

THE PLACE OF THE POOR IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH VIS-A-VIS PROSPERITY THEOLOGY OF TODAY: EXAMINING THE EVANGELIZATION TREND IN NIGERIA

The poor in the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary refers to those with little or no possession, low quality of life and deficient in basic necessities of life. Thus, the phenomenon of poverty has varieties of meaning; ranging from a socio-economic condition of life demanding basic needs in life, to a spiritually vulnerable condition that is dependent on the grace and mercy of God to be redeemed. On the other hand, Prosperity Theology or sometimes referred to as prosperity Gospel tends to reflect some aspect of liberation Theology with its attendant emphasis on well-being of the believers as the ultimate end of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While some Churches pioneer this type of Theology, others such as the baseline Churches tend to differ.

According to scholars of new trends of theological studies, while prosperity churches often have a reputation for manipulating and alienating the poor, they are some who are involved in social programs towards empowerment of the poor by ways of indoctrinating human flourishing with the goal of releasing people from their state of squalor. It can be observed that a lot of so-called prosperity churches hold seminars on financial responsibility for their members and intending members so as to create the consciousness in them that they can actually take their destiny in their own hand as far as meeting basic things in life are concerned. This has also been criticized that though such seminars contain some sound advice, they often emphasize the purchase of expensive possessions.

The proponents of prosperity Theology as a valid means of evangelism encapsulate the activities of Jesus Christ in his numerable miracles and healing of the abject and sick as bedrock of this theology. However, those who are of different opinion suggests 'the way of cross' of Jesus Christ as essential ingredient to attaining salvation and as such should be given priority.

Evangelization and conversion as the trend shows now hang around the option of presenting the gospel as that which is meant to liberate people from shackles of poverty and unworthy life to a meaningful existence understood in heightened economic life in which believers would have a feeling of progress and well-being.

This paper critically examines prosperity Theology as an authentic option of evangelization while appraising poverty as also a valid reality in the life of a genuine christian.

Key words: Poverty, Prosperity, Evangelization, Theology, Mission, Nigeria