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THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF GOSPEL MESSAGE BY SOME PENTECOSTAL PREACHERS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the commercialization of the gospel message by some Pentecostal preachers in Nigeria. The commercialization of the gospel message is covetousness and wrong means of wealth acquisition. It increased corruption and made the adherents to acquire wealth through crocked ways, as the preachers had deviated from holiness and sound sermon to exploitation and manipulation of their church members, through over emphasis on giving and misinterpretation of the scriptures. As the raw word of God that transforms lives and makes people to shun evil is lacking every adherent lived as he or she liked and acquired wealth at all cost irrespective of the sources. These had led to corruption, lack of contentment and lack of fear of God. The methodology used for this study was empirical and descriptive methods. In John 2: 13-17, Jesus was angry with the temple leaders for allowing the money changers and the animal sellers to pollute the house of God through the exploitation of the poor. This paper revealed that the factors that led to the commercialization of the gospel messages were lack of fear of God and theological training, unemployment, luxurious lifestyle of some preachers and lack of control. This study recommended that commercial pastors should stop using tricks to make money from their members, the balance biblical messages should be preached, the religious bodies such as CAN and PFN should monitor the churches under them to know what they are preaching and practicing, government should shut down the evil pastors churches to serve as a deterrent to others and every Christian should be contented with what he/she has.

Keywords: Commercialization, Gospel Message, Pentecostal Preachers, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The commercialization of the gospel message by some Pentecostal churches in Nigeria is worrisome as it is against the biblical injunction that says freely have you received, freely shall you give and a deviation from the basic tenets of faith such as holiness, hardwork, love, honesty and good human relation. According to Adabembe (2024) work commercialization of the gospel message is deep rooted in covetousness and acquisition of wealth and world pleasure. The commercialization of the gospel dents the image of the church and gives room for unbelievers to criticize the church. It is also making some adherents to get money through evil means. The commercial preachers do not preach balance sermon as they interpreted the scriptures to suit their interest. Arch. Bishop Benson Idahosa started the prosperity preaching in 1970s by saying that Christianity is not synonymous with poverty as people thought then, he went further to say that God is not a poor God, that as one gives his or life to Christ, live a

holy life, gives his tithe and offering he will be blessed by God. As Philippians 4:19 says "my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus", because He owns the universe, silver and gold, he will break the yoke of poverty in their lives. He balanced his message by preaching about salvation, faith and holy living but the contemporary commercial preachers extort money from their members by making them believe that prosperity comes through giving huge amount of money to the church no matter the source of the money and the individual's relationship with God. He also states that obedience to the law of prosperity through faith in the word of God makes one to prosper. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have redeemed mankind from sin, poverty and sickness. Therefore, as a believer claims the riches which is received through the finished work of Christ on the cross, he or she will prosper because God said I will bless the work of your hands.

Jesus told his disciples to go and preach, heal the sick and deliver the oppress, freely as they have received, they should as well give freely. The commercialization of the gospel message is making merchandise of the gospel which Jesus condemned in (John 2:15-16). The commercialization of the gospel message has spread every nook and cranny of the nation. As they meet on Sundays and some week days in uncompleted buildings, classrooms, town halls and hotel conference rooms. Nwadialor (2024) avails the commercialization of the gospel have led to the establishment of many churches which are business ventures. Ugwueye (2023) posits that church has become a business venture and competitive, as many pastors advertise the miracles they have done on the radios, television, facebook and other social media platforms to encourage people to come to their churches for their problem to be solved. Through advertisement in the social media the pastors tell the poor masses to come and receive their healing, deliverance, breakthroughs prosperity and divine security. The ignorant miracle seekers always fall prey to them as they extort money from them without solutions to their problems. Milles (2024) states that such churches are established for commercial purposes not for soul winning as such pastors are not called by God and not even save at all but do the work of God, to meet their financial needs. These pastors manipulate their members and the outsiders looking for miracles by duping them through their sugar-coated messages of hope which make them to give them their money willingly.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK

Commercialization is making gain in the way other people do not approve while commercial is buying and selling of goods and services (Hornby 2023). So, the commercialization of the gospel is extorting money from their church members and the miracle seekers. It is also a dubious way of making profit from the gospel. The bible said that the labourer is worthy of his wages but it should not be gotten through deceit and manipulation.

The commercialization of the gospel according to Wwangange (2022) is the usage of business principles in the running of church with the purpose of making gain. Fidelis (2023) states that the commercialization of the gospel is the exploitation and manipulation of the church, her services such as spiritual and emotional with the motive to extort money from members for financial profit or gain.

Gospel is persuading people to accept the ideas you believe in gospel messages are preached by pastors, evangelists, prophets, apostles and teachers to people in order to convince them to give their lives to Jesus, live uprightly and receive help or miracles from God. The right gospel

messages are exposing the whole truth in the bible to people for them to give their lives to God, fear Him, draw closer to him and be transformed.

Pentecostalism is a Christian movement that emphasizes the personal encounter with God through salvation and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues, accompanied with boldness and power to evangelize and do the work of God effectively.

Pentecostal is gotten from Pentecost a Greek word for the feast of weeks celebrated by the Jews and the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Jesus when Holy Ghost came to empower the 120 disciples at the upper room in Jerusalem for the work of evangelism and the eradication of fear from then, which gave them boldness, Peter preached that day and three thousand people gave their lives to God, and the church was established that day (Acts 2:1-41).

Robeck (2022) states that modern Pentecostalism started by Charles F. Parham a former Methodist holiness preacher in 1901 in the city of Topeka Kansas, who taught a few students the importance of Holy Ghost baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues of Acts chapter 2. The first student who spoke in tongues was Agnes Uzman on January 1st 1901.

Parham founded a church called Apostolic Faith and started a revival tour of the American Middle West to promote his new experience. However, in 1906 Pentecostalism gained worldwide recognition through the Azusa street revival in Los Angeles California by the African-American preacher, William Joseph Seymour where thousands of people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Faith Mission, where three services were conducted everyday for over three years. Idowu (2024) avails that Pentecostalism in Nigeria started in 1910, when an Anglican deacon started a prophetic movement that later became the Christ Army church as a result of an influenza epidemic. Allen (2023) posits that in 1930, Apostle Ayodele Joseph Babalola of Faith Tabernacle led a revival that converted of people. In 1941 he founded the independent Christ Apostolic Church. God used him mightily that many people gave their lives to God, received their healing and deliverance.

Achunike (2019), states that in 1970s some students who graduated from the university of Ibadan and Ife, spread the Pentecostal beliefs and created the awareness of Pentecostalism where ever they went during their youth service. Some secondary school students who were influenced by the scripture union teachings during and after the civil war started to spread the gospel and Arch. Bishop Benson Idahosa in 1980s made Pentecostalism to multiply in diverse forms through salvation, faith, healing, prosperity and miracle messages. Nwanganga (2022) posits that the commercialization of the gospel message is running the church with aim of making profit. it is the manipulation of the church members to enrich oneself. it is a deviation from Christian norms and ethics.

THE NEW TESTAMENT ACCOUNT ON COMMERCIALIZATION

The cleansing of the temple appears in all the gospels, Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46 and John 2:12-16. In the synoptic gospel Jesus went to the temple and drove away all who were buying and selling there, turned the table of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves because his house should be called the house of prayer and not den of

thieves so the house of God should be kept holy for prayer and service of God, for the presence of God to be available and the Holy Spirit to be felts, but the commercial preachers have turned the church of God to business centres where all kinds of atrocities are done in order to extort money from the members.

In John 2:13-16, Jesus cleansed the temple by driving away those selling oxen, sheep and doves and the changers of money, he poured out the changers money, threw away their tables and declared that "his father's house is not a house of merchandise". This shows that God is not happy with those making merchandise with the gospel messages.

According to Ogunlusi (2024), the cleaning of the temple at Jerusalem by Jesus happened during the feast of Passover where all the male Jews from 12years usually attend. The commercialization of religion always get to the peak as all the male Jews from diaspora come to pay tax with the Jewish coins as such they have to change their currency to Jewish currency before their tax will be accepted and the money changers charge them exorbitantly and the sellers of animals were selling their animals to them at very high price. So they were exploited and Jesus was angry with the wicked traders.

He also avails that Jesus made a whip of cords to drive away the wicked traders from the temple during this feast because of their exploitation and rebuked the priest and the religious leaders for polluting the temple. The commercialization of religion is a violation of the word of God and religious ethics as no meaningful prayer and meditation will take place and the presence of God will not be felt.

In 2 Corinthians 2:17 Paul told the Corinthian Christians that the "false teachers peddle the word of God preaching for personal gain in contrast to his sincere preaching". In 2 Peter 2:1-3, Peter states that "false prophets and false teachers among the believers will teach heresies and deny the Lord and bring destruction upon themselves and many shall follow their evil ways as the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you whose judgment is eminent". God is going to judge the pastors who are not walking with God but claimed to be working for God, for their personal gain because at the end, God will tell them "depart from me you workers of iniquity". Making merchandise of the gospel is preaching for personal gain without genuine motive and not caring for the salvation and spiritual growth of the members. It is a deceitful practice, false teaching and manipulation to extort money from people. Those so called pastors or preachers exploiting people will face the wrath of God if they refuse to repent because they are enemies of God who twist and misinterpret the word of God in order to extort money from their ignorant members.

Pentecostalism brought many changes in every aspect of Christianity in Nigeria such as praises, worship, studying the bible, doctrine, organization and prayer. Christians worship God in the African way now and worship service is made real to everybody through participation and understanding. In most Pentecostal churches, as the preacher will be preaching in English Language, the interpreter will be interpreting in the language of the people. However, some of the preachers strayed away or deviated to prosperity preaching and the belief that wealth of the adherents shows that God is blessing them irrespective of the source of the blessing.

Factors responsible for the commercialization of the gospel messages are thus:

1. Lack of fear of God and theological training: As a result of lack of pastoral training many Pentecostal pastors are novice in the things of God so they do whatever they like to make money. Nwadialor Edozie avails that as they lack the fear of God, they deceive mislead and manipulate the adherents as they just accept whatever they hear the so called pastor preach to them and do anything for their problems to be solved. These pastors or preachers sell salt, oil, water, handkerchiefs and picture to exploit their members, they also take advantage of the ignorant, miracle seekers to exploit them in order to enrich themselves as a result of greediness. Also their flamboyant lifestyle made many people to believe that success in ministry is acquisition of material things.

2. Unemployment: Kehinde (2024) states that unemployment is a major factor that enhances the commercialization of the gospel as many unemployed graduates see pastoral work as source of income and a business venture. Hence, they start pastoral work without being born again, lack of knowledge of pastoral ethics and the tenets of Christianity such as holiness, truthfulness hardwork and love. They brainwash, manipulate and even use threat at times to extort money from their members. instead of preaching about salvation holy living, hard work, love for God and man, and hardwork, they keep on preaching on giving, paying of tithe so that life will not be difficult for them and giving of seed for breakthrough.

Olawole (2023) opines that winning souls for the kingdom of God and preaching about upright living or holiness is not their concern all they preach, is pay your tithe so that there will be food in the house of God (Malachi 3:10). God blesses a cheerful giver and he that sows bountifully shall reap bountifully (2 Corinthians 9:6). So, they look for evil power to keep their members through fake prophecies and sake miracles.

According to Kehinde (2024) some pastors are selling miracles and prophecies as the members pay some amount of money to see the pastors for payers and prophecies. At times they pressure people to buy anointing oil, water, handkerchiefs, apron and the picture of the pastors for breakthrough and healing. They arrange miracles and pay people to share false testimonies of healing and break throughs to attract more members to their churches for financial benefit.

(F. Nkemchor personal communications, May 5, 2025) says that her friend called her to Warri Delta State that she has seen work for her, she rushed down to Warri only to discover that the work was to do "arrangee" miracle. She agreed because she was looking for money. Firstly, she pretended to be a blind person in the crusade and she received her sight during the crusade. The second one she pretended to die and they put her in the coffin put light cotton wool in her nostril and give her volume five in order to sleep for some time, when she woke up and shake the coffin they started jubilating and said that the commercial pastor has brought a dead person back to life. She said she was paid a huge of money for that act but God started warning her to stop promoting evil practices, then she stopped. These commercial agents' do things in order to exploit people. They are cursed people who love the wages of unrighteousness like Balaam the son of Beor. They are deceivers, corrupt, covetous and forsake the way of the Lord and go astray because of money (Numbers 2:4-20 and 2 Peter 2:14-15).

3. Luxurious lifestyle of the prosperity preachers is another factor that attracted many preachers to join the bandwagon. As they display their wealth through expensive cars, magnificent buildings, private jets and expensive life styles. Ugwueye (2022) states that some who were preaching about salvation, holy living and balance biblical teaching evicted and joined them because of poverty while those who were not called to be ministers or pastors of God called themselves into the ministry for personal gain. As they see pastoral work as a fast way of making money.

4. **Lack of control:** Nwadialor (2024) opines that as a result of lack of control some of the commercial agents use human beings for sacrifices for their churches to grow and perform fake miracles for them to be popular. They use social media to advertise themselves and their miracles. These pastors used to manipulate and dupe their members because they set up their churches for business. As people come to them for prayer as a result of life challenges they charge them for prayer and ask them to sow seed with huge amount of money for their problems to be solved. They emphasize that God blesses, heals, prospers and delivers one from bondage accord to how much he or she gives. Some out of ignorant, sold some of their cars, lands and even borrow money to give abundantly for their problems to be solve because they want instant miracle and they lack the word of God, that says man born of a woman is of few days but full of trouble" (Job 14:1) so the exploit and extort from people and go scot free because nobody is asking them how they are running their churches.

THE EFFECTS OF COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE ON CHRISTIANITY

The effects of commercialization of the gospel messages are as follows:

1. Pastoral work has been converted to a business venture.
2. There is deviation from salvation and holiness preaching to heretical teaching and doctrine of the devil.
3. Fake miracles that does not last, as the individual is healed of malaria parasite today, person will come back with ulcer tomorrow, for continuous exploitation.
4. Abuse and misinterpretation of the word of God for financial gain.
5. It led to moral laxity in the nation as the messages that will transform lives are not preached.
6. There is deviation from holiness to materialism as their messages centre on wealth, healing faith and victory over evil forces. No more salvation, honesty, hard work, love and holiness messages. They preach imbalance messages.
7. Many people have been duped and exploited by the commercial pastors and vow not to go to church again.
8. Some women looking for the fruit of the womb have been seduced and committed adultery with, these agents of the devil called men of God. They also commit fornication with some single ladies in their churches and some that came for prayer.
9. Many witch or native doctors have opened different churches called miracle centres with diabolical powers.
10. Distortion of religious values such as compassion care for the poor, justice, peace and faithfulness have been neglected.
11. Exploitation: The commercial church leaders take advantage of their members by making them to give huge amount of money for offerings during services which made some to be stranded.

12. The commercial pastors ignore the basic tenets of Christianity and teach heresy because of financial profit.
13. The commercialization of the gospel drives away the presence of God from the church as a result of deceit, extortion and making the adherents to lose focus and make money through evil means.
14. It is a satanic practice that is hindering many heathen or unbeliever from giving their lives to Jesus.
15. It is unethical and it dents the image of the church and drives away the presence of and turn the churches to den of thieves and worldly gathering.

CONCLUSION

Pentecostalism has tried in evangelism and the expansion of the word of God. It has expose everyone to study the bible on their own and know the biblical truth. It has emphasized personal encounter with God and close relationship with God. It has made people to serve God in the African way and made individuals to depend on God to solve their problems and intervene in their hopeless situations. The commercialization of the gospel has increased moral decadence corruption and powerless messages that can not convict sinners of their sins for them to be change or revive the souls of the believers. People in those churches go and come back the same way they came because the Holy Spirit which transforms lives has been grieved. Many believers are carnally minded and not spiritual minded because materialism is the order of the day. They forget that we brought nothing into this world and we will take nothing when going. As Matthew 16:26 says "what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul or what can one give in exchange of his soul nothing".

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Commercial pastors should stop using tricks to make money from their members.
- The balance biblical messages should be preached.
- The religious bodies such as CAN and PFN should monitor the churches under them to know what they are preaching and practices.
- Government should close down the evil pastors, churches to serve as a deterrent to others.
- Government should check mate the registration of new churches.
- They should be ethical and moral re-orientation for all the ministers of God for them to go back to the tenets of Christianity.
- The church leaders should exhibit behaviour that will draw people to God and not to drive them away from serving God.

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