

Poverty, Illiteracy cum Prosperity Theology: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: Prosperity Theology is the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through the faithful payment of tithes and offerings. However, the literature reveals that most adherents to the prosperity gospel are not prospering financially and prosperity preachers have been accused of feeding fat from the donations of church members. Even at that, millions of persons still cling to the prosperity gospel. Employing Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, a survey of 300 respondents was carried out aimed at examining the proposition that poverty and illiteracy are factors encouraging continuous adherence to the theology of prosperity. It also examined the accusation that prosperity preachers’ wealth is largely dependent on their congregants’ donations. The study reveals that poverty and illiteracy are associated with continuous adherence to the prosperity gospel. It also indicates that prosperity preachers usually enrich themselves largely from the donations of their congregants. Practical recommendations were thereafter submitted on how the problems gleaned from the study could be ameliorated.

Keywords: Poverty, Illiteracy, Prosperity theology, Donations, Nigeria.

Introduction

Prosperity theology, also known as the prosperity gospel has been ascribed many names such as the ‘name it and claim it gospel’, the ‘blab it and grab it gospel’, the ‘health and wealth gospel’, the ‘word of faith movement’, the ‘gospel of success’ and ‘positive confession theology’ (Jones, 1998). Lausanne Theology Working Group (2009) defined prosperity theology as “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the “sowing of seeds” through the faithful payment of tithes and offerings.” It originated in the United States of America (See Bowler, 2010; Jackson, Undated: 16) and has spread like wild fire to many parts of the world including Africa and especially Nigeria with many churches promising healing, wealth, and happiness (Wikipedia, 2013; Ekeke, 2012).

Many scholars and observers have attributed the preponderance of prosperity theology to the social problem of poverty (For example, see Ekeke, 2012; Bible411.com, 2010; Lioy, 2007:60; Falsani, 2012; Folarin, 2007; Lausanne Theology Working Group, 2009; Koch, 2009:10; Ekeke and Mumford, 2012). The millions of adherents to the prosperity gospel also do their best in applying the tenets of this theology which include giving/donating money and other material things (otherwise called ‘seed sowing’), positive confession, praying and fasting (Omoyibo and Okosun, 2014:2). However, an indicative search of the literature confirms that after some years of adhering to the prosperity gospel, most of its adherents are not prospering financially and health-wise and are often disappointed (See Folarin, 2007; Lausanne Theology Working Group, 2009; Grady, 2013; Generationscult.com, 2011; Igbinovia, 2003:26; Street Journal, 2012; Christianity Today, 2009:1). In addition, prosperity preachers have been accused of misinterpreting the scriptures to convince their adherents to hold on to this theology while they are feeding fat from the donations of church members (Fakoya, 2008; Street Journal, 2012; Global News 2012; Adoyi, 2012; Bible411.com, 2010; Lioy, 2007:60; Ukah, 2007:15; Ukpong, 2006; Momodu, 2010:18; Igbinovia, 2003:26; Didymus, 2011; Jones, 1998; Generationscult.com, 2011; Grady, 2013; Lausanne Theology Working Group, 2009; ChristiaNet, 2012).

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Even at that, millions of persons are still clinging to the prosperity gospel and prosperity preachers still have control of their members (Ibrahim, 2013). It is obvious from the foregoing that there are some factors influencing continuous adherence to the prosperity theology. This research will therefore aim to examine the proposition that poverty and illiteracy are factors encouraging continuous adherence to the theology of prosperity. In addition, it will examine the accusation that prosperity preachers' wealth is largely dependent on their congregant's donations.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has been rated as one of the countries with extremely poor people. According to UNDP Nigeria (2016), the poverty rate is 62.6% in a population of 170 million people. In the middle of the year 2016, the country slipped into recession having experienced two consecutive quarters of declining growth. And many Nigerians have lamented that they have never known it so tough (BBC News, 2016). Illiteracy is another problem in Nigeria. Her adult literacy rate is 61.3%. Thus, those from 15 years and above who cannot read and write a simple statement make up 39.7% of the population (UNDP, 2013: 172, 173). In this complexity, churches preaching the prosperity gospel have proliferated, promising health and wealth for a Christian who has faith, engages in positive confession and donates to support Christian ministries. Despite the fact that there are millions of adherents to the prosperity theology in Nigeria who do their best in applying its tenets by demonstrating faith in giving financially and materially to their churches, making positive statements and praying and fasting regularly, poverty is on the increase as the current statistics above testify. In addition, prosperity preachers are observed to be living in flamboyance and opulence largely from the donations of their members.

Research Methodology

This survey comprised a sample size of 300 respondents drawn from a population of professed Christians who are familiar with the prosperity gospel; this includes Pentecostals and Non-Pentecostals in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria which happens to be the home of prosperity gospel in Nigeria and indeed Africa. The sampling technique employed is purposive/judgmental sampling technique which is a non-probability sampling technique. The selection of this technique is hinged on a lack of information as to the size of the study population (de Vaus, 1993:77). Of course, the findings from this study cannot be generalized to the population of the study. A questionnaire is the instrument of data collection used while the chi-square is employed as an inferential analytical tool for the test of hypotheses.

Literature Review

The Concept of Prosperity Theology

Prosperity theology or the prosperity gospel has been ascribed many names such as the 'name it and claim it gospel', the 'blab it and grab it gospel', the 'health and wealth gospel', the 'word of faith movement', the 'gospel of success' and 'positive confession theology' (Jones, 1998). Lausanne Theology Working Group (2009) defined prosperity theology as "the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the "sowing of seeds" through the faithful payment of tithes and offerings." In the same vein, it is defined as the teaching that God blesses those he favours most with material wealth. Prosperity theology assumes that every Christian has the right to be rich and prosperous if he is faithful (Falsani, 2012; Palmer, 2011). "Adherents to the prosperity gospel believe that wealth is a sign of God's blessing and is compensation for prayer and giving beyond the minimum tithe to one's church, televangelists, or other religious causes" (Koch, 2009:1). However, the prosperity theology in Africa and especially Nigeria has been redefined because of the infusion of local cultural preoccupation with demons, spirits, and witches (Didymus, 2011). Putting the above into consideration, Omoyibo and Okosun (2014:2) defined "prosperity theology as the teaching that a Christian who has faith, engages in positive confession and donates buoyantly to Christian ministries will be wealthy, healthy, happy, and protected from his/her enemies." In all, "the prosperity gospel concludes that it is the right of all believers in Christ to enjoy the fullness of God's spiritual and physical blessings in the here and now" (Folarin, 2007).

The Origin of Prosperity Theology

An American named Daniel McConnell has conducted a piece of research which is extremely illuminating in establishing the origins of prosperity theology. McConnell established Kenneth E. Hagin as the father of the prosperity gospel or the faith movement because almost every faith ministry of the United States (where the theology originated) has been influenced by his ministry (Jackson, Undated: 16). For example, in 1974, Rhema Bible Training Center promulgated the prosperity theology of Hagin and by 2008, Rhema Bible Training Center, centered in Tulsa, Oklahoma claimed to have graduated nearly 30,000 ministers. “Through Rhema Bible and his annual conferences, Hagin succeeded in training uncounted pastors in his “word of faith” strand of prosperity theology, offered ministerial credentials and provided national exposure for his message and his protégés” (Bowler, 2010:24). However, though Hagin is established as the father of prosperity theology, he is not the author of its teachings though he claimed that “the new teaching was given to him personally by Jesus through a series of divine visitations during the 1950s.” McConnell places side by side several passages from the works of both Hagin and a man called Essek Williams Kenyon, and the overwhelming conclusion is that Kenyon was directly plagiarized by Hagin. As McConnell found out, “the word-for-word uniformity of the two men is beyond the bounds of coincidence.” Consequently, Essek Williams Kenyon who was not a Pentecostal but was ordained by the Methodist church and later spent most of his lifetime with the Baptist church has been isolated as the source of the prosperity theology (Jackson, Undated:16; Kitause and Achunike, 2013: 10). Kenyon referred to as the grandfather of prosperity theology seemed to have been exposed to the Faith Movement during his education at Emerson College of Oratory in the 1890s (Bowler, 2010: 32; Wikipedia, 2013).

Another person who has influenced prosperity theology worthy to mention is Oral Roberts. He is regarded by many to be the father of the prosperity gospel movement and claimed at the beginning of his ministry during a time of search for direction, that God miraculously led him to 3 John 2, which he understood as a revelation of the prosperity gospel (Jones, 1998). 3 John 2 says: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (The Holy Bible, KJV). Oral Roberts founded the Oral Roberts University in 1963 which brought academic standing and ministerial credentials to the movement. Roberts succeeded in decorating countless fellow ministers with honorary PhDs including John Hagee, Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar and Kenneth Copeland. His efforts succeeded in energizing the Faith Movement and giving believers theological cohesion and shared platforms (Bowler, 2010: 24, 25). Over the years the prosperity theology has gained wide appeal, and books promoting it are best sellers (*Awake!* May, 2009:12).

The Origin of Prosperity Theology in Nigeria.

The origin of prosperity theology in Nigeria has been indisputably attributed to Benson Andrew Idahosa (1938-1998), the founder of Church of God Mission International Inc. with headquarters in Benin City, Edo State. As Owojaiye (2010) puts it succinctly, “it would not be out of place to refer to Benson Idahosa as the father of the Faith Movement in Nigeria.” It happened that Benson Idahosa was influenced by the various purveyors of the prosperity gospel in the United States of America while he was studying in Christ for the Nations Bible Institute (Kitause and Achunike, 2013:10). After he returned in 1973, Idahosa claimed to have received this message from God:

The world and its people are complaining daily of poverty and want. I have given you the mouth of miracles and blessings to my people. I have asked the cashiers of heaven to be on duty as long as you have a need for my own honour and glory. I shall supply all your needs according to my riches in glory. Begin to bless your people with all blessing: ask them to ask me anything they need, and I shall provide it for them. If only they will honour me with all their wealth, I shall make them to be prosperous in all areas of their lives. I shall bless your partners and coworkers. Wake up, go to the church in the morning, and tell them poverty died last night. What you bless on earth is blessed in heaven. Bless my people, says the Lord, who came to give the good life of abundance (Olofinjana, 2012).

With time, Idahosa took the prosperity gospel to other parts of Africa and succeeded both directly and indirectly in mentoring some of the exponents of Faith Movement that we have in Africa and especially Nigeria including Ayo Oritsejafor, David Oyedepo, Felix Omobude and Chris Oyakhilome. Televangelism (through the “Idahosa World Outreach Television Ministry”) was instrumental in the spread of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria by Idahosa. He was known to have famously declared that “my God is not a poor God” and had very strong links with international prosperity gospel ministers like Billy Graham, Kenneth Hagin, Benny Hinn, Oral Roberts, amongst others (Owojaiye, 2010; Olofinjana, 2012; Christianity Today, 2009:38;). Prosperity gospel has become very popular in Nigeria. In fact, the PEW forum on religion and public life conducted a survey in 2006 where 92% Nigerian Christians agreed that wealth and material blessings are based on one’s faith (Ekeke, 2012).

Poverty and Prosperity Theology

This section discusses the effect of poverty on adherence to prosperity theology, the effect of prosperity theology on poverty and the effect of prosperity theology on prosperity preachers according to current and available literature. Lausanne Theology Working Group (2009) recognized “that prosperity teaching flourishes in contexts of terrible poverty, and that for many people it presents their only hope in the face of constant frustration, the failure of politicians, and NGOs etc. for a better future or even for a more bearable present.” However, it is important to reveal the findings from two sociological studies carried out in the United States of America with regards to the influence of income on adherence to prosperity gospel. In his ethnographic study, Harrison (2005:159, 160) observed that “for those who have not yet been upwardly mobile, the doctrine supplies explanations (such as their being “between blessings”). But for those who have become more prosperous or are in the process of being so, this belief system is an important conceptual vehicle supporting their efforts.” In his quantitative study, Koch (2014:24) revealed that income is not a significant predictor of prosperity adherence and so the prosperity gospel is not a type of poor people’s movement.

According to scholars, prosperity theology has not had a positive impact on the economic lives of its poor adherents. Lausanne Theology Working Group (2009) rejected the belief that prosperity teaching provides a response to the poverty of the people among whom it flourishes but noted that the teaching leaves multitudes worse than before with the added burden of disappointed hopes. It has also been noted that the poor flocks of prosperity preachers continue to wallow in poverty. Specifically, it has been revealed that available research on prosperity gospel provides zero evidence supporting the proposition of “the more people give to their church, the richer they become.” Rather, there are various documented cases where heavy giving caused financial hardship for some people. With specificity, it was noted that the prosperity gospel in Nigeria is not fully delivering on its promises as there are still many Christians who are financially poor and sick (Christianity Today, 2009:1; Momodu, 2010; Adoyi, 2012; Grady, 2103; Bible411.com, 2010; Generationscult.com, 2011; Folarin, 2007; Nyezi, 2012).

Unlike majority of their adherents who are poor (especially in Africa), prosperity preachers have been accused of living in undisputed and overt splendor, flamboyance and opulence (Momodu, 2010, Igbinovia, 2003:26; Didymus, 2011; Fakoya, 2008; Grady, 2013; Lausanne Theology Working Group, 2009; Bible411.com, 2010). Prosperity preachers have also been criticized for abusing the faith of their members by manipulating scriptures in order to enrich themselves through large donations (Lioy, 2007:60). Specifically, a U.K based politician, scientist and humanist, Tunde Arongundade noted that prosperity churches have cornered a significant percentage of Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Sahara Reporters, 2011).

Education and Prosperity Theology

With regards to the relationship between level of education and adherence, Koch (2014:25) found that the less education a Christian has, the more likely he or she is to adhere to the prosperity gospel. His study also revealed that “those with less education are more likely to agree that material wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, and those with less education are more likely to agree that poverty is a sign that God is unhappy.” However, his study also revealed something noteworthy, that “education is not a significant predictor of being a member of a prosperity movement; of agreeing that God wants people

to be financially prosperous.” Though education does affect acceptance of the core teachings of the prosperity gospel, according to the study, it does not affect membership itself either formally or informally. Ekeke (2012) simply assumes that those who adhere to the prosperity gospel are biblically ignorant. How about the prosperity preachers? Put simply and with specificity, Omotoye (2010) notes that “many of the leaders and founders of Pentecostal churches are well educated”, which is similar to Ukah’s (2007:11) reference to prosperity preachers as “a new class of religious elites with university education.”

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Max Weber’s “The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism” as a theoretical framework. In his classical work, Weber attempted to show that emerging beliefs by the Calvinists about predestination and material success in the world were intricately bound up in the rise of capitalism in Northern Europe (Monaghan and Just, 2000:127). Though he was interested in ascetic Protestantism, he was primarily concerned with Calvinism. The Calvinists believed that only a small number of people are chosen for salvation and that people had been predestined to be either among the saved or among the damned including the idea that there was nothing anybody could do to know or determine his fate. Thus, this idea left people uncertain about whether they were among the saved/elect since no one could know or influence God’s judgment. To reduce this uncertainty, the Calvinists developed the idea that *signs* could be used as indicators of whether a person was saved. People were then urged to work hard in order to uncover the signs of salvation, which were to be found in economic success. In sum, the Calvinist was urged to engage in intense, worldly activity and become a “man of vocation” (Ritzer, 2012:150; Hill, 1973:121). As used by Weber, the spirit of capitalism was an ‘ethos’ that stressed economic success. Its goal was to instill an attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically. This spirit regarded the acquisition of money as an ethically approved end in itself and gave no limit to the pursuit of gain; it also preached an avoidance of life’s pleasures. Incorporated in this ethos are ideas such as ‘time is money’; ‘be industrious’; ‘be frugal’; ‘be punctual’; ‘be fair’; and ‘earning money is a legitimate end in itself’ (Ritzer, 2012:149; Hill, 1973:127). Based on the ideas above, the Calvinists threw themselves into a quest for wealth. Their action eventually brought about what Weber referred to as an “unanticipated consequence” because what they intended by their actions led to a set of consequences that were at variance with their intentions viz. capitalism (Ritzer, 2012:150).

Some similarities can be drawn between the Calvinists and adherents of prosperity theology, the most notable of which is the belief that wealth is a sign of God’s blessing. In addition, both groups applied ideas or tenets to bring about wealth. However, there are striking differences between the ideas embedded in the ethos of Calvinism in gaining wealth and the ideas embedded in the theology of prosperity. For example, while the Calvinists were urged to work hard and be frugal and re-invest their profits, prosperity theology encourages its adherence to donate buoyantly to support Christian ministries and then wait for manna to fall from heaven as it were. Also, in Calvinism there was the idea that it was people’s duty to increase *their* wealth ceaselessly which is in contrast with the accusation that prosperity preachers are increasing their wealth largely from the donations of their followers while the followers are becoming poorer. Summarily, it can be said that the ideas in Calvinism with regards to gaining wealth are more practical and rational than the ideas in the prosperity gospel.

In any case, it is worthy to note that Weber’s work was on tracing the effect of religious convictions on economic behaviour. Thus, he treated religion as an independent variable. However, this study treats religion as a dependent variable because it is aimed at finding out the effect of social conditions on religious behaviour. This study will test the following hypotheses:

H1: *Poverty is associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel.*

H1: *Illiteracy is associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel.*

H1: *There is an association between the donations of congregants and the wealth of prosperity preachers.*

Findings

The previous chapters have dealt extensively with Christianity and prosperity. In this chapter, the data collected from the field are analyzed and hypotheses are tested via chi-square.

Chi-Square Test

Chi-Square formula = $\Sigma (fo-fe)^2/fe$

Hypothesis I

H₁: *Poverty is associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel*

H₀: *Poverty is not associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel*

Question: Do Christians adhere to the prosperity gospel because they are poor?

- (a) Strongly Agree [33] (b) Agree [51] (c) Strongly disagree [72]
- (d) Disagree [79] (e) Undecided [65]

These responses are the observed frequency (fo); the expected frequency (fe) is got by dividing the total number of respondents by the number of variables, i.e. 300/5 = 60.

Again the formula is stated: $\Sigma (fo-fe)^2/fe$

Table (1):Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis I

Poverty and Adherence to Prosperity Gospel	fo	fe	fo-fe	(fo-fe) ²	(fo-fe) ² /fe
Strongly Agree	33	60	-27	729	12.15
Agree	51	60	-9	81	1.35
Strongly Disagree	72	60	12	144	2.4
Disagree	79	60	19	361	6.02
Undecided	65	60	5	25	0.42
Total	300	300	0		22.3

Field Survey/Work (2017)

Level of Significance = 5%

Calculated X² = 22.3

Critical or table X² at 5% Significant level = 5.99

Decision Rule:

Accept the null hypothesis, Ho, if Calculated X² ≤ Critical X². Reject the null hypothesis, Ho, if Calculated X² ≥ Critical X². In this case, calculated X² is greater than the theoretical X².

The null hypothesis is then rejected. The substantive hypothesis that poverty is associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel is accepted.

Hypothesis II

H₁: *Illiteracy is associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel*

H₀: *Illiteracy is not associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel*

Question: Do Illiteracy makes Christians adhere to the prosperity gospel?

- (a) Strongly Agree [41] (b) Agree [48] (c) Strongly disagree [45]
- (d) Disagree [71] (e) Undecided [95]

Table (2):Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis II

Illiteracy and Adherence to Prosperity Gospel	fo	fe	fo-fe	(fo-fe) ²	(fo-fe) ² /fe
Strongly Agree	41	60	19	361	6.02
Agree	48	60	12	144	2.4
Strongly Disagree	45	60	15	225	3.75
Disagree	71	60	-11	121	2.02
Undecided	95	60	-35	1225	20.42
Total	300	300	0		34.61

Field Survey/Work (2017)

Level of Significance = 5%; Calculated $X^2 = 34.61$; Critical or Table $X^2 = 5.99$.

In this case, the calculated X^2 is greater than the theoretical X^2 . The null hypothesis is thus rejected. This implies that illiteracy is well associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel.

Hypothesis III

H_1 : The wealth of prosperity preachers is based largely on the donations of their congregants

H_0 : The wealth of prosperity preachers is not based largely on the donations of their congregants

Question: Do Clergy men who preach the prosperity gospel enrich themselves largely from the donations of their followers?

- (a) Strongly Agree [58] (b) Agree [52] (c) Strongly Disagree [69]
- (d) Disagree [73] (e) Undecided [48]

Table (3): Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis IV

Congregants' Donations and Prosperity Preachers	fo	fe	fo-fe	(fo-fe)²	(fo-fe)²/fe
Strongly Agree	58	60	-2	4	0.07
Agree	52	60	-8	64	1.07
Strongly Disagree	69	60	9	81	1.35
Disagree	73	60	13	169	2.82
Undecided	48	60	-12	144	2.4
Total	300	300	0		7.71

Field Survey/Work (2015)

Level of Significance = 5%; Calculated $X^2 = 7.71$; Critical X^2 at 5% Significant level = 5.99.

In this case, the calculated X^2 is less than the theoretical X^2 . The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The alternate hypothesis that the wealth of prosperity preachers is based largely on the donations of their congregants is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that poverty and illiteracy are associated with adherence to the prosperity gospel in the study area. It also indicates that prosperity preachers usually enrich themselves largely from the donations of their congregants.

▪ **Does poverty encourage adherence to the prosperity gospel?**

The study revealed that more of poor individuals tend to adhere to the prosperity gospel than individuals from the wealthy class. This is in harmony with the recognition by Lausanne Theology Working Group (2009) “that prosperity teaching flourishes in contexts of terrible poverty, and that for many people it presents their only hope in the face of constant frustration, the failure of politicians, and NGOs, etc. for a better future or even for a more bearable present.”

▪ **Does illiteracy encourage adherence to the prosperity gospel?**

The study reveals that more of illiterate individuals adhere to the prosperity gospel as they cannot read the Bible for themselves and hence rely on whatever interpretations given to them by their revered prosperity preachers. This finding concurs with the quantitative study of Koch (2014:25) that the less education a Christian has, the more likely he or she is to adhere to the prosperity gospel. His study also reveals that “those with less education are more likely to agree that material wealth is a sign of God’s blessing, and that poverty is a sign that God is unhappy.”

▪ **Do prosperity preachers enrich themselves largely through their congregants’ donations?**

The use of Chi-Square as an empirical tool in the study also reveals that the wealth of prosperity preachers is largely based on the donations of their congregants. Interestingly, this finding is in consonance with a recent report in GEO magazine which quotes that in Nigeria, “where 100 million people live on less than one euro per day, the flamboyant lifestyles of some pastors is beginning to become a problem” (Awake! Nov. 2015:5) and this is not surprising as Tunde Arongundade has since

revealed that prosperity churches have cornered a significant percentage of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Sahara Reporters, 2011).

Recommendations

The results of the findings have been discussed and it is in light of this that the following recommendations are made:

- Poverty which is responsible for the spread of the prosperity gospel must be curbed even though its eradication is impossible. Practically, it is recommended that the government and other stakeholders put in place poverty alleviation programs and work hard to ensure that these programs achieve their objectives. It has also been observed that the gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria is getting wider and wider, and if this trend is allowed to persist, poverty will continue to make life miserable for people. Consequently, it is imperative for the extant government to take the bold step of cutting down on the salaries of political office holders and their appendages and ensure that public funds are used discreetly to gradually and systematically lift the poor out of their state of deprivation.
- Illiteracy has been identified to be a factor responsible for the spread of the prosperity gospel; hence it is recommended that the government should do their best to curb illiteracy by sustaining the program of free and compulsory basic education and also consider the benefits of introducing free and compulsory adult literacy programs.
- It is also recommended that prosperity preachers be intimated on the futility of living in opulence. They should meditate on the fact that 'we have brought nothing into this world and neither can we carry anything out when we inevitably expire'. They should stop making their members base their hope on false promises but teach them the need for hard work and contentment and the joy that comes from assisting fellow humans in need.

Professed Christians who attend prosperity churches and are literate in any of the languages in which the Bible is available should take time to study it. They should be encouraged to engage in Bible discussions with professed Christians from other denominations and with an open mind as this can draw their attention to parts of the Bible that debunk the prosperity gospel. Most importantly, they should withdraw from churches whose teachings cannot at all be reconciled with the tenets of the Holy Scriptures.

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