

**AFFLUENCE IN POVERTY: THE PRIDEFUL NIGERIAN PROSPERITY  
GOSPEL (ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟ ΕΥΗΜΕΡΙΑΣ [EVANGÉLIO EVIMERÍAS]), IN LIGHT  
OF THE LAODICEAN CHURCH EXPERIENCE, REVELATION 3:16-22**

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**Abstract**

*The contemporary Nigerian Christian society is suffused with various shades of prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [evangélio evimerías]), garbed with quests for materialism. This brand of gospel which references faith in God, as a panacea for poverty eradication, gateway to health stability and victory over spiritual warfare, has produced very uncomfortable superficialities of religious attitudes among Nigerian Christians. Tracing its origin and growth, the paper highlights the prideful lushness and challenges of the trend in Nigeria, in comparison with the prideful status of the Laodicean church, in Rev. 3:14-22. Referencing the materialistic and physical health attitude, devoid of spiritual health in the Laodicean socio-religious society, the paper further compares the trend with the specters of materialism and corruption in the Nigeria prosperity gospel. Thus, with the impoverished state of the nation's economy, and the constant efforts of Nigerians, in quests for freedom from impoverishments, many cling to this theological perceptives in attempts to bridging the gulch of class and social inequalities in Nigeria. The resultant consequence has been the problem of materialism, false religious identities, free display of fake ministers and pseudo-religiosities becoming endemic in Nigerian churches. There is therefore the need for Christianity in Nigeria to retrace her steps back to a genuine and gratifying affluence, in a spirituality that should be Christ oriented.*

**Keywords:** Affluence, Poverty, Prideful, Prosperity Gospel, Nigeria, Laodicean Church

**Introduction**

Since the advent of Christianity in 1842, Nigeria has experienced diverse religious colourations, reflective of her Christian culture and practices. Topmost of all in the contemporary, is an offshoot of an indigenous Pentecostal revivalism - the celebrated

‘prosperity gospel’ (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]), amidst an all roundly religious society reflective of God, but garbed with endemic corruption and a high tasty quest for materialism. The extent the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]) has infested the Nigerian religious society is prideful and overwhelming, as there is a broad drifts of human movements from the mainstream and indigenous churches, to denominations that emphasize on it. Astronomically, its advances across other Nigerian religious expressions like, Islam and the traditional religions are also noticeably prevalent. As presupposed by (Phiri, & Maxwell, 2015) in (Kitause, & Achunike, 2015), the growth of this “prosperity-tinged Pentecostalism” has advanced faster than virtually all strands of Christianity, as well as other religious groups with Islam inclusive. Descriptively, the teaching of the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]) accentuates the achievement of success on the measurement of one’s level of commitment and demonstration of faith (Gifford, 2006). Emphasizing on this, contents of the trending gospel in Nigeria, highlight more of material wealth, financial breakthroughs and the availability of divine health. It also highlights descriptive implications of themes on demonology and spiritual warfare among its devotees. Gifford, in exemplifying this, remarked on the drifts the trend has made, from the known traditional Pentecostal practices of speaking in tongues, prophesying and the power to heal sicknesses and diseases, to a newer dimensional brand. This according to him emphasizes the availability of wealth and material gains for its enthusiasts, in the ‘here and now’ (Ehioghae, & Olanrewaju, 2015). Those who trend with this brand of gospel believe that wealth, financial breakthroughs and physical wellness, are achievable from God, through the kingdom principles of seed sowing, giving of offerings, tithes payment and positive confessions of faith, over dire needs and circumstances of life (Stambaugh, 2020). In its flow of thought, faith ethics is one predominant ingredient that is all embracing in the theological concept of the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]).

Proudly, in the Nigerian contemporary religious society, this brand of Christ gospel has penetrated all the nooks and crannies of the Christendom. This is not just among the so called Pentecostal churches, it has also become pervasive even among the mainstream churches vis-à-vis; the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, African, and Baptist churches among others. Denominations engage in it, for stronger foundational and financial footings, for funds acquisition, human connections, projects executions and the establishment of social institutions. It can also be said to be having a very strong and proud influence on the templates that inform the socio-religious landscape of the Nigerian society. Noticeably, the attitudes of Christians and the quests for materialism that flow with this trend, has introduced much decline in the holiness culture and heaven

consciousness that informed the teachings of the Christian church, before its advent. The Nigeria society, like what was observed in Laodicea, is endowed with rich mineral and human resources, often bragged about among her citizens. Most often, many Nigerians exhibit unusual confidence and pride, tied to such natural endowments to reducing commitments on God. Observably, Christianity in Nigeria has thus keyed into this flashy status of portraying God's relationship with human, on a high frequency of material wealth, wellness and health blessings. In Consequence, Nigerian Christians being so sentimentally religious have continued to socialize their religious attitudes, under this showy confidence of human flamboyance with or without God as they relate. With this prideful and ironic overconfidence of wealth and health availability, in the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), the Church appears to have failed in recognizing the height of bankruptcy and syncretistic predispositions that has garbed its socio-religious interactions. Therefore, like the rich and prideful Laodicean society with lucrative textile, medical and banking industries, Nigerians tend to define their societal wellness based on national wealth endowments. In consonance, despite the obvious spiritual futility of the Laodiceans, with such claim as opined by Logan, in (Brand & Draper & England, 2003, p. 1012), they continued to allege their prosperity to self efforts through their self-acclaimed spiritual wealth. This to them, was tantamount to their visible material wealth and opportunities available in their socio-religious and economic compositions. Comparatively, and in a way, the brand of the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]) preached in Nigeria, describes God as robustly wealthy, therefore adherents have such birthrights to wealth and prosperity, with the availability of super health conditions in all ramifications, irrespective of their moral standings. As a theological purview, this has obviously influenced the belief and worship systems of myriad of denominations in Nigeria. Beyond this obvious dominance, Nigeria Christians who are ardent followers of this doctrinal complexity, have continued to exhibit pride and celebrate confidence in material wealth, amidst a society submerged with non gradable descriptions of endemic corruption, in the face of such affluence in spiritual impoverishment. From this obvious religious decay, this paper investigates on the state of the Nigerian church, under such influence of the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), amidst the sad state of societal insolvency. This is done in comparison with the Laodicean Christian society example, with low profiled spiritual formation, that went with prideful exhibition of wealth endowments - a state Jesus remarked on as, affluence in poverty.

### **The Origin and Growth of the Proudful Prosperity Gospel (Ευαγγέλιο Ευημερίας [Evangélio Evimerías]) in Nigeria**

The brand of prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [evangélio evimerías]) domiciled in Nigeria, is a proudful ideological indigenous charismatic revivalism, which came to be in the 1970s. Since its advent, the trend and what it stands for, has continued to influence and impact the religious attitudes of Christians in Nigeria, with a high profiled level of audacity. This obviously has a common place in both the Pentecostals, indigenous and mainstream churches. It is a theological ideology that has a sequential growth link, traceable to the growth and impacts of the African indigenous churches in Nigeria, and a mixture of the American prosperity gospel syntax that it contracted in the 1970s. The American brand, posits a belief in the power of an individual's mindset, in unlocking God's blessings through positive thinking and speech. This position has some traceable links to the Christian Science assumptions of "reality being purely spiritual and the allusion of the material world (Atiri, 2019). The historicity in Nigeria is premised on two schools of thought, suggested to have been responsible for its advent. The first, traced the emergence to the growth of the alternative religious activities of the African indigenous churches in Nigeria. Demonstratively, a number of Nigerian indigenous churches in the early twentieth century functioned in response to the need of presenting Christianity, in a light to depict the African ecstatic religious consciousness and culture. This was as a result of the divergent transformations that Christianity oscillated among the indigenous tribes in Nigeria. More historically, the mainstream churches in the mid nineteenth century were brands that emerged with western coatings. These could not in any indigenous contexts, provide worship gratifications to the yearning needs of the native devotees. Afrocentrically, the context due to the less empirical projections and religious answers that went with its teachings and worship culture was questioned. It was the opposite of what was predominant in the trado- religious understandings it was meant to replace. Therefore, the emergent missions were greeted with very cavernous questions on life related mysteries, the effects of social and environmental degradations which sought empirical and evidential evaluations. Observably, the operational teaching and worship methodologies adapted by the mainstream missions were to the Nigerian indigenous eye, mere intellectualities garbed with cultural and religious orientations of their western proclaimers (Babalola, 1988). The missions according to (Fatokun, 2013), were characterized by cultural imperialism, and could not provide answers to the ubiquities of religious, economic and socio-political inundations predominant among the dark-skinned West Africans on the Gulf of Guinea. A little later, under such insatiate state, soothing religious reinterpretations, encompassed with answers to indigenous aspirations began to emerge. These were the emergence of the internally motivated Pentecostal and

charismatic navigations, through revivals, which founded the indigenous churches in Nigeria. Such fascinating sequence produced the spiritual ecstasies that confronted these inundations and provided a brand of charismatic Pentecostalism that projected God's holiness, righteous living and healing as well as deliverance ministries in indigenous ways. Through the activities of an Anglican lay reader of the Niger/Delta Pastorate, Garrick Sokari Braide, an indigenous prophetic/charismatic and a prayer movement emerged in 1912 (Olofinjana, 2012). The Pentecostal outburst and revivalism that went with it, was adaptive to the cultural and trado-religious orientations of the people. Braide, was said to have espoused a more practical dimension which contextualized Christianity for his Niger/Delta people. His theological compass dealt with idolatry (ειδωλολατρία [*hidōlōlatría*]), which was a major root problem among his people. He taught that sin (ἁμαρτία [*hamartia*]), was the reason for their sufferings and through righteous living, he introduced them to a Christian attitude of total dependence on God, whom he preached about, as the sure source of salvation and physical/spiritual healings. The theology of the new movement had to advance from Bonny via Urhobo land in Delta State to Benin and further to the Yorubas (Olofinjana, 2012). Interestingly, with the introduction of such brand of ecstatic and demonstrative indigenous Christianity, more prayer movements were introduced. The practical demonstration of the faith ethics and prayer attitude that went with such charismatic movements, were said to have confronted and cushioned the influenza epidemic that broke out in Yoruba land in 1918 (Kalu, 2008).

Progressively, with the dawning of this era, more indigenous churches adaptive of the African ecstatic and anthropocentric projected worship inclinations, were founded. Christ Army Crusaders (CAC), a group of Braide's devotees emerged after his death in 1918, promoting his adopted Afrocentric theological perspectives. The same development resulted in the founding of the Aladura (prayer mongers) churches in Ijebu-Ode and Lagos. These as remarked, were religious purists who had very strong appetite for fasting and prayers, as sure means of relating with God. As pontificated in (Ojo, 1998 and Gaiya, 2002), the Aladura churches, "adopted the African religious spirituality and charisma, without the traditional cultic paraphernalia." A frontline worship ethics and common religious routine that went with the Aladura churches, was the belief in divine healing through prayers (Isichei, 1995). Furthermore, the founding of Christ Apostolic Church by Joseph Babalola, Celestial Church of Christ by Samuel Oshoffa, Cherubim and Seraphim Church by Moses Orimolade Tunolase and Christiana Abiodun, emerged. These were through a successive internal wave of revival movement among the Aladura churches between 1920 and 1947 (Tuner, 1967 and Omavuebe, 2021). From the website documentation of the Christ Chosen Church of God International, then known as St Joseph the Apostolic Church, the Church in 1949, was founded in Benin City, by Joseph

Ikechiuku Anyanwu. This happened when Ikechiuku felt that the mainstream churches were losing lustre, as vehicles for gospel proclamation in Nigeria. Doctrinally, the constituents of preaching and revivalism among these churches were premised on themes of humanity and sin, confession, repentance, salvation, regeneration and piety. Others were prophesy [foretelling and forth-telling], healing and explorations on various demonological contexts, of exorcism and deliverance (Offiong, 2003). Others still, included emphasis of the parousia [rapture and the place of eternity] and making of sacrifices which went with their worship dramatizations. The last obviously, was a syncretistic incorporation of the African religious culture, in their *modi operandi*. These as highlighted, were predominant doctrinal practices ubiquitous in their theological perspectives. They emphasized holiness and righteous living as prerequisites and sure means of God-man cordial and receiving relationships. Under this wave of revivalism, Christianity in Nigeria retained the concept of living holy for God's impartation, unlike the current tide of worldly living that has come to stay among Christians with the influence of the neo-prosperity gospel (εὐαγγέλιο εὐημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]) proclamations. Over time, as the Aladura churches made advances, there were traces of deviations from biblical standards - a scenario which warranted further breakups that went with their structural tides. For example, most of these churches got involved doctrinally with rituals and making of blood sacrifices, a kind of syncretistic religiosity that never went well with some devotees. From the Cherubim and Seraphim Church therefore, came the Redeemed Christian Church of God in 1952, with Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi, as its founder (Ogunewu, 2009). This group continued to relate on the premise of acclaimed covenantal faithfulness in services unto God, and being obedient to His Word. Developmentally, the 1960s and 1970s, saw the advent of a methodology of western Pentecostalism that had a shift from fasting, prayer and healing ministries, as emphasized by the indigenous churches. The new wind blew in charismatic trends that emphasized on the impactful roles of the Holy Spirit in the Church. This went with the advent of western based Pentecostal churches in the likes of the Assemblies of God Church, Four Square Gospel Church, and Apostolic Church, from America, North America and Britain respectively. Their evangelical preachers in those eras got involved in mega church crusades, which converted souls in Nigeria through the demonstrating powers of the Holy Spirit. At this stage of the trailing Pentecostal waves, campus and interdenominational fellowship groups; like the Scripture Union (SU), Christian Union (CU) etcetera, were introduced into the Nigerian universities. Thus some university students and lecturers fell in line, as instruments that further galvanized the Pentecostal gospel proclamation, which later introduced the prosperity gospel (εὐαγγέλιο εὐημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]), into the existing churches (Kalu, 2010 and Omavuebe, 2021). This way, private cell communions that gave birth to a generation of campus fellowships, were founded. These

in turn became post-denominational churches that championed televangelisms that propagated the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]) in Nigerian. It was the religious activities of this time that suggested Archbishop Benson Idahosa, to have been the father of prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]) in Nigeria (Kituase, 2017). The second school of thought therefore points the advent of prosperity gospel in Nigeria, to the ministerial navigation of Benson Idahosa, of the Church of God Mission in the 1970s. According to this historical linkage, Idahosa, was said to have been influenced by this brand of gospel interpolation, as a student of Christ for the Nations Bible Institute, in the United States of America (Achunike, 2007, Kituase, 2017 and Omavuebe, 2021). Kituase, (2017) emphasizing on this, premised that such grasping of Idahosa, was triggered by the suffering experiences of his youth days, and his later aspiration of becoming rich and successful in ministry. Interestingly, when Idahosa, started professing and teaching on this faith, it never was easy, as the content, never went down well with members of his denomination then, (the Assemblies of God Church, Nigeria). As a minister of the Church, one of the legendry narrative that trailed his ministerial navigation - the procurement of a motorcycle to aid his ministerial movements, was critiqued as worldly and materialistic, thus was out rightly condemned by his superiors.

From more historical details available in the religious websites and Wikipedia pages that remarked on some of these post denominational and neo-prosperity gospel congregations, the likes of Benson Idahosa, supposedly became the superintending head of the Church of God Mission with headquarters in Benin City, in 1972. William F. Kumuyi, founded Deeper Life Campus Fellowship, which transmuted into Deeper Life Bible Church in 1973. Mike Okonkwo, founded the Redeemed Evangelical Mission (TREM) in 1981. Same 1981, David Oyedepo, emerged as the founder of the Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel). This was first known as Liberation Faith Hour Ministries. In 1984, Dikeji Daniel Miyerijesu, breaking away from the Anglican Church, founded God's Grace Ministry in the city of Warri. He is known as 'the Bishop of the Whole World' and also referenced as a living saint by the address, "His Holiness, Saint Dikeji." 1987 saw the founding of Christ Embassy by Chris Oyakhilome, Synagogue Church of all Nations by Temitope Balogun Joshua, (The Man in the Synagogue) and Word of Life Bible Church Warri by Ayo Oritsejafor respectively. About this time, a secessionist group from the Church of God Mission, emerged and became Bethsaida Gospel Mission under the spiritual eyes of Archbishop Apena, at Irri town in Delta State. Mountain of Fire Ministries was founded in 1989 by Dr. Daniel Olukoya. These and other ministries as founded, became trending gospel arenas known for the divergent and structural proclamation of the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), that has survived in

Nigeria till date. A striking feature that went with the functions of these post-denominational interpolations was their various mandates which also defined their identifications with the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]). Archbishop Benson Idahosa, in his teachings, vibrantly proscribed the Christian thoughts of poverty and piety in the theology of ‘future hope,’ for those of wealth and comfort in the ‘here’ and ‘now,’ as embraced in prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας). As a trend projecting religious answers for an endemic sick, economic and degrading society, Idahosa’s proclamations paved artery-vivacities for such institution among Nigerian Christians. It was indeed a theological industry he expanded and ran with premium flamboyancy, brandishing it as a supreme tasked evangelism. Idahosa, was systematic and total with the change he introduced through prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας). His brand was a mixture of the Nigerian indigenous charismatism and the American ideology of faith-word and positive confession (Okwori, 1995, Folarin, 2007, Kitause, 2017, and Omavuebe, 2021), which adopted transformations that made its coloration more expectant and fitting enough, for the Nigerian society, in dire need of spiritual reformation and economic overhauling. In the early 1990s, the flamboyant charismatism displayed by some of these post-denominational churches began to replicate among them, hairline fractures earlier experienced in the mainstream churches, at their advents. Younger generation of religious enthusiasts started seceding with owned ministries, giving the Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), much to do with new registrations, which commercialized Christianity in Nigeria. In faraway United Kingdom in 1992, Matthew Ashimolowo, - a London based Nigerian, founded the Kingsway International Christian Centre. This as a religious institution demonstrated the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), through auditoria teachings and televangelism. In 1994, Paul Adafarasm founded the House on the Rock Church, Lagos: an outfit that brandished the concept, in the Nigerian religious space. In 1996, Dr. Paul Idoko Enenche, founded the Dunamis International Gospel Centre, Abuja and David Ibiyeomie, founded the Salvation Ministries Port Harcourt, in 1997. All of these were established in major cities from where they infested every nook and cranny of the Nigeria society with trends of Pentecostalism. Undoubtedly, prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας), has spurred and improved in no small measure, the worldly standard of living of most Nigerians, who have continued to adhere to its contextual, motivational sermons, and business techniques, taught by its proclaimers, in their daily religious/adventurous lives. Such inspiration as derived, has made adherents not just high aimers and hard workers, but enthusiasts who try to avoid vices capable of future ruinations of their adventurous lives (Kitause and Achunike, 2015).



### **A Fecundity Trail of the Prideful Prosperity Gospel (Ευαγγέλιο Ευημερίας [Evangélio Evimerías]) in Nigerian Socio- Religious and Economic Society**

The extent the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]) has infested the Nigeria society, is alarming and overwhelmingly prideful. Like a seed planted on a fertile soil, it sprouted and grew and was fast in spreading across the length and breadth of the post colonial religious landscape in Nigeria. At inception, it was criticized by the mainstream and other indigenous churches, but today, its ingredients have fused with the worship methodologies, parlance and practices of virtually all denominational churches in Nigeria. This growth and development, has been attributed to the inevitabilities of the peoples cosmological perceptions and the corresponding responses of the indigenous charismatic religious orientations, on fallouts of life uncertainties, weak national economy, corruption, hardship and insecurities in the Nigerian system, which have thrived since the post colonial and democratic eras of the 1970s and 1980s. Be that as it may, the negative effects of the austerity measures adopted then through the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), the International monetary fund (IMF) implementations and the present instabilities on the national economy and continuous hardships on Nigerians, have been frontline examples that have encouraged the growth of the prideful prosperity gospel in this school of thought. Such fruitfulness as remarked in (Kalu, 2001, Magbadelo, 2004, Falorin, 2006, Kitause and Achunike, 2015 and Omavuebe, 2021,) has cruised and survived on the fighting spirit of Nigerians, in attempts to alleviating the effects of poverty and submerging sufferings in society. Ornately, the Nigerian society has always been saddled with economic and political challenges, religious and ethnocentric disintegrations and a level of spiritual manipulation and enslavement. Therefore, the fallouts of these descriptive activisms have made Nigerians more religiously enthusiastic and economically investigative. These have also produced in the urban and rural convolutions, a cross-culturally *au fait*, with fallouts of the naissance of syncretistic entwining of such restiveness. Interestingly, these pebbles have continued to structure and restructure the stimuli and responses trending with the open and secret interests of Nigerians. Religiously, various permutations of these interests are reflective of the interweaving implications of the people's economic and social definitions. From this background, the post colonial economy of Nigeria in the 1960s, was promising enough, to have provided Nigerians with gradable levels of societal comfort. There was the oil boom era that gave the State a progressive economic growth that was amazingly blissful, but was never utilized. Therefore, the failures that trailed the post colonial governments, irrespective of these natural endowments became clogs on the nation's wheel of progress. It was amidst these clogs, that the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), being introduced into the religious

space, flourished on a fertile soil of vicissitudes. Pains of poverty, hardship, sickness, insecurity, unemployment, high mortality rate, fraud, hooliganism, the present trend of kidnappings for ransom, corruption, banditry, economic and political woes and above all, lack of basic amenities, has made the embrace of prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας), more potent if not total in Nigeria. Taking their destinies in their hands, most Nigerians have gone spiritual by embracing the juicy promises of the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélío tēs evimerías*]), for the purpose of solving their bedeviled states of impoverishment. (Ogundu, & Wori, 2021).

Correspondingly, the close of the 1990s and the dawn of year 2000 saw the introduction of more practical but much commercialized versions of the gospel brand. These include the prophetic, deliverance, spiritual and televangelism ministries, which brought more radical faith ethics into the system. Like a surge, these commercialized versions, having shown more empirical, prophetic, spiritual and entertainment predilections, have overwhelmed Nigerians. From its outburst, branches of churches which advocated for its potency have virtually been established in every nook and cranny of the Nigerian society, thus producing various degrees of spiritual adultery (πνευματική μοιχεία [*pneumatiki moicheia*]) in forms of human and object worships. Through this fondness, many Christians have become mere idolaters and seekers of miracles and financial breakthroughs. This has produced a religious trend that has reduced the places of piety and righteousness in Man-God and Man-Man relationships among Nigerian Christians. The pulpit has become available channel for motivational speeches, teaching of economic empowerment skills and sadly, a platform for comic displays. Sad enough, the Bible has become an entertainment documentation used in producing worldly minded Christians. By this advancement, Patrick Anwuzia, and his Zoe Ministries Worldwide, trended with pumps and pageantries, brandishing this twist in theological aggrandizement. He practically demonstrated his brand, with a customized materialism that was disturbing, noting that ‘born-againism’ must be demonstrated evidentially through material prosperity. He eventually established a religious bureau christened ‘Ozigbo-Ozigbo’ (Quick-Quick) ministry, which people in quests for quick miracles patronize in their thousands till date. Some of the prosperity gossellers that came onboard about this time, in their various brands include, Ntia Ime Ntia, of the Full Life Christian Centre Lagos (2000), Lazarus Morka, of the Lord’s Chosen Charismatic Church (2002), Johnson Sulaiman, of the Omega Fire Ministry (2004), Joseph Haruna of the Gospel of Grace Church and Joshua Iginla, of Champions Royal Assembly Kubwa, (2006). Joshua Iginla, introduced into the system what he termed “*okoko*,” (a kind of impartation and transfer of spiritual empowerment on fellow minister during conferences). Same 2006 came forth Chibuzor Gift Chinyere, of the Omega Power Ministry in Port-Harcourt, a ministry that

has boastfully emphasized on helping the downtrodden and the needy, with tithes collected from devotees. Chukwuemeka Ohaemere Odumeje, known as ‘the Indaboski Bahose,’ ‘the Lion himself’ and Jeremiah Omoto Fufeyin, also known as ‘Ewere,’ of the Mountain of Holy Ghost Intervention Deliverance Ministry, Onitsha, and Christ Mercy Land Deliverance Ministry Warri, surfaced in 2010 respectively. Joshua Selman founded the Eternity Network International (ENI) Zaria, Kaduna State in 2011. Contemporarily, more prophetic, deliverance, spiritual, healing and televangelism ministries have emerged with full options of the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]). Striking feature of these post-denominational interpolations, displays very inimitable nature of various congregations, with areas of specialization determining those who became their devotees. From this development, the sick identifies with those specialized in the conducts of healing and deliverance, the unemployed, with those specialized in teaching of principles for financial transformation and economic empowerments and the needy, with those who dough out supportive incentives garbed with almsgiving. While some are trusted oases for divine impartations, others have remained channels for pseudo-religiosities and doctrinal dramatizations, infesting Christianity in Nigeria. In the same way, such formularies have produced some false identities, to the point of infesting the system with syncretism (συγκρητισμός [*synkritismós*]) and spiritual adultery (πνευματική μοιχεία [*pneumatikí moicheía*]) of human and object worships. Observably, high sales and the use of anointed elements for healing and deliverance, has become a routine by most pastors and prophets, in exploiting devotees for economic gains (Kalu, 2008, Diara and Mokwenye, 2019 and Akiri, 2019). For instance, the buying of ‘miracle pawpaw’ for barrenness termination and fruitfulness impartation, was introduced by Benson Idahosa, in the 1980s, after which the sales of other items for miracles; like oils, fruits, aprons, handkerchiefs, prayer gloves, candles etcetera, became part of the religious attitude of prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]) proclaimers. Be these as they may, payments for prayer lines and heavy seed sowing for expectant miracles; have domesticated gospel merchandising in the Nigerian religious landscape. Generally, eisegesis; a system of self induced biblical analysis, devoid of proper exegesis and right hermeneutical interpretation and applications, has remained the analytical springboard, and a fertile ground for the projection of the prosperity gospel theology by its handlers (Ehioghae and Olanrewaju 2015). Furthermore, some of these commercialized brands have been very intoxicant in the proliferation of fake and prearranged miracles and prophecies often seen in crusade grounds nowadays. Thus there is a very disturbing phenomenon of the use of charms, ritual killings, initiations into the occult and involvements in spiritual sacrifices, for potency of the miraculous, that are sometimes traced to prosperity gospel handlers. The

blend has constituted religious scenery of Christianity mixing with spiritism and traditional religious particles - a fusion that has continued to mislead the gullible.

Developmentally, the practice of establishing non-denominational Christian centers has been another fertile method often used in the spreading of the prosperity gospel theology. Most of those who attend these fellowships are members of the mainstream churches. Some in quest for healing and other needs of life become permanent members, while some others patronize as regular attendees and through their mixed religious cultures, they infest and adulterate the activities of the mainstream churches. This trend has thrived majorly, through the establishment of urban Christian centers, where the middle-class members of society, are used in founding such urban based congregations, that later spread into the rural religious spaces. By tapping from the better income levels of these urban settlers, the prosperity gossellers and their ministries are supported and maintained. From their well structured networking methods, mentorship and intimacy are thoroughly established between the apologists and their devotees. In another vein, through the owning of Bible Schools and Seminaries they also indoctrinate their devotees most thoroughly. The prosperity gossellers are excellent communicators who make use of telephone conversations, distribution of newsletters, and sending of emails, to getting familiar and more hooked to their devotees (Akiri, 2019). Massively, the availability of the social media vis-à-vis, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etcetera, has made the prosperity gossellers liked, and followed by multitude of people. The media and publication streams, have also contributed to the fertility and wide range of acceptance prosperity gospel (*ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας*) had enjoyed, since a good number of such gossellers, now own private media and printing institutions. Through mass publications and televangelism, projections are made of self-esteemed eisegetical documentations that have continued to infest and influence the inclinations of many to the juicy packages of the prosperity gospel in Nigeria. This has made the brand, not only to have influenced most Nigerian Christians overconfidently, but birthed a religious attitude that has traversed the nation's socio-religious differences and economic space. As a result, many Nigerians, assert to the allusion that failures and disappointments are not possible because 'God is too faithful to fail' and that 'what He cannot do does not exist,' irrespective of their relationships with Him. Potent doctrines for expected true Christian livings are twisted for the eloquence of the brand. Marriage is no longer for 'better or for worse,' 'for richer or for poorer,' 'in sickness or in health,' but now for 'better and best,' 'for richer and richest and only in health. There is therefore no room for endurance in life related issues. Marriage as proclaimed must be for health and for health, no sickness, no poverty and no challenges. It must be zoom- zoom and rosy-rosier affair and without the unavoidable oppositions in life related matters. Such marriages established on falsehood plummet into lack of

affection at the slightest provocation, on the claims that such were never bargained for from the outset. Prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]) has made the gullible more naïve and egregiously deceived. This has produced often in the available socio-religious landscape, a bunch of proudful noisemakers and one-way thinkers, having the form of godliness but with lack of ability to testing of the powers thereof (1Thess. 5:21). This was the kind of scenario and belief system that contributed to the Laodiceans' tepid (χλιαρός [*chliaros*]) attitude toward God, in their pride of natural and social endowments. Having confidence in self prominence, the availability of social amenities and natural endowments within the city, produced a carnally minded status that reduced in them, the supremacy of God.

### **Challenges of the Proudful Prosperity Gospel (Ευαγγέλιο Ευημερίας [*Evangélio Evimerías*]) in Nigerian Churches**

The prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), having in diverse ways infested Christianity in Nigeria; it has also contracted many compromising features which showcase its challenges. It tends a continuation of negative influence, on the ubiquities of Nigeria religious complexity. Not only has it commercialized the religious space, it has also syncretized the belief systems of many Nigerians. Given to the social and material gains in its web, prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας), has intermixed Christianity with different social institutions, to have influenced the socio-religious inclinations of many Nigerians. It has garnered massive supports which has also earned its form-criticisms. Observably, in the quest for power and operations to empirically impress and gratify the needs of its patronizers, many prosperity gossellers, have fallen into various forms of religious syncretism (συγκρητισμός [*synkritisμός*]). These have displayed practically, the three dimensions of spiritual adultery (πνευματική μοιχεία [*pneumatikí moicheía*]), in forms of idolatry (ειδωλολατρία [*hidōlolatría*]), covetousness (πλεονεξία [*pleonexia*]) and apostasy (ἀποστασία [*apostasia*]). The proudful influence of the trend has further produced in Nigeria, a gratuitous fondness which most adherents adopt for worldly gains. There is therefore, a common attitude of people owning and prostituting with alien gods for secret powers. It has also produced in society, some degree of restraints and discrimination of desires garbed with quests for acquisition of personal and material gains, greedily pursued for keeps. Such development, giving birth to a complication of egregious egoism, has further produced in Nigeria, relationships of unfairness and ruthlessness in and among churches, and in other socio-religious strata under its influence. There is therefore, a prevalence of fake pastors and ministries who engage in all forms of frivolities to manipulate the gullible, in advancing the falsity of the gospel brand. In this vein, known occult shrines and traditional temples have transmuted

into cathedral churches where people ignorantly consult demons and fetish spirits for spiritual solutions. There are also scenarios of church leadership under the influence of prosperity gospel, being greedy and self-seeking, with the church becoming a field for the exploitation of salvation seekers. Furthermore, the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), falling short of serious doctrines for the stabilization of sufferings in Nigeria, failed to acknowledge the fact that persecutions, pains and sufferings are parts of the cross of believers. Jesus in Mark 10:29-30, taught that ‘persecution’ (διωγμός [*diōgmōs*]), was one of the gains of salvation. From this teaching, Christians would receive a hundred fold of houses, relatives and property ‘with persecutions’ in return. The Greek preposition (μετα [*meta*]) ‘among,’ which the NIV Bible translated as “with” in this context, appeared in its genitive form to emphasize its implication on the noun διωγμός (*diōgmōs*) rendered in the plural, masculine, genitive, form of διωγμων (*diōgmōn*), to mean ‘persecutions.’ It indicates the association or combination of pain and suffering in Christian life related issues. Therefore, the clause (μετα διωγμων [*meta diōgmōn*]) - “with persecutions,” as used, foreshadows afflictions and trials for Christians, which Jesus idiomatically inferred in Gould’s supposition, “to portray a reminiscence of an idealized apocalyptic of the familiar blessings of the Messianic kingdom” (Robertson, 1997). For the Apostle Paul, persecutions, tribulations, afflictions, distresses, sufferings and pains sometimes typify true Christian life experiences of faithful believers (1Thessalonians 3:3-4, 2Timothy 3:12). To portray this in context, Paul’s use of the verb σαίνω (*sainō*) ‘to wag the tail,’ rendered in its present, passive, infinitive form σιαινεσθαι (*siainesthai*), is reflective of the going back and forth associated with trial times and persecutions. Paul by using it taught that Christians should not be troubled in the face of persecutions or tribulations. (Walvoord, John & Zuck, 1985 p. 698). As further inferred in 1Thessalonians 3:4, the Greek noun θλίψις (*thlipsis*) in its feminine, plural, dative, form θλίψεων (*thlipesin*), was used to indicate the expected tribulations or sure troubles of the Thessalonians, which dovetails with the trials associated with true Christian living in Nigeria. Therefore, a true and complete gospel should herald these other aspects of life, not just the rosy-rosier predilections projected by the prideful prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]) in Nigeria. Although, pains and troubles can sometimes be attributed to sin (ἁμαρτία [*hamartia*]), it is wrong to assume that all cases of trouble and pain Christians go through are results of sin (ἁμαρτία [*hamartia*]). Thus in the context of a true and complete Christ gospel, such scenarios of human sufferings and challenges, are part of tests which should be seen as gains for the building of the Christian faith.

In materialistic ways, the prideful prosperity gospel (ευαγγέλιο ευημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]), has contributed to the indices and frustrations surrounding tales of

unemployment in Nigeria. It has fuelled greed and influenced a high level of nepotism in jobs acquisition for congregational members. Such people, with membership identities, are gainfully employed in places of more qualified applicants. Standing on same dais with what politicians and elites with ethnic bias do, this has produced a socio-religious response that gratify the state of nepotism and impatience among Nigerian youths, in their quest for material gains, speedy wealth acquisitions and better livings. In this vein, people now go to churches not for the gains of salvation, but for worldly connections and material comforts. There is therefore, a noticeable decline in the preaching of salvation gospels in Nigerian churches nowadays. Another trend in same direction is the specter of corruption that has sadly become prevalent in the gospel brand. Most often, very corrupt elites, politicians, internet hoaxers, yahoo boys, kidnappers and even some deviants who engage in ritual killings and blood money, tend to legitimize their ill-gotten wealth through payment of tithes, fabulous donations and sponsorship of projects in churches (Phiri, & Maxwell, 2015 and Ogundu, & Wori, 2021). In return, awards of recognition and partnership are doled out to such donors for their wonderful performances (Ogundu, & Wori, 2021). Thus there are accounts of large donors with such records of frauds and tales of corruption, paying heavy tithes and making donations into the coffers of churches nowadays, without the church questioning their sources of wealth. Further still, the trend also has other shortcuts for manipulations for wealth acquisition. Many Nigeria youths using it as alternative for unemployment, have become founders and general overseers of trending fake churches. Since there are no yardsticks or regulatory measures in determining the genuineness of such churches, even native doctors and possessors of marine spirits, have rebranded their shrines and spiritual houses into becoming churches, as a result there are hues and cries everywhere. Opposed to Jesus' call for seeking first the kingdom of God in Matthew 6:33, the prosperity gospel (το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), through its eisegetical applications, projects a Jesus' gospel of two parts that highlights his person and principles. The person of Jesus and principles as eisegesized guarantees accesses to heaven and worldly prosperity respectively. Thus such Christians who accept his person but toil with his principles will not prosper and cannot be principal enough to deal with principalities (Ibiyeome, 2021). In this regard, the church has become downtrodden with a scarcity of the true gospel of Christ. What is preached about in recent times as emphasized by (Orokpo, 2021) are mere principles and laws teachable in business schools. The content in his opinion, has become devoid of the essence of the true gospel and filled with upheld customs and traditions, validated with ingredients of acts and dispositions of men. With this trend, the rivulet is submerged with very boastful and arrogant self acclaimed postulations from pastors, prophets, prophetess, apostles, bishops and preachers, in their acts of high and mighty and arrogations to special claims of God. There is therefore a common trend of devotees, referencing God, as God

of whomever a pastor, prophet, prophetess or an apostle or bishop that has caught their fancy, thus displaying their denominations with so much arrogance to the mockery of others. Sayings like “If church does not change you, change church,” “God of pastor this or that, is my God,” have prejudiced the religious system to the production and littering of the space with half baked devotees and denominational prostitutes. This brittle state of attitude has also made the church in Nigeria prideful, boastful and arrogant like the Laodicean church, in its various claims of existent and nonexistent of what God can and cannot do, irrespective of the ubiquities of their dirty and worldly lifestyles. There is therefore an unusual and false spiritual status of the church in Nigeria, visible under the influence of the prideful prosperity gospel (εὐαγγέλιο εὐημερίας [*evangélion evimerías*]), with a correlation of the peculiarities that marked out the worldly and tepid (χλιαρός [*chliaros*]) position of the church in Laodicea.

### **The Prideful Religious Attitude of the Laodicean Church (Revelation 3: 14-22)**

The Laodicean society was heavily consumed with attitudinal premonitions and practices that made it complexly socio-religious. These positioned it on a relational societal confidence that was very tepid (χλιαρός [*chliaros*]) and prideful in spirituality and loud in the divides of natural endowments. The spiritual convulsion of the city relegated God’s values in societal orientations and manipulations of her citizenry. Like Nigeria, the naturally endowed dark-skin dwelling state on the Gulf of Guinea, the city was situated on the bank of the River Lycus, in the southwestern part of Phrygia. This site as located in the present day West-Central Turkey was first named Diospolis, after its tutelary deity, Zeus, and later became known as Rhoas. The political transformations of Seleucid Antiochus II, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC further established the city which he also named after his wife, Laodice. Its location in the rich Lycus valley was closely situated around Hierapolis and Colossae, a site that distinguished it from the six other cities that went with same name. It had distances of ten (10) and six (6) miles respectively in its proximities to Colossae and south of Hierapolis. The location from all historical indications, favoured its development, state of wealth, the commercialization and administrative attractiveness that went with it. (Beasley-Murray, 1995 and Rudwick, & Hemer, 1996 and Logan, 2004 and Spence-Jones, 2004 and Okoh, 2019). Historically, Laodicea (justice of the people) was a major commercial city productive of incentives that enhanced the stable pride and self beliefs, which became part of the attitudes of her citizenry. The city had mixed socio-cultural understandings full of pride that also influenced the religious behaviours of her Christian community. In a socio-cultural way, the city was a centre that played host to the worship of Apollo, Asklepios (the healing deity) and a provincial court, where Cicero, lived and wrote many of his letters. It also had temples for other deities like Hades, Hera,



Athena, Serapis and Dionysus. As one of the six cities that went with that name, it was a city of compromise and a home for many Jews in Diaspora, who settled there by the invitation of Ramsay (Keener, 1993 and Robertson, 1997). The Laodicean church was said to have flourished in much latter times, and played host to the Church Council held in A.D, 361(Logan, 2004). However, the site today, is a deserted heap of ruins with deserted Christian antiquity - a site the Turks reference as ‘old castle’ (*Eski Hisar*) (Jamieson, & Fausset, & Brown, 1997 and Youngblood, 1995). As one of the seven churches in the province of Asia, the Laodicean church had an early historicity, traceable to the Apostolic Age. It was suggested to have been established probably by one of Epaphras, Tychicus, Onesimus or Mark, who were followers of the Apostle Paul (Youngblood, 1995). One amongst them appeared to have been the earliest evangelist to have visited the city with Christ’s gospel. The city was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60 and was rebuilt by its citizens without any aid or assistance from Rome. This was as a result of her wealth endowments through the economic distributions of textiles and the establishment of banking and medical industries (Logan, 2004). Like the Nigeria state, richly endowed with minerals of various kinds, agricultural products and human resources, Laodicea had the production of black wool, eye ointment and the presence of industrial banking and educational systems in commercial quantities. These boosted its economic life. It was the romance with this rich economic and promising financial status that contributed to her prideful, self-satisfying and lukewarm (*χλιαρος* [*chliaros*]) attitude in spiritual things (Rev.3:14-22). From the Apostolic Constitutions 8.46, Archippus, a possible son of Philemon and one of Apostle Paul’s followers, was mentioned to have been the first bishop of Laodicea. He was earlier admonished by Paul on the need for diligence in ministry, some thirty years before Jesus’ assessment and rebuke in Rev. 3:14-22 (Jamieson, & Fausset, & Brown, 1997). Be these as they may, the Laodicean church existed along with other six churches in the province of Asia with its very deleterious idiosyncrasies. Being known for its wealthy status and ubiquities of commercial industrialization and exposure, it was endowed with local products that served the needs of her citizenry and beyond. With the presence of medical institution, Laodicea was producing a special eye ointment that was administered to patients with eye problems (Carson, 1995 and Okoh, 2019). From all indications, the Laodicean society had a problem of lack of credence in its outward spirituality and cultural composition. The church as opined by Swete, appeared to have also carried this pride and false claim, into its spiritual life (Robertson, 1997) - a sad scenario that branded it lukewarm (*χλιαρος* [*chliaros*]), in Jesus’ diagnosis and judgment. Even though, the city carried solution for eye impediments and had wool for clothing, the church therein was judged to be literally blind (*τυφλος* [*tuphlos*]) and naked (*γυμνος* [*gumnos*]) spiritually. They were so consumed in the fleeting pleasure and comfort of worldly offers, to the point that they

became indifferent, of God's lasting pleasure and satisfaction. The Church in the city became known and respected not for their right status with God, rather, because of their wealth which they boasted about (Okoh, 2019). Thus Christianity in the city took a prideful dimension garbed with quests for material gains and a sad state of ignorance of their spiritual poverty (Richards, 2004). The incongruity of their religious status was that the church in her self-satisfaction became lukewarm (*χλιαρος* [*chliaros*]). The church was neither hot (*οὐτε ζεστος* [*oute zestos*]) nor cold (*οὐτε ψυχρος* [*oute psuchros*]) - a tinge reflective of the available tepid waters in Laodicea. Reflective of a coloration relating to the source of waters in Laodicea, a combination of the hot springs from Hierapolis channeled alongside the Colossae's excellent cold drinking water often got to Laodicea, not good enough tepid water for human consumption. This happens when the River Lycus dries up during summer. The horrifying picture accentuated the state of the church in Jesus' diagnosis (Carson, 1995). From a sad and very disappointing end, the Laodicean church was ignorant of their spiritual ineptitude. Apart from their tepid status, they also could not see the reality of their spiritual decomposition and they continued to display a convinced perception that portrayed their poor spiritual state, which made them relaxed and loudly unnecessarily boastful, in what appeared to be pseudo-spirituality (Okoh, 2019).

The damaging effect of this outburst was that the church having become spiritually blind (*τυφλος* [*tuphlos*]), also assumed that her numerous material possessions were, signs of God's spiritual blessings. The situation was that bad. They could not see their wretchedness, pitiable status, poverty, blindness and outright nakedness that went with it. The visible material wealth became more valuable to them than finding eternal wealth and the essential true relationship with Christ. From a footnote remark of the New International Version Bible, Christ did reveal to the Laodicean Christians "that true value was not in material possessions but in a right relationship with God." He counseled them to get from him, the right eye medication to cure their blindness, to enable a true spiritual view of their impoverished situation. Against this background, the level of affluence in poverty, pride and false spiritual claims of the Laodicean church correlates with the prideful and boastful status of the prosperity gospel (*το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας* [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]) in Nigeria. From all indications the religious attitude of the Nigerian church under the influence of the prosperity gospel (*το ευαγγέλιο της ευημερίας* [*to evangélio tēs evimerías*]), is nothing short of the lukewarm (*χλιαρος* [*chliaros*]) status attained in Laodicea. Christianity in Nigeria has been heavily influenced by the commercial dictates of this new trend, to the point of producing very lackadaisical instincts among Nigerian Christians. A successful Christian life is now premised on material gains reflective of how much money is available in someone's account and how

much luxurious life definition could be for the children of God. Bishops, General Overseers and church leaders of all kinds are now proud of their gains and achievements in materialism and luxuries. The presence of pseudo-spirituality has brought all manners of ungodliness and religious sentimentality into the Nigerian church. Thus true spirituality has gone to the brutish beasts with the devil opening the floodgates of materialism, sloping people to distractions and eventual destruction in hell.

### **A Correlation of Affluence in Poverty: Trends of the Nigerian Prosperity Gospel and the Laodicean Church Experience**

Despite the rich status of the Laodicean church and her confidence in domesticating Christian activities in the city, the church displayed very prideful and boastful self-esteemed materialistic relational lifestyle. This warranted its state of none commendations from Christ the true and faithful witness. Her wavering composition of not being hot (οὔτε ζεστός [*oute zestos*]) nor cold (οὔτε ψυχρός [*oute psuchros*]), was so disgusting to warrant Christ's threat of spewing her out like a wasted saliva in Rev. 3:16. The prideful status which showcased the church's affluence in poverty was personified in verse 17, on the account of her boastful expressions, "I am rich" (ὅτι πλουσιος εἰμι [*hoti plousios eimi*]), "I have acquired wealth" (πεπλουτηκα [*peploutēka*]) and was so self-satisfied in pride to say, "... and do not need a thing" (καὶ ουδενος χρεϊαν εχω [*kai oudnos chreian echō*]). This is a kind of prideful status displayed through the prosperity gospel (το εὐαγγέλιον της ευημερίας [*to evangēlio tēs evimerías*]) in Nigeria. Christ as the faithful and true witness, in judgment, declared of having true knowledge of the spiritual compositions of all seven churches, (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea) in the province of Asia. He opened on each by saying, "I know your works" (οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα [*oida sou ta erga*]) and proceeded by giving their various assessments with commendations and rebukes. He commended the first six on their various statuses of hard work, perseverance, suffering, poverty, true to faith, effectiveness, love, service and faithfulness, but for Laodicea, there was none. The rebukes included the forsaking of first love, compromise, immorality and superficiality. Of all seven churches, Laodicea went with no commendations and was adjudged lukewarm (χλιαρός [*chliaros*]) despite her religious enthusiasm and glorious financial and structural statuses. She was asked to be hot (ζήλευε [*zēleue*]) in her religious dealings and repent (μετανοεω [*metanoēō*]) of her lukewarmness. Ζηλεύω (*Zēleuō*) as used, is a second person, singular, present, imperative, active of the verb ζήλευε (*zēleue*), indicated the contextual warmth or feeling for true spirituality required of the church. Fitting into various translations of it, the Laodicean church was required to become earnest, or be zealous, or be on her mettle and be wholehearted in her spiritual composition (Swanson, 1997). Her call for repentance in the

use of μετανοησον (*metanoēson*), a second person, singular aorist, imperative, active of the verb μετανοεω (*metanoēō*), connotes the change of her purpose required of her, to avoid the threat of Christ in verse 16, which says “I am about to vomit you out of my mouth” (μελλω σε ἐμεσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.” [*mellō se emesai ek tou stomatos mou*]). Exegetically ‘ἐμεσαι’ (*emesai*) is the first aorist, infinitive active of ἐμεω (*emeō*), the verb to vomit, which indicates the certain rejection and removal of this prideful and materialistic congregation from her once attained position in Christ. This rejection was to be with extreme disgust as remarked in (Robertson, 1997). Correspondingly, the accuracy of Jesus’ judgment was accentuated in the metaphors which qualified his omniscient predisposition in verse 14. As ‘the God of truth,’ (ὁ Ἀμήν [*ho Amēn*]), ‘the witness,’ (ὁ μάρτυς [*ho martus*]) ‘the faithful,’ (ὁ πιστός [*ho pistos*]), and ‘true’ (καὶ ἀληθινός [*kai alēthinos*]), Christ is ‘the faithful, true witness ‘and the beginning of God’s creation, whose judgment is absolute and true. The designation of this truth as in the use of (ἀληθινός [*alēthinos*]), applies to that which is genuine, displaying the fact in accord with the absolute virtue of truth in Christ’s adjudication (Renn, 2005). The accuracy of his judgment therefore, cannot be doubted and his testimony in Swete’s assertion never falls short of the truth (Robertson, 1997). Going by these, the offensive predominant religious attitude of the Laodicean church was their prideful and continuous boastful claims of wellness and being in possession of all they wanted. They had complacency in their pseudo spiritual status, coated with materialism in Christ’s judgment. On this spiritual falsehood and personalized mindset of the church, Christ reiterated on their boastful affirmative in the use of ‘λέγεις’ (*legeis*), a second person, singular, present, indicative active of (λέγω [*legō*]) the verb ‘to say,’ to indicate the verbal and prideful materialistic predisposition of the church on her spiritual arrogance and ignorance, in the midst her of abundant of resources. The assertion connotes the opium of the people in their expression of self-will, self-satisfaction, self-righteousness and outright false judgment. Be these as they may, the mindset of the church marred her spiritual composition, since the people from the fallout of their rich endowments, became blind (τυφλός [*tuphlos*]) and indifferent in taking any reasonable standing with God.

Depreciatively, the Laodicean church in Christ’s appraisal, was in a rich city demonstrating her wealth in the pride and conceit of the city’s attitude, but was poor (πτωχός [*ptōchos*]) in grace, thus in a spiritual poverty that she was very ignorant of (Rev. 3:17). This was in contrast with the poverty of the poor church in Smyrna that was rich in grace (Rev. 2:8). Smyrna, one of the seven churches in the province of Asia, was located on the gulf of the Aegean in the north of Ephesus. It was a great city in the province of Asia with a seat of emperor worship and a temple to Tiberius (Robertson, 1997). The endured persecutions meted out on Christians in Smyrna, necessitated their poverty

(πτωχειαν [*ptōcheian*]), but her spiritual alertness in patience and endurance made her a poor-rich church, while the Laodicean church, in her pride and boasts of economic resources made her a rich-poor church. Such scenario simply placed the Laodicean church in an opposite parallel of the spiritual beauty of the church in Smyrna. The Laodicean church was therefore seen as being wretched (ὁ ταλαιπῶρος [*ho talaipōros*]) pitiable (ἐλεεινός [*eleinos*]), poor (πτῶχος [*ptōchos*]), blind (τυφλός [*tuphlos*]) and naked (γυμνός [*gumnos*]). The implication of the single article in predicate (σὺ [*su*]) as used to qualify the boastful attitude as in, “you that boasts,” in Robertson’s opinion remarked on the sharpness of the personified boastful status of the Laodicean church (Robertson, 1997). Their being wretched in the use of (ὁ ταλαιπῶρος [*ho talaipōros*]), not only connoted the pitiable state of the church, but also represented the hypothetical miserable condition and state of their distress, unhappiness, unpleasantness, contemptibility and inadequacy given to their spiritual ignorance and impoverishment. They became poor (πτῶχος [*ptōchos*]) not in the quality of genuine humility which leads to faithful dependence on God, but in the sense of being economically destitute (Renn, 2005). In another vein but on same dais, they became blind (τυφλός [*tuphlos*]) spiritually, indicating their hypocritical self-righteousness garbed in a spiritual tedium and a litany of insensitivity. They also became naked (γυμνός [*gumnos*]), a sad tale that indicated their shameful exposure, vulnerability, destituteness and the need for assistance which they were again, most ignorant of. In Christ, were the real items that triggered their boastful claims of a spiritual wellbeing which they never had. Thus they were counseled to buy from him, ‘Gold’ refined in fire (χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ [*chrusion pepurōmenon ek*]), so they could be rich (ἵνα πλουτησῆς [*hina ploutēsēs*]), in a way that will glorify God. The white clothes (ἱμάτια λευκὰ [*imatia leuka*]) when acquired from Christ, was meant to cover their shameful nakedness as in (ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου [*hē aischunē tēs gumnotētos sou*]). This obviously in the opinion of (Walvoord, and Zuck, 1985 p. 939) was a symbol of righteousness meant to cover their spiritual nakedness. The eye-salve (κολλούριον [*kollourion*]) they needed was to heal their pathetic blindness (Robertson, 1997). From all indications, the Laodicean church was a dying but not a dead church that never realized the dangers entangling her. Clearly, the church in context is an archetypal of some churches in Nigeria under the influence of the prideful prosperity gospel (εὐαγγέλιο εὐημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]). These days as generally remarked in (Walvoord, & Zuck, 1985 p. 939), such churches in Nigeria are quite unconscious of their spiritual needs and are gladly comfortable with beautiful edifices and material things their excess monies acquire. In correlation, (Okoh, 2019 pp. 379-382), highlighted a list of traceable inconveniencies associated with such sad state, which are obvious with the trends of the prideful prosperity gospel predilections in Nigeria. Quest for materialism and worldly comfort fronted through it, has ravaged the Nigerian religious landscape with mere

emotional expressions dominating the central places of the word and prayer in the worship life of the church. It has also influenced a culture where societal status and influence are used to determine positions and the pursuance of monuments rather than winning of souls in the church. It has influenced the delight of churches in the boasting of funds availability and speedy time frames for completion of projects. Through these drifts, churches celebrate riches without questioning sources and quests for such riches have occupied God's positions in both her private and corporate intermingles. Sadly, the church has become lukewarm (χλιαρος [*chliaros*]) in doctrine and praxis – a scenario producing broadmindedness for sin (ἁμαρτία [*hamartia*]) and the consigning of holiness (ἁγίασμος [*hagiasmos*]) to the background. Ἁγίασμος [*Hagiasmos*]) in context, is a noun derived from the verb ἁγιάζω (*hagiazō*) implying, 'to sanctify' or 'make holy' (Renn, 2005 p.495). In deduction of Christ rebuke and call to the Laodicean church, the Nigeria church under the ravaging influence of the prideful prosperity gospel (το εὐαγγέλιο της εὐημερίας), must be earnest (ζήλευε [*zēleue*]) in a true spirituality and repent (μετανοήσον [*metanoēson*]) of her falsity and commodious compromise with worldly predispositions.

## Conclusion

Virtually all Nigerian churches are in one way or the other, involved in the allurements of the prosperity gospel (το εὐαγγέλιο της εὐημερίας), trending under a national economy with dwindling resources. There is therefore a disturbing drift from the preaching of salvation messages, to the proclamation of such teachings and application of principles for wealth acquisition ubiquitous in the religious landscape. These have made Christianity more materialistic and anthropocentric than being Christocentric and heaven-focused. Negatively, prosperity gospel (εὐαγγέλιο εὐημερίας [*evangélio evimerías*]) has affected the Nigerian religious and socio-cultural complexness in so many ways. The ubiquities of the unavoidable connections from it have infested both the church and society, as this repulsive tepidity has become reflective of their endemic affluence in poverty. Both societies have become spiritually poor (πτωχος [*ptōchos*]), with the signs of the unhealthy spiritual life, evident in the displays of corruption, greed, division, spiritual short-sightedness and ill-gotten wealth celebrations in Nigeria, through what is demonstrable as faith-acclaimed persuasions and application of principles. It has birthed and nurtured the problem of inequality and corruption, by offering divine justification for the pursuit of worldly comforts and amassing of wealth - a trend in the church, which appears to be on same dais with the corrupt political culture of the Nigerian society (Smith, 2021). These in Okoh's submission have become injurious because with the persistence of such trends in the country, the consequences have sustained the production of gross economic impoverishment, breakdown of religious and social orders and the birth of callous leaders

and followers, who have continued to make the times absolutely perilous for Nigerians (Okoh, 2019 p. 384). Therefore, the sad state of Nigeria - a nation endowed with both human and natural resources cannot be over-emphasized. Frustration, hunger, starvation, insecurity and unremitting trend of victimization, irrespective of such claims of affluence, have continued to hold common places in the hustling and bustling, and the daily adventurous livings of Nigerians. Beyond these, the socio-religious and political landscapes of the nation, have produced same tepid tendencies, which can be likened to those of the Laodicean city. The Nigerian church can thus be viewed through the five corrosive adjectives of Christ against the Laodicean church, as being wretched (ὁ ταλαιπῶρος [*ho talaipōros*]) pitiable (ἐλεεινός [*eleeinós*]), poor (πτῶχος [*ptōchos*]), blind (τυφλός [*tuphlos*]) and naked (γυμνός [*gumnós*]) in the midst of hypocritical self-righteousness garbed in a spiritual tedium and a litany of insensitivity. The cross of the matter is that the Nigeria church appears to be insensitive of her spiritual needs, but comfortable with her lofty material acquisitions and celebration of all that material riches can provide. There is therefore the need for the Nigerian church to be earnest (ζήλεε [*zēleue*]), and yield to the call of repentance (change of attitude) as implied in the use of (μετανοήσον [*metanoēson*]), which is a second person singular first aorist imperative active of μετανοέω (*metanoēō*), the verb to repent. This change action must be ingressive enough to produce the right religious attitude that is Christ oriented and devoid of superficial religious inclinations, as Christ the owner of the church stands at the door (ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν [*hestēka epī tēn thuran*]) for a possible reentry of the righteousness of God in a superficial Nigerian church.

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