup> E.M. Okwori, *Godliness for Gain: An Evaluation of the Nigerian Version of the Prosperity Gospel* (Jos: Capro Media Services, 1995), 45.

<sup>61</sup> Renee N. Chinkwo, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

From the foregoing, we can establish that the Prosperity Gospel came to Nigeria from different points and via several media while it is also understood that the Prosperity Gospel was driven by African agents of which the late Benson Idahosa became a leading figure. We will then proceed to examine the people's responses to the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria. That is what has made it attractive to the people. This leads to the next discussion.

#### 2.4 Responses to Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

Without any doubt, the Prosperity Gospel was warmly received in Nigeria. It will be important therefore to know what has made the Prosperity Gospel so attractive to many people in Nigeria. This needs to be investigated as we have noted earlier that the Christian faith has become more attractive in Nigeria and the Prosperity Gospel is playing a major role in this regard. According to Paul Gifford, as quoted by Elkana Jamin, four main reasons can be identified with the attractiveness of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa and by extension in Nigeria.<sup>63</sup> First, the Prosperity Gospel appeals to divine intervention as the answer to the problem of poverty, disease, and suffering. Two, it agrees with the African worldview that wealth and success are signs of God and the ancestors. Three, the prosperity preachers themselves mirror an image of success and this serves as a motivation for their admirers. The fourth is the availability of literature on prosperity teaching and its persuasive nature.

Furthermore, it can also be pointed out that the Prosperity Gospel's attraction in Nigeria was linked to the failure of the economic structural adjustment policies introduced to many African countries

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<sup>63</sup> Elkana Jamin, "A Biblical Assessment of the Understanding of Blessings and Curses in Prosperity Gospel in Africa with Special Attention to the Use of Malachi 3:6-12", (M. A Thesis in Theology, Theological University Kampen, 2016) 21.

including Nigeria in the 1990s.<sup>64</sup> As reported, the poor result of these policies left many people unemployed, retrenched, and impoverished. This coincided with the emergence of the Prosperity Gospel and since people had been disappointed by the government, people began to seek divine solutions to economic challenges which the Prosperity Gospel promised.<sup>65</sup>

From Paul Gifford's view above, the issue of poverty and suffering remains central to all the reasons mentioned above. It must be noted that till the present time, poverty and suffering have continued to plague the majority of the Nigerian population. Poverty has been characterized by lack of food; lack of water, lack of health; lack of accommodation simply put, lack of basic human needs.<sup>66</sup> Since the Prosperity Gospel argues for the total well-being of an individual believer on earth, it then becomes logical to see to what extent this has been achieved in terms of the impact it has made in Nigeria. To this end, we shall examine the impact of the Prosperity Gospel from religious, moral, social, educational, and economic perspectives.

#### 2.4.1 The Religious Impact of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

It has been observed that “in the contemporary time Nigeria has continued to play a pivotal and central role in the expansion and transformation of the Christian faith in certain unique ways.”<sup>67</sup> It is further claimed that the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have constituted the phase of Nigerian Christianity whose current manifestations have put Nigeria on the centre-stage within

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<sup>64</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, “The Prosperity Gospel in African Christianity” [https://repository.globethics.net/bitstream/handle/20.500.12424/166479/n127a\\_togarasel\\_prosperity.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repository.globethics.net/bitstream/handle/20.500.12424/166479/n127a_togarasel_prosperity.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y). (accessed August 13, 2023).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> L. Togarasei, Exchange 40 (2011), 344

<sup>67</sup> David O. Ogungbile, “Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity: Issues and Perspectives” in *Creativity and Change in Nigerian Christianity* eds. David O. Ogungbile and Akintunde E. Akinade, (Nigeria: Malthouse Press Ltd, 2006), 1.



global and world Christianity.<sup>68</sup> It can be inferred from this claim that the Prosperity Gospel has worked towards the expansion of the Christian faith and churches in Nigeria. This may be one impact that cannot be contested in the multiplication and expansion of churches in Nigeria. It has also been noted that the Prosperity Gospel in some way has helped awaken people's consciousness and faith in the ability of God to solve human problems especially, the existential problems. According to Dr. Goka Muele Mpigi, (a Senior Lecturer in Religious and Cultural Studies at the Rivers State University, Port Harcourt Nigeria, and a priest in the Anglican Church) the Prosperity Gospel helps to create a new spiritual space in which people can lay claim to having the power of negotiating their ways out of the negative into the positive, from poverty into wealth, and from sickness into health.<sup>69</sup>

The Prosperity Gospel's impact in Nigeria from the religious perspective is also attached to its elaborate use of the Scripture as God's word to defend its claim. Following Timothy Barga's argument, "Prosperity Gospel elaborately uses the Sacred Scripture to defend its claims."<sup>70</sup> It is claimed that Prosperity preachers never fail to use the Bible and also encourage their followers to do the same. The elaborate use of the Bible in the defence of the Prosperity Gospel has tended to give the Bible more prominence in Nigerian society. The Prosperity Gospel is characterized by intensified teaching that aims at persuading believers to grow in faith. The focus on specific themes and the use of various Bible texts in making the Gospel relevant to people's daily living in the church and through Mass media and social media have impacted the religious atmosphere in

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>69</sup> Goka Muele Mpigi, "The Prosperity Theology's Impact on the Contemporary Nigerian Church and Society" *Sky Journal of Educational Research* vol. 5 (5), (2017), 41.

<sup>70</sup> Timothy Barga, "Theological Pitfall of Prosperity Gospel in Nigerian Churches" in *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* Vol. 1, No. 1. 2018, p 206.

Nigeria. For instance, Peter Young mentions some Bible passages that are often quoted by the Prosperity Gospel preachers as 3 John 2, Psalm 1:3, Deuteronomy 28-30, Isaiah 53:4-5, Mark 8:16-17, and 2 Corinthians 8:9.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, it is also acknowledged that the teaching of prosperity has promoted a high sense and spirit of generosity that is unprecedented in the history of the church in Africa and Nigeria in particular as there is a strong call to stewardship.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, there are counter-arguments to the religious impact of the Prosperity Gospel. It is strongly observed that the Prosperity Gospel is a threat to the integrity of biblical Christianity which has promoted shallow Christian spirituality in contemporary Nigeria.<sup>73</sup> A difference is struck here between preaching the content and the message of the Bible and using the Bible to say what the preacher wants to say. Tihitshak Biwul, (an Old Testament scholar and Head of the Pastoral Department of ECWA Theological Seminary Jos, Nigeria) opines that the failure of preaching in contemporary Nigeria to make the content and message of the Bible, and Christ and the cross the core of Christian preaching has negatively impacted the Christian community's lifestyle and the Christian witness at large.<sup>74</sup> Dieudonne Tamfu, an assistant professor of Bible and Theology at Bethlehem College and Seminary Yaounde, Cameroon also shares the view that the Prosperity Gospel has had a negative religious impact as he states that,

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Young, "Prosperity Teaching in an African Context"

<sup>72</sup> Kwabena K. Asamoah-Gyadu, "Anointing through the Screen: Neo-Pentecostalism and Televised Christianity in Ghana" in *Studies in World Christianity* 11: (1) 2005): 9-28.

<sup>73</sup> Joel Kamsen Tihitshak Biwul, Preaching Biblically in the Nigerian Prosperity Gospel Context n.d. [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/32-2\\_121.pdf](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/32-2_121.pdf). (accessed June 17, 2023), 129.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

“The prosperity gospel is an idolatrous perversion of the gospel according to which Jesus is a means to God’s full blessings, primarily of wealth, health, and might, now available to those who trust and obey certain faith principles prescribed by a particular man of God”<sup>75</sup>

Tamfu pointedly describes the Prosperity Gospel as a distortion and perversion of the Bible when salvation as a blessing diverts attention from forgiveness of sin and a right relationship with God to the earthly blessings of wealth, health, power, and so forth for all believers on earth in the present world. Another point raised against the religious impact of the Prosperity Gospel is from too much power it arrogates to the devil. There is an impression that in an attempt to stir people up to pray for deliverance from Satan, the preachers do create an atmosphere of fear for Satan and thereby equate Satan’s power with God’s.<sup>76</sup> Be that as it may, it has been proved that the Prosperity Gospel has impacted the religious atmosphere in Nigeria.

#### 2.4.2 The Social Impact of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

There are a number of views that have been expressed. According to M.A. Ojo, (a professor with a specialty in African Pentecostal and Charismatic movements at Religious Department, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria) the Prosperity Gospel has functioned as a new product designed in response to individual, group, and societal needs in Nigeria and beyond.<sup>77</sup> This implies that the Prosperity Gospel serves as a tool for responding to social needs among people in Nigeria at all levels. For instance, Joshua Robert Barron, (a theologian based in Kenyan and serving with

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<sup>75</sup> Dieudonne Tamfu, “The Gods of the Prosperity Gospel: Unmasking American Idols in Africa” (2020), [The Gods of the Prosperity Gospel | Desiring God](#). (accessed June 20, 2023).

<sup>76</sup> George O. Folarin, “Contemporary State of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria” *Asian Journal of Theology* 21 (1), (2007), 69-65, [\\*Folarin - Contemporary State of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria.pdf](#). (accessed June 20, 2023).

<sup>77</sup> M.A Ojo, “Consonance and Dissonance in the Doctrinal Emphasis of Prosperity among Nigerian Pentecostals” *African Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies* 1(1), (2013), 15-45.

the Association of Christian Theological Education in Africa ACTEA), notes that the prosperity ministries participate in humanitarian activities like building schools and colleges, supplying food and medicine to the poor, supporting HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, and many more.<sup>78</sup> This is also corroborated by the remarks of Goka Muele Mpigi who points out the positive contribution of the Prosperity Gospel especially, in the educational sector of Nigerian society.<sup>79</sup> As their churches are increasing in number so are the number of schools being established are also increasing. These schools comprise nursery, primary, secondary, and university with most of the schools ranking among the best in the country such as Benson Idahosa University, Benin City and Covenant University, Ota. It is further believed that these educational institutions have not only contributed to producing quality graduates but have also helped reduce the pressure on government-established institutions in the areas of admission. All this speaks of the positive social impact of the Prosperity Gospel.

#### 2.4.3 The Economic Impact of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

The economic impact of the Prosperity Gospel has been shown in the area of employment and job creation.<sup>80</sup> It is believed that the educational institutions established have contributed immensely in providing jobs and thus reducing the number of unemployed people.<sup>81</sup> The argument goes further to state that if an account of the number of the Prosperity Gospel-based churches is taken, it will be surprising to see the number of people on their payroll. In other

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<sup>78</sup> Joshua Robert Barron, "Is the Prosperity Gospel, Gospel? An Examination of the Prosperity and Productivity Gospels in African Christianity," 99.

<sup>79</sup> Goka Muele Mpigi, "The Prosperity Theology's Impact on the Contemporary Nigerian Church and Society," 42.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 44

words, the Prosperity Gospel churches have helped to mitigate the socio-economic situation of Nigeria.<sup>82</sup>

Lovemore Togarasei, a professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, at the University of Botswana, agrees with this same view as he emphasises that the Pentecostal churches have used the prosperity message to encourage entrepreneurship.<sup>83</sup> The Pentecostals are said to teach members the importance of being entrepreneurs and being self-dependent rather than settling down as employees. Togarasei believes that the teachings of entrepreneurship have really helped to promote sustainable development and poverty alleviation in the context of a high rate of unemployment and make many Pentecostal members own their own businesses.<sup>84</sup> However, he acknowledges the argument that the Prosperity Gospel promotes the Western economic free market which has been blamed by others as a contributing factor to poverty in Africa because of capitalism.<sup>85</sup> The economic impact of the Prosperity Gospel is again opposed to the fact that though there is always a claim of economic enrichment among members, most of the members do not see prosperity being made manifest in their lives.<sup>86</sup>

#### 2.4.4 The Moral Impact of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria

This area has been much criticized because most critics of the movement believe that the Prosperity Gospel has tended to create a moral deficit in Nigerian society. Ande Apyewen et al believes that

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, *The Pentecostal Gospel of Prosperity in African Context of Poverty: An Appraisal*, 347.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 345.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Moses Kumi Asamoah, *Penteco/Charismatic Worldview of Prosperity Theology*, 206-207.

monetization and commercialization of religious activities thrived in Nigeria as a result of the Prosperity Gospel.<sup>87</sup> They argue that every religious activity like clapping of hands, dancing, prayers, devotion, and many more have been monetized. For instance, there is a practice of dropping money when the choir is singing or when a preacher is preaching in many Nigerian churches. They adduce the reason for high crimes in the church and the society to the prosperity Gospel with the claim that many professing Christians are involved in crimes such as drug and child trafficking, kidnapping, money laundry, cheating, and extortion through the influence of the Prosperity Gospel's emphasis on wealth and material possession for gaining recognition both in the society and the church.<sup>88</sup> This may be substantiated by cases of immorality and corruption involving pastors and churches in Nigeria as reported in some newspapers referred to below:

- i Pastor Bags Four Years Imprisonment for Fraud (234Next Newspapers, January 5, 2010
- ii. Pastor Dupes Okupe, Bank MD, Others, N2bn (Nigerian Compass, March 15, 2010
- iii. Pastor Dupes Trader Claims the Money was for Prayers (Nigerian Compass, April 22, 2010
- iv Holy Spirit removed her pants- says Pastor accused of having sex with student inside the church (Nigerian Tribune May 10, 2019).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ande Utensati Apyewen, Dantani Weyi Nuhu, and Josephine Joseph, "Prosperity Gospel: Effects on Nigerian Christian Church and Society" *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research* Vol. 05 Issue 04 (2022), 1503.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Efe Azino, "Proliferation of Churches and Corruption in Nigeria: Understanding the Irony" [https://www.academia.edu/6468351/Proliferation\\_of\\_Churches\\_and\\_Corruption\\_in\\_Nigeria\\_Understanding\\_the\\_Irony](https://www.academia.edu/6468351/Proliferation_of_Churches_and_Corruption_in_Nigeria_Understanding_the_Irony). (accessed August 15, 2023).

From another angle, it is viewed that the influence of the Prosperity Gospel has eroded moral values such as hard work, and honesty from among the people as families and clergy no longer question the sources of people's wealth as long as the money keeps flowing.<sup>90</sup> This points to the moral rot, corruption, indiscipline, fraud, and immoral acts being associated with the Nigerian church as a result of the Prosperity Gospel. This is a very strong argument against the Prosperity Gospel and this stands in contrast to the fact that the Prosperity Gospel promotes entrepreneurship.

In retrospection, we have come to understand that the Prosperity Gospel's main focus is on physical comfort and wealth. The movement's origin is also traced to America with Benson Idahosa as the arrowhead of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria. We have also discussed the different arguments found in favour and against the impacts of the Prosperity Gospel. I would like to point out that those factors that make the Prosperity Gospel attractive for Nigerians are very relevant to my research. These are the problems of poverty, suffering, and disease; the African worldview of success as favour from God and ancestors; the Prosperity Gospel preachers' evidence of wealth and success; multiplicity and availability of literature on prosperity teaching and the government's failure to meet the social and economic needs of the people which the Prosperity Gospel seems to have solutions to. These will be given critical analysis in our conversation in chapter five.

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<sup>90</sup> Dodeye U. Williams, "Prosperity Theology: Poverty and Implications for Socio-economic Development" in Africa in *HTS Theologese Studies/ Theological Studies* 2022. (99+) '[Prosperity theology': Poverty and implications for socio-economic development in Africa | Dodeye Williams - Academia.edu](#). Accessed June 19, 2023.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BLESSINGS OF SALVATION AND ESCHATOLOGICAL TENSION IN THE PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY IN GENERAL

#### 3.1 Preamble

Salvation has been foregrounded as a theme that runs through the entire Pentecostal theology with the belief that it not only produces the assurance of going to heaven after death but has significant implications and practical application for the present life on earth.<sup>91</sup> It is also opined that the Pentecostals adopt their theology mainly from Luke-Acts and not from Pauline or Johannine writings because of the cruciality of the Pentecost narrative.<sup>92</sup> This Luke-Acts theology of salvation makes salvation account a unique framework that presents salvation as (1) Spirit-focused, revolving around the biblical events of Pentecost (2) holistic, and (3) liberating.<sup>93</sup> Thus, this makes salvation not to be observed through the lens of the biblical narrative only but also as an event taking place in the here and now.<sup>94</sup>

This background information is therefore important for this section in order to lead us to the Pentecostal view of the blessings of salvation and how eschatological tension is approached generally. I first want to identify the relationship between blessing and salvation. That is, how the Pentecostals perceive the issue of salvation and blessing. It is believed that salvation consists in

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<sup>91</sup> Grace Milton, "Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet" in *The Routledge Handbook Pentecostal Theology* ed. Wolfgang Vondey (London: Routledge, 2020), 226.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



the atoning work of Christ on the cross<sup>95</sup> and the blessings that flow from it. In this regard, it may be understood that the Pentecostals believe that the blessings of salvation form an integral part of salvation. Because salvation in Christ does not happen in a vacuum, there is a human condition that necessitates salvation. For this reason, we shall examine the Pentecostal view of sin and atonement which is intended to lead us to the blessings of salvation in Christ. This section also sees the need to examine the African Traditional Religious concept of salvation in either its convergence or divergence from the African/Nigerian Pentecostalism.

### 3.2 Pentecostal View of Sin and Atonement in General

The Pentecostal view of sin and atonement takes us back to the Pentecostal story of salvation.<sup>96</sup> This basically begins with humanity being created in God's image and given life through God's *ruach* (breath). The first man and woman enjoyed a special and perfect relationship with God in the Garden of Eden. They were created pure and upright with the ability to exercise free will. Through voluntary transgression, they fell to the temptation to sin thereby rendering all humanity subject to God's wrath and condemnation. Going by Grace Milton, a Western theologian, this basic narrative and the interpretation of the Fall reveal the Pentecostal understanding of the origins of sin in human beings and in the world at large.<sup>97</sup> It is further believed that human sin has far-reaching implications beyond humanity to all of creation since prior to the Fall, human beings assumed stewardship over creation.<sup>98</sup> The Pentecostals believe that all people have sinned and thus, sin became universal and the way out is for all humans to be cleansed from sin through

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<sup>95</sup> Abiola Mbamalu, "Prosperity a Part of the Atonement": An Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9' *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36 (1) (2015), 1-8.

<sup>96</sup> Milton Grace, "Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet," 227.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

repentance and faith in “the precious blood of Jesus” for regaining a right relationship with God and to move towards holiness and restored purpose.<sup>99</sup> It is also acknowledged that sin does not only affect humanity’s relationship with God but it affects people’s relationship with one another; it affects the state of the entire creation; and it is the reason for suffering and physical sickness in the world today.<sup>100</sup>

It is believed that due to the lack of human ability to overcome sin on their own, God stepped in by sending His Son who came in the flesh and gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world.<sup>101</sup> The Pentecostals believe in the predominant atonement model as that of penal substitutionary atonement whereby God demanded a penalty to be paid for sin and Jesus Christ, God’s pure and sinless Son acted to pay the penalty and thus restoring humanity to a right relationship with God all by His blood.<sup>102</sup> In conclusion, the human response to the atoning work of Christ is seen as directly in line with the early Christians’ response to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>103</sup>

### 3.3 Salvation as Praxis in Pentecostal Theology in General

The emphasis of Pentecostal soteriology on embodiment is described as being central to salvation as praxis and this makes spiritual and doxological practices form important expressions for the Pentecostal experiences of salvation that is mainly evident in the giving of testimonies.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Grace Milton, “Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet,” 228.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 228

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 228

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 228-229

<sup>104</sup> Grace Milton, “Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet,” 231.

Pentecostal testimony is more attributed to inspiration by the Holy Spirit in witness of Christ and is perhaps considered a charismatic speech act following the lines of prophecy, words of knowledge, and speaking in tongues.<sup>105</sup> When the testimony is about giving witness to one's personal experience of salvation, it is taken to be a Spirit-inspired speech, and this personal testimony serves as a building block that continues the biblical salvation story by filling in "the gaps" between the history of the Epistles and the fulfillment of the events indicated in Revelation.<sup>106</sup> The understanding here is that the Pentecostals have a strong conviction that their testimonies are Spirit-inspired and must be accorded regard as the testimony of the Bible. As admitted, "Believers are not only invited to participate in the salvation story but to continue to tell it through their own experiences and witness."<sup>107</sup> Therefore, it may be summed up that personal testimony, experience, and witnessing, are taken to also serve as the blessings of salvation for the Pentecostals.

In corroborating the above-stated view, Kalu quoting Cheryl Johns maintains that Pentecostal hermeneutics in Africa is also praxis-oriented, with experience, and Scripture being used in a dialectical relationship- the Holy Spirit is placed in between to maintain this relationship while the lived faith is the result of knowledge of the Scriptures, the emphases are placed on the experiential, relational, emotional, oral aspects of faith; the immediacy of the biblical text; the liberty to interpret and appropriate the multiple meanings of the biblical texts with the recognition of a spiritual kinship between the authors and the readers which forms ongoing continuity with the New Testament church by pneumatic illumination. This stands in sharp contrast to what is mostly experienced in the West as J. Asamoah-Gyadu maintains, the Enlightenment in the West has almost

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<sup>105</sup> Grace Milton, "Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet," 231.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

demystified the Bible by liking the knowledge of the Bible and theology to be like any other academic discipline which has failed to give prominence to the fact that there is a supernatural and experiential element in Christianity without which the faith falls short.<sup>108</sup> This suggests that the Bible is held in Africa as having a supernatural and experiential value by the believers as against the Western believers who mostly approach the Bible from an academic or intellectual dimension.

<sup>109</sup> Kalu also mentions the prominent role attached to the emphasis on the narrative texts by which the reader gives authority to narrative sections of the biblical text and makes it a part of that person. This is most times used to corroborate the authority of personal revelation. The four-part process that has been developed to become a means of conscientization is revealed: First, it is taken that the Christian story functions as a source of critique for the present; two, there is believed that there is a movement from present praxis to the story; three, there exists a dialectic between the vision that arises out of the meaning of the story and the present praxis; and lastly, there is a shift of vision between the present praxis and the future that is shaped by one's appropriation.<sup>110</sup>

More particularly, Kalu opines that the hermeneutics for conscientization is displayed with vigorous homiletic that touches on people's experiences, portrays them in real-life testimonies, and brings the promises of the Bible. Thus, the Pentecostal homiletics in Africa call for action and social engagement as they bring together materials from both internal and external sources in a simplistic manner for even the uneducated can understand.<sup>111</sup> This may imply that the Pentecostals

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<sup>108</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu, *Contemporary Christianity: Interpretations from an African Context* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2013), 178

<sup>109</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 267.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 267.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 269.

do not stay within the confines of the Bible alone but use extra-biblical material to affirm their claims.

### 3.4 Blessings of Salvation from Western Pentecostalism

In this section, the blessings of salvation from Western Pentecostalism are examined. The purpose of this is to be able to identify the Western Pentecostals' view of the blessings of salvation in comparison to the understanding of African/Nigerian Pentecostalism which is mostly characterized by the Prosperity Gospel.

According to Grace Milton, there is no observable formal and clear *ordo salutis* advanced by Pentecostal theology except the one linked to Peter's command after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."<sup>112</sup> As a Pentecostal theology scholar, she further asserts that though this command does not single-handedly take the individual through the whole process of salvation, it represents the three initial stages that are an essential part of the 'born again' experience in Pentecostal theology.<sup>113</sup> Kalu's view offers a very significant insight at this point as he states that Pentecostalism stands for a paradigm shift that unshackles theology from rationalistic/scientific ways of thinking and expands the understanding of the spiritual dimensions of reality and the operation of the spiritual world.<sup>114</sup> However, Hans Burger's observation that the New Testament use of different metaphors<sup>115</sup> to depict salvation may account for the non-use of a systematic order of salvation in Western Pentecostalism.

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<sup>112</sup> Grace Milton, "Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet, 229.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>114</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 250.

<sup>115</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 540

Repentance as the first stage is viewed as not being public or confessional but personal and individual. This is closely connected with justification and in the place where salvation is in view, it is usually taken to be where the “conversion” experience has ended. Water baptism is treated as a sacramental act believed to be an outward expression of internal regeneration and considered necessary for salvation in Oneness theology.<sup>116</sup> It is also believed to be a human response to God’s work by faith and corresponds to an age when an individual is old enough to show commitment to God. The third stage involves Spirit baptism which is the act of the Holy Spirit entering into the believer by which he or she receives the empowerment and gifts to participate in the divine life to become Christlike. This is viewed as sanctification.<sup>117</sup>

There is no consensus among the Pentecostals as to whether salvation is a two or three stages process, whether justification (resulting from repentance) and sanctification can be combined and are followed by Spirit baptism, or whether justification and sanctification remain two separate crisis stages.<sup>118</sup> However, it is affirmed that the African Pentecostals teach a doctrine of sequential three-fold conversion: repentance from sin and initial acceptance of Christ; Spirit baptism, sealed and seated with Christ; capacity to engage in a power encounter with forces of darkness.<sup>119</sup> Yet, Pentecostal theology shares the same conviction with a Protestant theology of salvation by faith alone.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Oneness theology is from Oneness Pentecostalism also known as Jesus Name or Apostolic Pentecostal movement, a significant part of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity with over thirty million members worldwide. While it shares many key beliefs with conservative Protestants, the distinctive teachings of Oneness theology are one, that there is one God with no distinction of persons in God’s eternal being, and that Jesus is the fullness of one God incarnate; second is that water baptism should be administered by invoking the name of Jesus rather than the titles Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit; third, Acts 2: 38 is taken as the paradigm for Christian initiation and the pursuit of holiness is the fourth distinctive. David K. Bernard, “Oneness Theology: Restoring the Apostolic Faith” in *The Routledge Handbook Pentecostal Theology* ed. Wolfgang Vondey (London: Routledge, 2020), 195-205.

<sup>117</sup> Grace Milton, “Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet,” 229.

<sup>118</sup> Grace Milton, 229.

<sup>119</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 260.

<sup>120</sup> Grace Milton, 230.

Notably, the Pentecostals believe that salvation is totally God's work, yet in its application, God's saving work and the reception of the Spirit rest on the active response by the person who is to undergo the "born again" conversion experience as an individual.<sup>121</sup> The implication of this is that the Pentecostals hold that one has a role to play in one's salvation as one can only receive salvation through one's active faith, without a personal active faith there can be no salvation.

Three major changes are put forward to take place in the individual after the initial conversion: (1) regeneration, (2) restored identity as an adopted child of God, and (3) divinely guided destiny.<sup>122</sup> While it is noted that those changes may not be acknowledged immediately, it is believed that they operate in principle within the believer in Christ. Finally, baptism in the Holy Spirit with signs following (often as charismatic manifestations such as speaking with tongues) is taken to be biblically remarkable evidence of conversion or the blessing of salvation.<sup>123</sup> According to Frank D. Macchia, the experience of Spirit baptism was part of a deeply held restorationist impulse whose goal was to recapture the powerful early church portrayed in the New Testament with also a strong eschatological fervour at work.<sup>124</sup>

Wolfgang Vondey provides some useful points in this regard as he draws attention to the full gospel in Pentecostal theology. He notes that the full gospel operates as a theological narrative expression (hermeneutic) of Pentecostal altar liturgy- salvation, sanctification, Spirit baptism, divine healing, and the coming kingdom marking the way to and from the altar of Pentecost.<sup>125</sup> Beginning with salvation, he states that the entrance into the full gospel as liturgy shows that an encounter with

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<sup>121</sup> Grace Milton, 230.

<sup>122</sup> Grace Milton, "Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet," 230.

<sup>123</sup>, 230.

<sup>124</sup> Frank D. Macchia, "Spirit Baptism: Initiation in the Fullness of God's Promises" in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, 248

<sup>125</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, "The Full Gospel: A Liturgical Hermeneutic of Pentecost" ed. Wolfgang Vondey, *Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (London/New York: Routledge, 2020), 175.

God is soteriological, redemptive, transforming, converting, correcting, and delivering. This points to salvation blessings. Hence, salvation is indicated in a move to the altar, the acceptance of the invitation of God, and the response of the worshiper in a move forward into the holy place. The symbol of Pentecost as the story of the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in the cosmos, world, society, the church, and the human person serves as a model for narrating a broad Pentecostal liturgy that reaches the transformation and salvation of the total life.<sup>126</sup> Following Vondey here takes us through a series of encounters with salvation, sanctification, Spirit baptism divine healing, and God's coming kingdom.

Sanctification is presented as the second motif in the narrative of the full gospel; seen as a distinctive work of grace and the most controversial teaching among the Pentecostals. It follows salvation in the five-fold gospel but in the four-fold gospel, it is subsumed under salvation or Spirit baptism. Within the soteriological emphasis of the altar call, sanctification accommodates both the call of God and the believer's desire for holiness.<sup>127</sup>

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is the third and central element in the full gospel. It reflects a deep, personal experience by which the regenerated and sanctified believer receives an extraordinary encounter with the Holy Spirit empowerment for the Christian life. It is conceived as both a personal experience of grace and a communal, universal, and eschatological manifestation of God's kingdom in the world.<sup>128</sup>

Divine healing is another element of the full gospel and stipulates that wholeness and restoration are the universal will of God for the salvation of the entire creation. The liturgical contours of

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>127</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, "The Full Gospel: A Liturgical Hermeneutic of Pentecost", 177.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 178.



divine healing are linked to the altar through three intersecting dynamics namely, (1) those saved, sanctified, and baptized with the Spirit come to the altar to find healing, (2) those who experience healing at the altar take the altar to the world, and (3) those who receive healing in the world come to the altar for salvation.

The last element of the full gospel is the kingdom of God. It is noted that Pentecostal eschatology culminates in what is termed an apocalyptic mandate to go and seek the lost; to proclaim Christ as king; and to bring the world into God's kingdom. The events of Pentecost become an eschatological motivation for the proclamation of the entire full gospel till it finds its full realization.<sup>129</sup> It can be submitted that Pentecostal theology in this sense, is a participation in the day of Pentecost lived out in the charismatic, evangelistic, and socio-critical practices of the church revolving around the altar.<sup>130</sup>

Before we take on the next section where we shall be focusing on the Prosperity Gospel and salvation blessings, it may be helpful to quickly look at how the prosperity theology is perceived from Western Pentecostal theology. It is claimed that the Pentecostals generally view salvation in terms of forgiveness of sins, deliverance from evil, and healing of the body with diverse manifestations and experiences which include personal-spiritual, individual-physical, communal, socioeconomic, and ecological dimensions of life; salvation is also conceived as personal, familial, ecclesial, material, social, cosmic, and eschatological.<sup>131</sup> However, it is noted that the prosperity theology incorporates a broad and holistic view of salvation that anticipates material and physical prosperity to be products of faith as well as the importance of the inherent this-worldliness.<sup>132</sup> To

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>130</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, "The Full Gospel: A Liturgical Hermeneutic of Pentecost," 181.

<sup>131</sup> Grace Milton, *Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet*, 261.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 231.

this, Andreas Heuser views that the theological emphasis of the prosperity teaching on the matter of the “here-and-now” in the Christian life has generated a “spiritual platform” for the neo-liberal ideology.<sup>133</sup> Meanwhile, it is emphasised that prosperity theology is not universally agreed to by all Pentecostal groups, but is more associated with the Neo-Pentecostal group.<sup>134</sup> Peter Yong in objection to the prosperity gospel as evidence of a realised eschatology, argues that “the tension that the New Testament teaches between the realised and the yet-to-be-realised aspects of the kingdom is completely missing here, the emphasis solely rising on the former.”<sup>135</sup> It is obvious here that the Pentecostals in the West perhaps the Classical Pentecostals as discussed in chapter one view salvation generally from the spiritual blessings than the physical. It can also be stated that it is believed that the Prosperity Gospel is famous and unique to a specific Pentecostal group.

In summary, we can point out that in Western Pentecostalism, despite the absence of clear *ordo salutis*, there is an acknowledgment of such blessings of salvation as repentance, justification serving as the first stage while water baptism is connected to conversion as a mark of internal regeneration, while the third stage of salvation is connected to the blessing of the Spirit baptism. It is also revealed that there is no consensus on whether salvation is a two or three stages process. While it is believed that salvation is entirely God’s work, in its application, the Pentecostals emphasise the individual’s active response to God’s saving work and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Divine healing also belongs to salvation blessings with Pentecostal eschatology culminating in what is termed an apocalyptic mandate to go and seek the lost; to proclaim Christ as king; and to bring the world into God’s kingdom as claimed in the full gospel.

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<sup>133</sup> Andreas Heuser, “Prosperity Theology: Material Abundance and Praxis of Transformation” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, 416.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 261.

<sup>135</sup> Yong, *Prosperity Teaching in an African Context* (n.d.), 12.

### 3.5 The Blessings of Salvation and Prosperity Gospel in (African) Neo-Pentecostalism

From an African context, Kalu, drawing from three Ghanaian scholars' interpretation of the prosperity gospel from the concept of salvation pinpoints two emphases in Pentecostal soteriology namely conversion and transformation through empowerment.<sup>136</sup> This is further explicated to be taught as a doctrine of sequential three-fold conversion which specifies that a believer transits from "leprous anointing" (repentance from sin and initial acceptance of Christ) to "priestly anointing" (Spirit baptism, sealed and seated with Christ, and the manifestation of charismatic gifts of the Spirit), to "kingly anointing" (capacity to engage in a power encounter with forces of darkness).<sup>137</sup> He notes also that though a few groups of African Pentecostals believe in total sanctification, the majority believe that sanctification is a process that leads to more and more fruits of the Spirit.<sup>138</sup> From the foregoing, we can see a sharp difference between the Pentecostals in the West and the African Neo-Pentecostals as noted earlier. While the Western Pentecostal soteriology draws attention to such soteriological concepts- justification, and sanctification as God's blessings that free man from God's judgment and lead to a right relationship with God, the majority of African Neo-Pentecostalism draws attention to the emphasis on the empowerment of an individual believer and restoration not necessarily from sin but from shame to honour.

Going further, Kalu notes that the argument about tongues as an initial sign of the Spirit though exists in African Neo-Pentecostalism, it is not as hotly debated as it is being experienced in the West. Neo-Pentecostal born-again believers are rather spurred to desire the gift less as evidence of their faithfulness and more as a necessary instrument for effective prayer as the spiritual tongue is believed to be the language of the angels that can be used to confuse Satan. Thus, tongues speaking

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<sup>136</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 260.

<sup>137</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 260.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 260.

serves as a weapon in the warfare imagery of both salvation and the security of Christian life<sup>139</sup> Kalu again identifies three emphases on salvation from the Neo-Pentecostal view: first, salvation connotes being liberated as if in warfare or from a vulnerable position or defeat as well as by evil forces or sinful habits. Second, salvation means to regain a lost position in Christ, and third, salvation is to live happily.<sup>140</sup> In Neo-Pentecostals' imagination and objectification, the sinful persistent drive is seen as externally originating from Satan.<sup>141</sup> This explains why Satan is always to be blamed for every moral failure among African Neo-Pentecostals. Kalu adds also that in African Neo-Pentecostalism, "salvation manifests itself in the transformation of material, physical, and psychic wellbeing."<sup>142</sup>

Kalu also points to the notion of Abraham's blessing as being foregrounded in Neo-African Pentecostalism which presupposes that God's promised generosity as experienced by Abraham is very much accessible to Christians on earth in these days. This is premised on the ground that since the covenant was a legal contract, in the same way, is the promise part of a spiritual contract that makes each believer possess the ability to claim and possess prosperity.<sup>143</sup> The prosperity theology makes faith the route to prosperity and faith here is regarded not just as belief, but as acting on the word, speaking into reality what is not in existence, dreaming, and envisioning one's desired goals.<sup>144</sup> Faith is held to shape prayers and teach also how prayer must be used to access different kinds of prosperity. Thus, there are prayers of faith, agreement, intercessory, dedication, and anointing as used appropriately to access Abraham's blessings. Giving tithes and offerings is

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 260

<sup>140</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism*, 261.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 255.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 255.

another element tied to accessing this prosperity.<sup>145</sup> In alignment with Kalu's view, Kelvin Phiri writes that the message of prosperity reflects the theological idea that the blessing of Abraham has been willed to believers in Christ who are the beneficiaries of the new covenant.<sup>146</sup> He further notes that African Pentecostal churches teach the blessing of Abraham to encapsulate success in life's endeavour, health, progress, and general well-being.<sup>147</sup> From an outsider's view, the question remains to all of us: what does it mean in the present time of 'in between' to be in Christ, to be a member of the New Covenant, an heir of Abraham, and to share here and now in the blessing of Abraham as being advocated in African Neo-Pentecostalism?

From Ruth Marshall's point of view, the Neo-Pentecostals in Nigeria distinguished themselves from the older holiness movement by preaching the doctrine of prosperity that places emphasis on miracles, prosperity, and salvation in the here and now as well as global spiritual warfare.<sup>148</sup> Such elements as experiential faith, the centrality of the Holy Spirit, the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues, and miracles are noted. It is believed that the second coming of Christ and strict ethical conduct though reflect in the Neo-Pentecostal parlance, are made secondary to spiritual gifts and miracles in the here and now.<sup>149</sup> Marshall makes another observation that there is a difference in the nuances of becoming born again and being born again in the understanding of African Neo-Pentecostalism. While becoming born again is an event of rupture, being born again constitutes a continuous existential project, not acquired once and for all, but something that is never fully

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 255-256.

<sup>146</sup> Jason Kelvin Phiri, "African Pentecostal Spirituality: A Study of the Emerging African Pentecostal Churches in Zambia" (A Ph.D. Thesis in the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology, Faculty of Religion, University of Pretoria, 2009), 129.

<sup>147</sup> Jason Kelvin Phiri, "African Pentecostal Spirituality: A Study of the Emerging African Pentecostal Churches in Zambia", 129.

<sup>148</sup> Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 78.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 79.

achieved but can run the risk of being compromised.<sup>150</sup> This creates room for an individual to backslide or lose his or her faith completely. As she further points out, salvation becomes a process to be learned in which the intellectual apprehension of moral doctrines is combined with a gradual acquisition and enactment of a series of bodily techniques such as fasting and speaking in tongues.<sup>151</sup>

Marius Nel employs the nuance of miracle prosperity for describing the prosperity theology in African Neo-Pentecostalism.<sup>152</sup> As explicated, miracle prosperity basically claims that of a necessity, spiritual growth results in material wealth. This Neo-Pentecostal understanding links spirituality with material blessing. By this, it is emphasised that prosperity theology is different from other theology because salvation is viewed as a holistic physical, material, and spiritual wellness, which reflects the joy of living in fellowship with and participating in God's life shared with other people.<sup>153</sup> This does not suggest that a holistic understanding of salvation is wrong in itself, except when it is pinned to the matter of the here and now. It is further claimed that the Prosperity Gospel's influence on African Neo-Pentecostalism as against the Western Pentecostals comes as a result of the specific way of looking at the person of Jesus and salvation that is culturally predisposed.<sup>154</sup> It is believed that this cultural factor is responsible for the theological differences. This in my view is a valid point.

Another significant element worthy of note in the African Neo-Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel as discussed by Nel's is the significant place of the Deuteronomist's guarantee of blessings which

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>152</sup> Marius Nel, "Pentecostal Engagement with the Concept of Salvation Employed by African Neopentecostalism" in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* XX (2021) 1-19

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 3.

teaches that God usually commands His blessings on the people who obey Him.<sup>155</sup> This shows another dimension of the African Prosperity Gospel by which the blessings spoken of directly to the Israelites are linked to the blessing of salvation in Christ. Nel argues that since this is employed to meet the felt need of the African people, it functions as a witness to Neo-Pentecostals' pastoral sensitivity and theological realism that "discounts the cross and resurrection power through the Spirit power in a relevant way."<sup>156</sup> Nel's view here suggests that the Prosperity Gospel is being employed for a practical purpose.

In summary, it may be pointed out that in African Neo-Pentecostalism, salvation is very well regarded and understood to entail the blessings of conversion, transformation, and empowerment. The spiritual tongue is a salvation blessing that is meant for effective prayer in warfare imagery and the security of the Christian life. The concept of Abraham's blessings in material term is as well foregrounded in African Neo-Pentecostalism. There is also emphasis on miracles, prosperity, and salvation in the here and now as well as global spiritual warfare. The Deuteronomist's guarantee of blessings is also included in the salvation blessing of the African Neo-Pentecostalism.

### 3.6 Eschatological Tension in Pentecostal Theology

It is asserted that the Pentecostals believe that salvation has a climax that involves many possible climaxes to which their salvation drives them. These are categorised under the concept of "destiny." Destiny is conceived as a divinely guided and motivated future gained through salvation with regeneration and a renewed identity.<sup>157</sup> The three categories of destiny are (1) a destiny to be fulfilled in the present life, (2) a destiny of eternal life, after death, and (3) a destiny involving the

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>157</sup> Grace Milton, "Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet," 231.

whole creation in the eschaton.<sup>158</sup> The individual renewed destiny is occasioned by the liberation from sin and restored relationship with God which results from the atoning work of God and is applied as an act of faith-righteousness, holiness, and finally eternal life. That leads to eschatological destiny on the one hand, but on the other hand, is a strong belief in God's plan taken from biblical promises for the individual believer to be achieved in this present world.<sup>159</sup> In the same vein, it is also anticipated that the whole creation will be restored as all Christians experience their restored relationship with God and one another in its fullness.<sup>160</sup> This seems to imply restoration to the wholeness of life as it used to be before the fall. Peter Althouse however, argues that eschatology is neither restricted to the future nor to the end in Pentecostal theology, but rather reflects what he calls 'the always present' hope in the continuing activity of God in Christ by the Spirit in history.<sup>161</sup>

In their views, Babatunde Adedidubu, a Pentecostal theologian and professor at the Redeemed Bible College of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria, and Benson Igboin, a professor of Religious Studies at Adekunle Ajasin University, Ondo State Nigeria with interest in African Pentecostalism, while acknowledging that there may be different sides to the understanding of eschatology, point to irreducible contents that mean so much for the Christian- the idea of God's total revelation of Himself at the end of history (though experienced partially now); the awareness that our existence places on us responsibility guided by some form of divine ethics; our participation in the history that is about to close and the hope of the future that is fully to come

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 232.

<sup>161</sup> Peter Althouse, "Eschatology: The Always Present Hope" in in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, 268.



(though, we are involved in it partially now). Given this, they argue that eschaton-praxis, in some Neo-Pentecostal churches, fails to adequately countenance responsibility and ultimate accountability into its prosperity theology. Thus eschaton-praxis means enjoying eternal bliss here on earth which is devoid of anticipation of heaven.<sup>162</sup>

It is observed that eschatology stands as a major motif of the full gospel<sup>163</sup> which presents Jesus Christ as saviour, sanctifier, healer, Spirit baptizer, and soon-coming king in Pentecostal theology.<sup>164</sup> The full gospel Pentecostal eschatology is however viewed not as restricted to the future nor to the end but as the always very present hope in the continuing activity of God through Christ and by the Spirit in history.<sup>165</sup> This view is different from the above-stated Neo-Pentecostal view. Salvation is projected as an eschatological process that is both personal and cosmic; transforming humans into the image of Christ and transforming creation into the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>166</sup> The Pentecostal employs the altar as an eschatological metaphor for the kingdom of God that appears unexpectedly through the outpouring of the Spirit and participation in creation as a response to the divine presence. Thus, altar soteriology is viewed as eschatological not in terms of relational disposition between God and people toward a post-mortem but as a present reality experienced and practiced now in anticipation of the eschatological kingdom<sup>167</sup> Altar

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<sup>162</sup> Babatunde A. Adedibu and Benson O. Igboin, "Eschato-praxis and Accountability: A Study of Neo-Pentecostal Movement in the Light of Prosperity Gospel" in *Verbum et Ecclesia* vol. 40 (1) (2019) <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v40i1.1987> (accessed July 18, 2023).

<sup>163</sup> The full gospel speaks of a theological hermeneutic which takes account of Pentecostals' innate articulations of their own theological story. The most consistent methodological framework employed for narrating the historically dominant set of Pentecostal spiritual experiences is known as the four or five-fold gospel focusing on (1) salvation, (2) sanctification, (3) baptism in the Spirit, (4) divine healing, and (5) the impending arrival of God's kingdom Wolfgang Vondey, "The Full Gospel: A Liturgical Hermeneutic of Pentecost" ed. Wolfgang Vondey, *Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (London/New York: Routledge, 2020), 173.

<sup>164</sup> Grace Milton, "Salvation: Participating in the Story Where Earth and Heaven Meet," 268.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 273.

soteriology serves as a description of the Pentecostal ecclesia practices of which the altar call is very dominant. The altar call reinforces an understanding of human response to the divine invitation to salvation and the communal and individual response in a move, to tarrying and transformation as well as the ultimate release from the altar. It is a reflection of the emphasis of the full gospel on conversion, sanctification, Spirit baptism, divine healing, and the commissioning on behalf of God's kingdom as transformative moments at the altar that characterise different experiences of salvation<sup>168</sup>

Healing is foregrounded as an eschatological realization by the early Pentecostals who believed that healing was a soteriological benefit of the atonement on the ground that just as the death of Christ overcomes the curse of sin and brings redemption, the cross also overcomes the results of sin (sickness and death), and brings healing. Meanwhile, it is observed that one difficulty of early Pentecostal theology historically is that it placed too much attention on individual redemption at the neglect of the cosmic implications of biblical eschatology.<sup>169</sup> This suggests that the early Pentecostals' stance on healing as a benefit of atonement has also been upheld by the African Neo-Pentecostals and continues to be advanced by the Prosperity Gospel today. It may be established therefore that the Pentecostals believe that salvation in Christ confers on an individual all the benefits of the kingdom of Christ on believers in this present life.

In summary, we learn in this section that Pentecostal theology views eschatology as involving fulfilment of individual life destiny here on earth as well that which culminates in eternity. In

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<sup>168</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, "Soteriology at the Altar: Pentecostal Contributions to Salvation as Praxis." *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 34 (3): (2017b), 223-238.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 276.

particular, the full gospel's view of eschatology reveals eschatology that is both personal and cosmic in nature.

To a large extent in this chapter, we have been able to investigate the blessings of salvation and the eschatological tension in the Western Pentecostal and the African Neo-Pentecostal Prosperity Gospel. These are very significant for this thesis as we shall later attempt to compare and contrast these with each other and also with the African Traditional Religion as well as with Herman Bavinck's benefits of salvation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BENEFITS OF SALVATION AND ESCHATOLOGICAL TENSION IN BAVINCK/REFORMED THEOLOGY

#### 4.1 Preamble

This chapter aims at discovering Herman Bavinck's teaching on the benefits of salvation. Since sin necessitates salvation and salvation is a divine work, it is considered appropriate to do a quick survey of Bavinck's view of the origin of sin, the works of Christ with the application of salvation by the Spirit before fully concentrating on the application of the benefits of salvation as well as the eschatological tension. There is a need to provide answers to such pertinent questions as: how did sin originate and what is sin's impact on man? How is humanity saved? What benefits does salvation offer? We will therefore start with a short introduction of Herman Bavinck.

#### 4.2 A Short Introduction of Herman Bavinck

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) has been regarded as the leading theologian among the founders of Dutch Neo-Calvinism.<sup>170</sup> He was born in Hoogeveen as a son of a minister, Rev. Jan Bavinck. After completing gymnasium, he spent one year at the Theological School in Kampen where his father was a minister. Because the education there did not satisfy him, he moved to Leiden in 1874 to study theology under the famous professors Scholten and Kuenen and he completed his studies in five years bagging the title of doctor of theology in 1880.<sup>171</sup> He later served as a professor of dogmatics at Theological School Kampen (1883-1902) and Free University Amsterdam (1902-1921). He was popularly known for his extensive four-volume works known as Reformed

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<sup>170</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *A Half Century of Theology, Movements and Motives*, Tr. L. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 11-13.

<sup>171</sup> James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 316.

Dogmatics (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*) with the first edition written between 1895 and 1901.<sup>172</sup> Bavinck's irenic nature made him always look for what he and his opponents had in common and how he could do justice to them.<sup>173</sup>

In his historical context, Bavinck came out of a group of pietistically-influenced Reformed people with separatist tendencies. He wanted to reorientate this group to become less afraid of art, science, and politics since he believed the entire world is God's creation. The fundamental defining and shaping theme of his theology is identified as "grace restores nature."<sup>174</sup> Bavinck places great emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity which sets him apart as a Trinitarian theologian.<sup>175</sup>

#### 4.3 The Origin and the Spread of Sin

Bavinck asserts that the fallen world rests on the foundations of a creation that was good and came forth from the hand of God, but this did not continue for long in its original goodness.<sup>176</sup> Bavinck also affirms that the origin of sin is to be seen from the direction of the creature though never isolated from God's government and his counsel.<sup>177</sup> Bavinck posits that "God by His special revelation created the possibility of sin" going by the way man was created<sup>178</sup>. Adam in this sense is said to represent the whole of humanity as *persona publica*.<sup>179</sup> God's covenant with Adam, the covenant of works through Adam extends to all other human beings. In this is revealed the character of religion as always involving a covenant according to Bavinck.<sup>180</sup> The relationship

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<sup>172</sup> James Eglinton, *Bavinck: A Critical Biography*, 316.

<sup>173</sup> Johannes M. Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective*, (Eugene: WIPF & STOCK, 2008), 88.

<sup>174</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 17.

<sup>175</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective*, 89.

<sup>176</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3 *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 25.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>179</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 93.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

between Adam and the rest of humanity is what is characterized as physical and ethical-covenantal-juridical.<sup>181</sup> Following Genesis 3 report, the fall is regarded as a fact that occurred at the beginning of the human race and marks an indestructible component of the world and of history; and it is also a serious and appalling fact that the consequences of it continue to make an impact on the history of the human race to date.<sup>182</sup> In other words, Bavinck argues convincingly that the fall as reported in Genesis 3 gives a clear understanding of the origin of the sin as against all other alternative explanations.

Bavinck also emphasises the universality of sin through the original sin of Adam.<sup>183</sup> Adam's disobedience is linked with the originating sin and this reveals the organic unity and solidarity of the human race as representative.<sup>184</sup> Original sin shows that in all humans, it is the origin and source of all other sins. It is the moral depravity that men carry with them from the time of their conception and birth from their sinful parents.<sup>185</sup> The simple interpretation of this is that the reality of sin in the world and in every human being is traced from the first occasion of disobedience of Adam and becomes the nature of mankind in all generations as all humanity was included in Adam when he sinned. It is also noted that as extensive as original sin is in humanity as a whole, this also is true in the individual person. Sin holds sways over the whole person, the mind and will, heart and conscience, soul and body, over all one's capacities and powers. This points to man's total depravity.<sup>186</sup> Bavinck's idea may be summarized here. Firstly, Adam's disobedience caused the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>183</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 78.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 100-101

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 119.

original sin; secondly, that God neither sins nor causes sin, but sin's origin is not outside the will of God; lastly, sin is universal and also sin makes individual person to be totally depraved.

#### 4.4 Christ and His Work

According to Bavinck as mentioned by Hans Burger, God's Trinitarian life is a covenantal life that rests on the eternal foundation of the covenant of grace: the *pactum salutis* between Father, Son, and Spirit concerning the salvation of humanity.<sup>187</sup> This implies that the Trinity- the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is fully involved in the entire work of salvation. As revealed, while the Father plays the role of the Giver of the people to be saved; the Son serves as the guarantee and head of those who are elected.

This shall lead us to examine Christ's work in the restoration of creation. Christ's work will only be focused on as it directly concerns salvation. Hans Burger while clarifying Bavinck's thought on Christ's position regarding humanity states that Adam as head in the covenant of works, is head of humanity while Christ as head in the covenant of grace, is the head of the new humanity.<sup>188</sup> Christ acts as head in both predestination and election by being the mediator and the head of the covenant of grace and of the church.<sup>189</sup> Being head of the covenant of grace, Christ becomes representative and substitute and greater than Adam as head of the new humanity and the church.<sup>190</sup> Specifically, Bavinck points to Christ as the true covenant sacrifice, God's lamb who takes away the sins of the world.<sup>191</sup> This points to Christ's atonement. By his sacrifice (death) he secured his own exaltation and for his own the blessing of salvation- the forgiveness and removal of our sin, peace with

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<sup>187</sup>Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 98.

<sup>188</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 98-99

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>191</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 337-338

God.<sup>192</sup> In the entirety of Christ's person and work (for Christ's person cannot be separated from his work), Christ is a revelation of God's love.<sup>193</sup> Christ's death was a satisfaction for sin. Christ's full and complete obedience is a vicarious satisfaction and by this satisfaction, He has obtained all the benefits of salvation.<sup>194</sup>

Bavinck also points to Christ's state of exaltation. This he states, does not refer to the person of Christ and his nature but to the glory of his mediatorial work as by Christ's resurrection and ascension, Christ enters a new state and as the mediator, he is now at the right hand of glory.<sup>195</sup> Here, the necessity of the glorification of Christ's work is emphasised by Bavinck according to Hans Burger.<sup>196</sup> In summary, it can be noted that in all of Jesus' life- incarnation, obedience, death, resurrection, and glorification, Christ remains active as a mediator till he hands over a saved people to the Father.<sup>197</sup> This gives us a glimpse of what the benefits of salvation are in Bavinck's view.

#### 4.5 The Spirit's Application of Salvation

According to Bavinck, "the covenant of grace, the mystical union, the imputation of Christ to his church, all of which are rooted in eternity are first of all objectively realised in time in the person of Christ."<sup>198</sup> Hans Burger on his reflection of Bavinck's thought in this regard, affirms the Calvinistic tradition of theological perspective on the mystical union that sees the *unio mystica* as being rooted in the eternal council of God and worked out by the Holy Spirit.<sup>199</sup> As posits by Bavinck, Christ had been designated from eternity to be the mediator of the covenant of grace by

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 339.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 368-369.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 394.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 435.

<sup>196</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 113.

<sup>197</sup> Johannes M. Burger, *Being in Christ*, 113-114.

<sup>198</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 591

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 117.



which He vicariously makes atonement for the elect.<sup>200</sup> Again, Bavinck asserts that there are numerous special benefits which the Scripture in its listing of the blessings that were obtained by Christ and applied to the church by the Holy Spirit.<sup>201</sup> The implications of this theological perspective are thus enumerated: first, the imputation of Christ and his benefits comes first in the order of salvation with the gift of salvation.<sup>202</sup> In other words, Christ himself is a gift first given to the body along with the benefits of salvation. The second implication points to the gift of the Holy Spirit as the first benefit Christ grants after His glorification.<sup>203</sup> In other words, the Spirit here applies and distributes the benefits of salvation as acquired by Christ to believers. It is the Spirit's work to unite believers personally with Christ. This makes the gift of the Spirit and the resulting mystical union with Christ become the prerequisites to the gifts of other benefits.<sup>204</sup>

According to Bavinck, the Spirit works both with Word and the sacrament.<sup>205</sup> As the Spirit connects the soul to Christ in a *unio mystica*, the communion with Christ is made possible by the word of the apostles. This is followed by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper which give expression to the communion with Christ in his full richness by the Spirit. While baptism is the sacrament of incorporation, the Lord's Supper becomes the sacrament of growth in the communion with Christ.<sup>206</sup>

#### 4.6 The Application of the Benefits of Salvation

Having touched on the origin of sin, Christ and his work, and the Spirit's application of salvation, the question then may be: what are the benefits of salvation according to Bavinck? This question

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<sup>200</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 590.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, 579

<sup>202</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 118.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*. 119

<sup>205</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 593.

<sup>206</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 119.

will lead us to identify the benefits of salvation. Meanwhile, before proceeding into the discussion fully, it needs to be stated that Bavinck's treatment of the order of salvation is hinged on Jesus' continuing work as glorified Lord, the Holy Spirit's work in applying the benefits of salvation, the union with Christ as well as the new life.<sup>207</sup> According to Henk van Den Belt, Bavinck subdivides the benefits of salvation into three parts namely calling and regeneration, faith and justification, and sanctification and perseverance.<sup>208</sup> Specifically, we shall examine the following application of the benefits of salvation as discussed by Bavinck: regeneration and calling, faith and conversion, justification, and sanctification, perseverance, death and resurrection.

#### 4.6.1 Regeneration and calling

Bavinck in line with Rformation, defines regeneration as the implantation of the new life or the spiritual life that then leads to conversion and further sanctification.<sup>209</sup> It is believed that God's calling through the Word and the internal work of the Spirit plays a vital role in regeneration. Just as the operation of the Spirit is held to be immediate and irresistible.<sup>210</sup> As a benefit of salvation, regeneration is to make men spiritual people by which to live a life of intimate communion with God in Christ.<sup>211</sup> Bavincks also emphasises that regeneration does not mean that believers' created nature is qualitatively transformed as no new substance enters into the world with redemption, but the creature is only liberated from sin's futility and bondage; salvation is therefore seen as the restoration of creation and the reformation of life.<sup>212</sup> Hans Burger however remarks that in

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<sup>207</sup> Johannes Burger, *Being in Christ*, 32.

<sup>208</sup> Henk van Den Belt, "Herman Bavinck and his Reformed Sources on the Call to Grace: A Shift in Emphasis Towards the Internal Work of the Spirit" 42. [Bavinck & Regeneration.pdf](#) (accessed June 22, 2023).

<sup>209</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, 76

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 40, 80

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 87-92

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 92

Bavinck's view of regeneration of Christ's application of the benefit of salvation as first the germ of new life is given and also that it is a substantialist concept that contains some problems.<sup>213</sup>

#### 4.6.2 Faith

Having spoken of the new life in Christ through regeneration, Bavinck emphasises the need for the spiritual growth of a regenerate person through the Spirit's strengthening and nourishment.<sup>214</sup>

The Spirit produces in believers the virtues of faith, knowledge, wisdom, and other virtues to be able to grow intellectually and this is tied to the Word of God.<sup>215</sup> The act of understanding the word of Christ and becoming spiritually conscious of its truth is termed "enlightenment" also known as the knowledge of faith.<sup>216</sup> Faith is the way by which all the benefits of salvation are appropriated to us; it is through faith that they are enjoyed.<sup>217</sup> It can be understood then that salvation is not earned by faith because Christ alone gives salvation. Salvation is only enjoyed through faith.

Faith is further explained as the trust-filled surrender to God and His word and promise which involves two elements, acceptance of the apostolic message about Christ; and personal trust in Christ who forgives sin and bestows complete salvation.<sup>218</sup> Knowledge and trust, intellect, and will were also incorporated into Bavinck's understanding of faith.<sup>219</sup> This is made possible as the new life implanted in regeneration yields, in relation to the intellect, faith, knowledge, and wisdom and

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<sup>213</sup> Hans Burger, *Being in Christ*, 129.

<sup>214</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, 98.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 98-99.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, 99-100.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 126-132.

in relation to the will, conversion, and repentance. Here, the Word of God plays an active role that brings a connection between knowledge and faith.

#### 4.6.3 Conversion

Conversion is another benefit of salvation that Bavinck treats in the order of salvation. Conversion and repentance are applied as connoting the same biblical terms.<sup>220</sup> Bavinck sees conversion as a two-fold action that involves dying to self and rising to Christ in a life of obedience.<sup>221</sup> It is the gift of grace and the application of Christ's finished work to the believer: true conversion is a religious-ethical matter that involves the whole person in a turn from sin and to God.<sup>222</sup> Conversion is also recognized as a lifelong turning to God.<sup>223</sup> It is also noted that conversion appears the same in essence, but in the manner and time of its occurrence, there are differences.<sup>224</sup>

We can understand here that Bavinck recognizes that conversion is not to take a uniform experience for all people. According to Bavinck, conversion serves as a benefit of salvation that is aided by the initial experience of regeneration through the Spirit's work in the life of an individual. It is also established that believers from the first point of spiritual conversion continue to experience this till the end of their life on earth. Meanwhile, it is clearly pointed out that conversion does not stop believers from suffering, tribulation, and occasional acts of sinning which must not be taken as a punishment.

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<sup>220</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, 136.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 137-138.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, 140.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

#### 4.6.4 Justification

Bavinck opines that of all of God's benefits given in the covenant of grace, the first place must be given to justification (forgiveness of sin).<sup>225</sup> Bavinck does not accept that justification is from eternity, yet he agrees that justification precedes faith.<sup>226</sup> Justification is viewed as bringing forgiveness of sin through God's gracious judicial act by which he acquits humans from all the guilt and punishment of sin and bestows on them the right to eternal life.<sup>227</sup> Additionally, more emphasis was placed on righteousness as God's gift rather than as a benefit accrued by faith. Righteousness is then seen in terms of imputation which ties justification to the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>228</sup> Again, it can also be pointed out in Bavinck's theology that justification is not a product of human works of righteousness. It is not something that is received by one's faith or obedience.<sup>229</sup>

#### 4.6.5 Sanctification

Bavinck also turns to sanctification as a benefit of salvation. In his treatment of sanctification, Bavinck states that Christ is both believers' holiness in the same sense in which he is believers' righteousness. Hence the remarks, "the holiness that must completely become ours therefore fully awaits us in Christ"<sup>230</sup> He posits that sanctification is ethical and continues throughout the whole of believers' life by the renewing activity of the Holy Spirit; it makes the righteousness of Christ believers' ethical possession while justification is a juridical act that is completed

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<sup>225</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, 179

<sup>226</sup> Johannes Burger, *Being in Christ*, 118.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, 209-214.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, 193.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, p. 248.

instantaneously.<sup>231</sup> Bavinck makes a clear distinction between evangelical sanctification and legalistic sanctification by stating that God in Christ grants believers along with righteousness complete holiness; that God does not just impute it but also inwardly imparts it by the regenerating and renewing working of the Holy Spirit until believers are fully conformed to the image of Christ. Having established this distinction, he notes that justification and sanctification are not separated for a moment. In justification, there is the restoration of the religious relationship of men to God, while in sanctification their nature is renewed and cleansed of the impurity of sin. By justification, believers become the righteousness of God while by justification, God comes to dwell in them by His Spirit and renews them after his image.<sup>232</sup>

This shows us clearly that Bavinck conceives sanctification as not a one-time experience in the life of believers, but something that continues to be worked out in them till they are glorified with Christ. It can also be noted that sanctification is not something to be achieved by believers, but something Christ already achieved for the believers which they will continue to experience as they continue in faith. It can also be pointed out that Bavinck's treatment of sanctification shows the reality of sin's presence which necessitates a believer's lifelong process of sanctification.

#### 4.6.6 Perseverance of the Saints

Bavinck's Reformed theology stipulates that perseverance is not a human activity or human action but God's gift. Perseverance is seen as a gift of God. God is believed and seen as the one watching and seeing to it that the work of grace continues and is completed in the life of believers. It is further revealed that God carries this out through the believers themselves. All Scriptural

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<sup>231</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, p. 249.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*,

admonitions and threats serve as means by which God confirms His promise and gift through believers. They serve as means by which perseverance is realized in life. All the admonitions and warnings come as God's will to morally lead the believers to their heavenly blessedness and by the Spirit's grace to prompt them willingly to persevere in faith and love. Therefore, it is misleading to take those Scriptural admonitions for the possibility of a total loss of grace.<sup>233</sup> We can submit therefore that perseverance is a benefit of salvation by which believers are assured of God's faithfulness to their life of faith to the end.

#### 4.6.7 Death and Resurrection

One of the critical matters of interest in this thesis bothers on whether believers enter into full possession of the benefits of salvation in their earthly life. It is therefore important to examine how Bavinck views this matter. According to Bavinck, believers possess the whole of salvation in Christ in a juridical sense now while they enter into full possession of them at death.<sup>234</sup> Physical death is implied here. It is believed that there remains no more sanctification after death, but a state of sanctity resumes in which the spirits of the righteous are made perfect.<sup>235</sup> Death is portrayed as a as an enormous change that comes as a sudden relocation of the believer into the presence of Christ; a breaking of bonds with all earthly life and entering into a new world with completely different conditions and relations.<sup>236</sup>

Bavinck also recognizes a communion between the church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heaven that cannot be broken.<sup>237</sup> Finally, it is held that though the souls of believers

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<sup>233</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatic*, Vol. 4, p. 267.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, 635-636.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, 636.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 636.

<sup>237</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatic*, vol. 4. 642.

in heaven do not experience a change of status, they are confirmed and grow in their knowledge and love of God.<sup>238</sup> We may summarize then that, believers do not enter into the full possession of all the benefits of Christ until death; believers do reach the zenith of sanctification after death; there is a spiritual communion between the church militant and the church triumphant at the moment; and believers soul will grow in their knowledge and love of God.

#### 4.7 Eschatological Tension in Bavinck's Reformed Theology

Having dealt with the benefits of salvation as contained in the order of salvation, I shall at this point examine how Bavinck's Reformed theology views eschatology in the light of the biblical salvation of God's people. This is very critical to this research work in order to be able to appropriate the already/not yet feature of eschatology in regard to God's kingdom inaugurated on earth through the death and resurrection of Christ vis a vis its implications for believers' life on earth. Bavinck in dealing with eschatological tension ascertains that while the kingdom of God is first planted in the hearts of men and all the benefits of the kingdom are internal and invisible, the future blessedness is not expected to be spiritualized.<sup>239</sup> He argues that biblical hope that is rooted in incarnation and resurrection can be proved to be creational, this-worldly, visible, physical, and bodily hope.<sup>240</sup>

Bavinck claims that the blessings in which the believers participate are not only spiritual, but also material, and physical in nature with the evidence of the Scripture that maintains the intimate connectedness of the spiritual and natural.<sup>241</sup> It is asserted that the believers will not only be free

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<sup>238</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatic*, vol. 4, 642.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid*, 718

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, 718-719

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 720.



from sin but as well from all the consequences of sin- ignorance and error, death, poverty and disease, pain and fear, hunger, and thirst, cold and heat, and from all weakness, dishonour, and corruption.<sup>242</sup> Yet, spiritual blessings are far more important and innumerable abundant for believers in Christ. When exactly will these blessings be fully realised? Bavinck clearly points out that these will be at the renewal of creation after the final judgment. Be that as it may, it will be recalled that Bavinck believes in the renewal of a Christian culture-science, arts, politics and society as reflected in his popular theological idea of “grace restores nature.”<sup>243</sup> This also in some way relates to a material and cultural reality. Can Bavinck be taken up on this as something related to health and wealth of the Prosperity Gospel today? I think the ideas are not the same upon the fact that Bavinck’s argument is based on the allusion to the inner transformation by the Holy Spirit that does not divide between the sacred and the secular. After all Christians are described as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). This may be the sense in which Bavinck approaches the matter of the renewal of a Christian culture. In line with the Scripture, it is opined that the present world will not continue forever nor be destroyed but will be cleansed of sin and recreated, reborn, renewed, and made whole. The rebirth of human beings will only be completed in the glorious rebirth of all creation. To this end, the kingdom of God has come and it still coming.<sup>244</sup>

We can glean from Bavinck’s point the idea that the benefits of salvation have material and physical dimensions apart from its spiritual dimension as it is being experienced in the present world. It is noted that while believers experience the spiritual aspect of these blessings on earth,

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<sup>242</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatic*, vol. 4, 721.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, p. 716-722.

the full realization of the material and physical aspects of the blessings does not come until the renewal of creation after judgment. This justifies the already/not yet feature of the kingdom of God and salvation. As alluded to by Hans Burger, the emphasis on the necessity of the glorification of Christ's work points to the eschatological drive of Bavinck Christology that Christ's work is yet to be completed until he hands over the kingdom to the Father.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Johannes Burger, *Being in Christ*, 113.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONVERSATION BETWEEN PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

#### 5.1 Preamble

In this section, I shall first do a critical analysis of the relationship between the Nigerian context and the Prosperity Gospel. Next, I shall compare and contrast the Prosperity Gospel with Bavinck's Reformed theology based on their models of salvation as discussed in chapters three and four. Lastly, I shall attempt to provide theological responses to some specific issues/questions that may be necessitated from the outcome of the conversation between the two theologies.

#### 5.2 A Critical Analysis of the Relationship between the Prosperity Gospel and the Nigerian Context

The Prosperity Gospel as an appropriation of Pentecostalism in Nigeria (Africa in general) has been discussed in chapter two with part of chapter three focusing on the blessings of salvation. This will be revisited here for the purpose of critical analysis. Its relationship with the Nigerian context shall be brought to the fore in this analysis. From the earlier discussions, it has been revealed that the Nigerian context is characterized by several factors.

- We shall begin the review by focusing on the unfavourable socio-economic realities in Nigeria (Cf. 29-30).

Despite the fact that Nigeria is blessed with vast mineral resources like crude oil, Nigerians have a lot of poor people. For instance, as of 2018, it has been on record that Nigeria attained the unenviable status of being the country with the highest number of people living in abject poverty

in terms of poverty counts with 49% of its 190 million population living in abject poverty.<sup>246</sup> This shows clearly how people struggle to get out of poverty by any means possible. It will be recollected that this same condition is mentioned as one of the three main factors that influenced Benson Idahosa, the pioneer apostle of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria to embrace the Prosperity Gospel.<sup>247</sup> The problem of poverty is accompanied by other problems such as lack of access to good medical care, quality education, unemployment, physical, economic, and social suffering as well as low quality of life. As we have noted before, the Prosperity Gospel offers ready-made appeals to divine intervention in the problem of poverty, disease, and suffering. These socio-economic realities make it naturally possible for the Prosperity Gospel to thrive in Nigeria.

Without being biased, it will be reasonable to acknowledge that the Prosperity Gospel preachers to some extent, are attempting to proffer solutions to the problems of poverty, disease, unemployment, suffering and many more by providing facilities such schools, hospitals, facilitating economic empowerment of the members, inculcating entrepreneurship skills and so forth (Cf. 33-34). However, it may be submitted that this effort, though is good in itself it does not address the problems. It is like trying to cure a disease without addressing the cause. Corruption, greed, self-centredness and such moral problems remain the bane of poverty and suffering in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the society keeps on degenerating at an alarming rate by the emphasis on wealth, success and material acquisition.

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<sup>246</sup> This is based on data from the World Poverty Clock: <https://worldpoverty.io/> (accessed on 15 July 2023). The methodology used in generating the data is published as (Cuaresma et al., 2018).

<sup>247</sup> R. Kitause, A Historical Study of Prosperity Gospel Preaching in Nigeria, 1970-2014.

- Another important factor that is found to characterize the Nigerian context in relation to the Prosperity Gospel concerns the belief in the “here and now” or ‘this-worldly stress.’ (Cf. 22, 47)

This featured prominently in our discussion of both the Prosperity Gospel and the African Traditional Religion. It is pointed out that the Prosperity Gospel and African Traditional Religion share the same worldview that wealth and success are signs of God’s blessing.<sup>248</sup> ATR views salvation essentially from the point of view of the present human condition. ATR looks at the socio-economic and physical condition of people as markers of the blessings of God in people’s lives. This is also found to be the same in the Prosperity Gospel. Prosperity preachers base their preaching on the things that affect the physical, social, familial, and economic well-being of the people. As argued by some scholars, one of the Prosperity Gospel’s impacts is marked by its ability to provide quality education, a quality health care system, job creation, and entrepreneurship development.

- Furthermore, the relationship of the Prosperity Gospel with the Nigerian context is observable from the eschatological point of view (Cf.53)

ATR is generally observed to lack basic eschatological properties (the idea of the close of the age, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal reward) though there is a notion of life after death when one joins the invisible world of the ancestors. In the case of the Prosperity Gospel, most often than not, the issues of eschatology are not addressed and when they are addressed, it is from the point of view of God’s kingdom has come and has to be enjoyed in the present world.

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<sup>248</sup> Elkana Jamin, A Biblical Assessment of the Understanding of Blessings and Curses in Prosperity Gospel in Africa with Special Attention to the Use of Malachi 3:6-12,

- The spirituality that places much emphasis on the quest for experience, feelings, and the supernatural is another factor that characterises the Nigerian context to which the Prosperity Gospel has come to relate (cr. 40-41)

There is a wide range of beliefs and practices in supernatural realities in the Nigerian context. For instance, a lot of importance is associated with dreams and visions. Some people who used to frequent traditionalists in the past for a change of condition and status that is regarded as shameful or dishonorable have since switched over to Pentecostal Gospel preachers because of the similarities. Some opt for this kind of spirituality to get protected from misfortunes or forces of evil. The use of objects such as mantles, oil, handkerchiefs, water, and so forth are pieces of evidence of the relationship between the Nigerian context share with the Prosperity Gospel.

### 5.3 A Comparison of the Models of Salvation of the Prosperity Gospel and Bavinck's Reformed Theology

Efforts shall be made here to compare the models of salvation as found in the Prosperity Gospel with Bavinck's Reformed theology.

First and foremost, both the Prosperity Gospel and Bavinck's Reformed theology attempt to communicate the understanding of the application of salvation to the people from their different contexts and times. This is very good and commendable. Bavinck's theology was developed within the socio-religious context of the Dutch Orthodox Reformed tradition and the modern culture of the early twentieth century while the Prosperity Gospel is a theology of the contemporary time in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

- First, it is observed that both the Prosperity Gospel and Bavinck acknowledge the fact of the origin of sin as having to do with Adam's disobedience in the garden. This disobedience

affected man's relationship with God and man's relationship with the rest of the creation. It is also recognized that sin affects the whole human race negatively.

- It is further identified in both theologies that salvation was worked out by God to bring man's restoration to God and the rest of the creation.
- The Trinity's involvement in the work of salvation features in both theologies, though it is more projected in Bavinck's. Both theologies allude to Christ's atoning sacrifice as the ground for salvation.
- Both theologies attest to the fact that Christian salvation is real and can be marked in believers although there are some differences in their models of salvation, it is clearly observed that both of them point to the reality and application of salvation in people's life.
- In the Prosperity Gospel, the blessings of salvation are often mentioned while Bavinck's Reformed theology speaks of the benefits of salvation in marking the application of salvation. This points to the fact that both theologies recognise the reality of salvation and its appropriation as noted before not minding the difference in the terms used to denote the experience.

Having made that general comparison, we shall now turn to the specifics as we identify some common elements in both models of salvation. Let us however recall that it was mentioned earlier that the Pentecostals generally lack clear and formal *ordo salutis*<sup>249</sup> as contained in Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics. This does not seem to be true as there are some of the elements mentioned in Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics that are equally mentioned in the Prosperity Gospel as well. These are displayed in the table below:

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<sup>249</sup> Grace Milton, 229.

<i>Bavinck's Reformed Theology</i>	<i>The Prosperity Gospel</i>
Regeneration	Being born again
Conversion	Conversion
Repentance	Repentance
Justification	Justification
Faith	Faith
Sanctification	Sanctification

The table above has indicated the common elements that are alluded to in both the Prosperity Gospel and Bavinck's Reformed theology. These six are used directly in connection with the application of salvation to individual believers. It must however be noted that the mere mention of these elements does not imply that they all mean the same thing in both traditions. Their different understanding will be considered in the next section.

We need to also mention that the ATR does not fit into this section as the understanding of salvation in ATR does not follow the model analysed above.

#### 5.4 A Contrast of the Models of Salvation of the Prosperity Gospel and Bavinck's Reformed Theology

Having identified the common elements shared by both Reformed theology and the Prosperity Gospel, I shall proceed to look at the differences that are observed between the two and also point out the possible reasons for this. This will be indicated in the table below:



<i>Bavinck's Reformed Theology</i>	<i>The Prosperity Gospel</i>
Perseverance of the saints	-
-	Authorisation in spiritual conflict/power encounter, liberation
-	wealth and healing

From the table above, we can observe the contrast between Bavinck’s Reformed theology and the Prosperity Gospel. This shall be discussed.

- Perseverance of the Saints is completely omitted in Pentecostal theology. This is presented as the benefit of salvation in the Reformed theology. Perseverance of the Saints is viewed as the divinely-given ability of the believers to be able to trust God to reach the end of their faith on earth.<sup>250</sup> Perseverance is the assurance and the security of the believer in their salvation. The reason for this omission may be due to the fact that the Prosperity Gospel emphasises that suffering and pain belong to the sinful life, the new life in Christ guarantees a suffering and pain-free life (Cf. 52-53).
- Bavinck’s Reformed theology does not acknowledge liberation, power encounter, authorisation in spiritual conflict <sup>251</sup>. The Prosperity Gospel believes that the spiritual authority to exercise spiritual power is part of the blessing of salvation (Cf. 49). This power is also exercised through the speaking in tongues in order to confuse the devil in spiritual warfare. This aspect may need to be re-examined by the Reformed theology.

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 267  
<sup>251</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1979), 133-144.

- Wealth and healing are also part of the Prosperity Gospel's blessing of salvation (Cf. 25, 46 & 56). This has been a critical issue in this research. The Prosperity Gospel insists that a believer is bound to be wealthy and healthy to manifest the blessing of salvation. This is not found in Bavinck's Reformed theology. Though Bavinck acknowledges that salvation in Christ affects the whole of humanity and the entire creation, the full manifestation is delayed till the second coming of Christ.
- On death and resurrection, Bavinck teaches that death is a breaking of bonds with all earthly life and entering into a new world with completely different conditions and relations; which comes as a sudden relocation of the believer into the presence of Christ.<sup>252</sup> Bavinck shows clearly here how Christian salvation connects life in the body to the believer's eternity with Christ after death and as the culmination of the glorious inheritance of believers in Christ. On the contrary, the Neo-Pentecostal eschato-praxis as pointed out by Adedibu and Igboin proves that the bliss of heaven could be enjoyed on earth by believers as part of God's blessing on them. The Neo-Pentecostal eschaton-praxis places more importance on life over death with the impression that eschatology should be understood more as part of life rather than accountability before God ultimately.<sup>253</sup>

In other words, with prosperity theology salvation brings the benefit of enjoying a materially and physically good life on earth to believers in Christ. Since this is actually the crux of the matter in this thesis. We shall therefore examine further questions that may bring clarification on this matter.

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<sup>252</sup> Herman Bavinck,

<sup>253</sup> Babatunde A. Adedidubu and Benson O. Igboin, "Eschato-praxis and accountability: A Study of Neo-African Pentecostal Movement in the Light of Prosperity Gospel," 1.

## 5.5 Issues/Questions for Further Engagement between Prosperity Gospel and Reformed Theology on the Blessings/Benefits of Salvation

The questions below are considered essential to further engage Prosperity Gospel and Reformed theology on the blessings/benefits of salvation. These questions are raised in order to biblically, and systematically verify the claim of prosperity as an integral part of the blessings of salvation.

- i. Are all the blessings/benefits of salvation to be enjoyed or experienced by all believers or not and when?

This is a very important question and the reason is that it will help us to know whether the blessings/benefits of salvation are to be experienced by every believer or whether there are some of these blessings/benefits that may not be experienced by some believers. From the consideration of the *ordo salutis*, we have found out that both Pentecostal and Reformed traditions suggest that those elements are what mark the life of believers and of necessity, are to be present in the life of all believers. If this is the case, the present reality then shows that wealth, health, and other material blessings that are associated with the prosperity gospel are not enjoyed in all cases by all believers. That means, there are many believers who are still poor and suffer ill health despite their salvation in Christ. If material prosperity is then a valid blessing of salvation as claimed in the Prosperity Gospel, how then may we account for this? We can as well cite from the Scripture the reality of the experience of poverty among the early Christians. For instance, Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus in Luke 15:19-31 while James talks about the poor believers in his epistle (James 2: 2). The point being made here is that if regeneration, justification, faith, repentance, and other elements mentioned are valid and real experiences to be practically enjoyed by all believers, why is bodily/material blessing different?

ii. Does Salvation in Christ Guarantee Problem-free Life?

This is another legitimate and relevant question for our engagement on the blessings/benefits of salvation. Since the prosperity gospel entails that believers have access to full physical well-being on earth that speaks of wealth, good health, the absence of suffering, sickness, pains, and many more. There are many biblical references that ascertain the reality of suffering, sickness, disease, pains, lack, and other life problems by believers. Paul itemizes his experience of physical problems such as hunger, thirst, danger, peril, and so forth even as an apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-27). In James 5:13-16, we find that believers can still experience suffering and sickness as James recommends prayer as a vital tool given to Christians to seek remedy for their unpleasant earthly conditions.

There seems to be no place in the Bible where believers are guaranteed a problem-free life on earth. This is supported by Paul's argument in Romans 8:22-23, as he refers to the groaning of the whole creation as well as the believers also who still groan inwardly while awaiting the redemption of their physical bodies. In other words, believers are still subject to the vicissitude of life in spite of their salvation in Christ. Yet, Paul makes it known that their body is yet to experience the full redemption in Christ.

iii. When Does the Bible Teach that Believers Will Experience Problem-free Life?

This question also requires attention. Indeed, Jesus in the upper room discourse states that believers will experience tribulation in the world (John 16:33). The believers are also promised a life when all things shall be made new (Rev. 21:5). Nevertheless, the Bible does not mince words to declare that this promised newness or what may be termed a problem-free life is not going to be experienced in the present world, but in the new world to come. This is when believers are

promised that tears, hunger, thirst, sorrow, crying, and death will no longer be experienced by believers (Rev. 21:4). That can be said to be the time the believers will experience prosperity as it were and being claimed.

Aside from this, it will be tantamount to a mere fallacy to claim that salvation blessings in Christ Jesus guarantee men a prosperous life experience on earth. For instance, death has continued to be a serious life threat to all of humanity despite the redemption brought about by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. It will be interesting to note that the early apostles and early Christians had all died and a number of them suffered a martyr's death. Several generations of believers had passed unto glory just like the present generation is going to witness the same thing if Christ's second coming is still delayed. Do we now say that those early believers including the apostles who were the pioneer witnesses of salvation in Christ and the original recipients of the Word of God suffered some deficiency in the blessings/benefits of salvation? This is never so as all that we have of the Scripture and the foundation of the Christian faith today came from these pioneer believers.

#### iv. Can the Prosperity Gospel be Labelled Another Gospel?

It is noteworthy that the Prosperity Gospel is thriving and making great waves in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. Nevertheless, its substance has become questionable and raised a lot of dust, especially in regard to the blessings/benefits of salvation. Just like the perfectionism claims that Christians can reach perfection from sin in this life, the Prosperity Gospel's claim seems to be no different. Let us then appeal to the Scripture's authority has been claimed to be the final arbiter in any matter in the Christian faith. The Scriptural texts that have been advanced in support of the Prosperity Gospel may be said to be misinterpreted and misapplied. Such texts are Matthew 6:33, John 10:10, 2 Cor. 8:9, 3 John 2. The case may seem to be the same in Galatians 1:6-7 where Paul

declares the Gospel that is promoting circumcision among the Galatians a different Gospel because it tended to alter the core of the biblical gospel of Christ and salvation benefits. In light of this, the Prosperity Gospel can also be described as a different Gospel which calls for concern for the health of the Nigerian church in general and the Nigerian Baptists in particular.

This chapter may therefore be concluded by noting the following: first, the Prosperity Gospel of African Neo-Pentecostalism shares many things with the Nigerian context. It has also been noted that African Neo-Pentecostalism shares some elements in its model of salvation with Bavinck's Reformed theology. Finally, it is revealed that most of the elements of salvation found in the Prosperity Gospel shared with Bavinck's Reformed theology are interpreted and applied for immediate and practical life usage as against the ethical and spiritual wellbeing in Bavinck's Reformed theology. Thus, the African Neo-Pentecostal understanding of the blessings of salvation tends to consist in the physical and material well-being in this world (making a strong case for the kingdom of God as already being here and now), while Bavinck's Reformed theology tends to the spiritual and total renewal of creation in the world to come (the kingdom of God has come and is still coming).

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Summary

In this research, I have endeavoured to investigate the biblical understanding of the blessings/benefits of Christian salvation and the eschatological tension of God's kingdom for the recipient of salvation in the Nigerian context of the Prosperity Gospel. The main problem of this research was to seek to know whether the 'blessings' the Prosperity Gospel preaches are the same as the benefits of salvation in Reformed theology, and if all the blessings of salvation in Christ are realised here and now. This understanding was sought for the sake of the Nigerian Baptist Church which is being overwhelmed by the Prosperity Gospel of the African Neo-Pentecostalism version of Pentecostalism.

In pursuing this goal, I chose conversation partners to represent the Prosperity Gospel and the Reformed theology. Wolfgang Vondey, a Western theologian on Pentecostalism, and Ogbu Kalu an African theologian, on African Pentecostalism, were chosen respectively while Herman Bavinck, a renowned Dutch theologian was chosen to speak from the Reformed theology. Because of the peculiar nature of African Pentecostalism which has fuelled the Prosperity Gospel, the African Traditional Religion (ATR) was also examined as an important marker of the Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria.

#### 6.2 Conclusion

From the engagement of the Prosperity Gospel and Bavinck's Reformed theology, the Nigerian Baptist Church has the following to learn in regard to the blessings/benefits of salvation: First, the Prosperity Gospel's understanding of the blessings of salvation centres essentially around physical,

material, financial and social well-being of the believer on earth. All the blessings/benefits of salvation such as justification, conversion, faith, repentance, and sanctification which were found in common with Bavinck's Reformed theology seemed to be generally viewed from a practical and utilitarian lens as it affects the physical well-being of the believer. This is contrary to Bavinck's Reformed theology which teaches these benefits of salvation from the viewpoint of what God has accomplished in Christ and how it affects the believer's spiritual relationship with God now and hereafter.

Again, it is to be learned that in the Prosperity Gospel, the notion of eschatological tension rarely surfaced as the eschatological praxis of the African Neo-Pentecostalism proved that salvation blessings must be enjoyed here and now. The bliss of heaven is meant to be enjoyed on earth. Thus, the Prosperity Gospel places life over eternal life.<sup>254</sup> This is in contradiction to Bavinck's Reformed theology. Bavinck teaches that the benefits of salvation have implications for believers both here on earth and later in the afterlife. Death and resurrection are taught by Bavinck which connects the believer to the glorification of Christ as a result of the union with Christ's death and resurrection which have been juridically realised now but are yet to be practically experienced till the restoration of the believer's physical body and the entire creation.

The Nigerian Baptist Church should acknowledge some of the missing links among the Prosperity preachers as involving the interpretation and understanding of the blessings of salvation from the African Traditional Religious context of poverty, sickness, and so forth. It must also be understood that the Prosperity Gospel preachers appeal more to experience and emotional feelings than critical thinking and theological reasoning in their approach to teaching the blessings of salvation in

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<sup>254</sup> Babatunde A. Adedidubu and Benson O. Igboin, "Eschato-praxis and accountability: A Study of Neo-African Pentecostal Movement in the Light of Prosperity Gospel," 1.



Nigeria. Be that as it may, the Nigerian Baptist congregation may need to learn from the Prosperity Gospel the dynamics of liberation and power encounter which is missing in Bavinck's Reformed theology.

### 6.3 Recommendations

- i. It is essentially important for the Nigerian Baptists Church to note the marked similarity between the Prosperity Gospel's teaching regarding the blessings of salvation and the African Traditional Religious idea of blessing.
- ii The Nigerian Baptist Church should see it as a necessity to engage the Prosperity Gospel adherents in a dialogue for the health of the Christian community in Nigeria in general, and the Baptist congregation in particular. This can be done by bringing Reformed scholars to lead discussions on critical theological issues from time to time.
- iii. Reformed theology is something very remote in the Nigerian Christian community, it is therefore recommended that the Nigerian Baptist Church should take the lead in inculcating Reformed theology in its theological programmes which would help expose pastors and theological educators to theological dogmatics.

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