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## **"Ask and you shall be given": Pentecostalism and the economic crisis in Cameroon**

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## From asceticism to a gospel of prosperity: The case of Full Gospel Mission Cameroon

Within the last decades in Africa, there has been a spectacular rise, which is still going on, in the number of newly pentecostally-oriented churches and prayer groups articulating a gospel of prosperity. Some of these groups often carry an epithet like 'Global' or 'International' in their name, which advertise the prosperity gospel and criticize the theologians of the established mission churches for advocating an ascetic stance characterized as 'to be poor to be holy' (Marshall 1992, 1998, Gifford 1992, 1997, Maxwell 1998, Meyer 2002 and Akoko 2002). Accumulation is the formal doctrine of these churches and it is preached with great regularity. If a 'believer' is not accumulating, it is believed that he or she lacks faith. While this development is going on, some mainline Pentecostal groups are moving away from the classical doctrine of asceticism to the prosperity gospel with resistance from some of their members and others are successfully achieving this transition with no resistance. One such examples, is the Zimbabwe Assembly of God Africa (ZAOGA), which achieved this in the 1980s, but with tough resistance from the older generation of pastors who had managed the church from its foundation in the 1960s. The old generation pastors of the church were not happy with this development. They accused the young pastors of introducing a doctrine which only did not comply with the biblical teachings on suffering as a necessary part of a believer's life, but also made material wealth and not holiness as a basis for position in church thereby leading to the rapid promotion of businessmen whose lives fall short of Pentecostal expectations (Maxwell 1998). There is, however, a growing body of literature on modern Pentecostalism embracing the gospel of prosperity (Marshall 1992, 1998,

Gifford 1992, 1997, 2001, Meyer 2002, Smith 2001, Hunt 2002, Kramer 2002, Coleman 2002) but very little on the shift of mainline Pentecostal groups from asceticism to the gospel of prosperity. This work could be credited that it is among the few works that have focused on the shifting of a mainline Pentecostal church from asceticism to a gospel of prosperity.

However, the prosperity message itself is so broad in biblical term. It is taken to include prosperity in economic and material terms. It also involves prosperity in body, soul and spirit, which has to do with issues such as healing ability, peace of mind, victory over Satan, blessed children, protection and deliverance. According to the gospel, God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, and every Christian should now share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness and poverty. A believer has a right to the blessings of health and wealth won by Christ, and he or she can obtain these blessings merely by a positive confession of faith (Gifford, 1997). Its usage in reference to material prosperity dominates the discourse to the extent that whenever scholars and material prosperity theologians or those church ministers who teach that all Christians should be materially prosperous refer to it, they undermine the other aspects. Several well known church ministers from the United States of America helped to create this popular form of usage, most notably E.W Kenyon, A.A Allen, Oral Roberts, T.L Osborn, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and John Avazini. Each of them has made a contribution in the propagation of this gospel. For instance, it was Allen who first made it an aid towards fundraising; he was the first to teach that *God is a rich God, and that those who want to share in his prosperity must obey and support God's servant-the speaker himself*. Oral Robert added the idea of seed faith; *that you prosper by planting a seed in faith, the return on which will meet all your needs*. The gospel has proved very successful among the religious entrepreneurs (otherwise called Get-Rich-Preachers) who constitute the media evangelist all over the world, for its 'seed faith' idea has brought in the enormous resources needed to sustain these extremely expensive ministries and the ministers. Indeed, it developed in those circles precisely because it was so functional in this regard. However, it is not only its functionality but also its general socio-economic context that is significant in this respect. Though the gospel is broad, my main concern here is to use it in the context of material prosperity.

Full Gospel Mission Cameroon is an example of another Pentecostal church, which has undergone this kind of transformation from asceticism to a (more or less) gospel of prosperity in the last decade. In its beginning, this church adopted an ascetic doctrine, which did not give room for accumulation but it has now, to a larger extent, also embraced a gospel of prosperity, which has opened the way for members and the church itself to accumulate (Akoko 2002).

It is the oldest Pentecostal church in Cameroon after the Apostolic Church and the biggest in terms of adherents and establishments. Reverend Werner Knorr introduced this church, which is of German origin, in Cameroon in 1961 under the sponsorship of the United Missions Friends Inc of Germany (Knorr 2000). According to statistics from the office of the National Superintendent of the church in 2000, it has a total membership of roughly 59,062 with 518 assemblies (local churches) located in all provinces of the country. Membership has been increasing rapidly and the Mission has penetrated all nooks and crannies of the country and beyond. The high rate of growth can be attributed to some of its doctrines and practices such as divine healing/protection, good leadership, political liberalization, evangelization strategies, its caring culture towards the needy and a shift from complete asceticism to a gospel of prosperity.<sup>1</sup> The church has gone down in record as the first in Cameroon, which has extended its activities beyond the national frontiers. Its presence is felt in Chad, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and in its future projects plan (5 years) 2001-2005, it intended to penetrate the Republics of Congo and Gabon before 2005 though the years elapsed without it attaining this goal due to financial constrains. It also goes down in record as the first Pentecostal church to have been introduced into Nigeria from Cameroon instead of the usual tradition of being introduced into Cameroon from Nigeria (Knorr 2000).

In a release that was prepared by the Missionary founder of the church, Reverend Werner Knorr, Full Gospel Mission embraces asceticism as an economic message, while leaving the door open to accumulation.<sup>2</sup> An issue that can be underscored with the message is that it gives every biblical explanation to justify asceticism and accumulation amongst 'believers'. In justifying asceticism in the message, it is stated that *through greed our hearts can be bound by worldly possessions, so that they can hinder us in our Christian walks*. The statement implies that the Mission believes earthly possessions (wealth) can exercise an evil and negative influence on its beholder. For instance, many people have fallen into the temptations of stealing, defrauding, smuggling, counterfeiting of money, or unfaithfulness in making offerings and correct tithes in order to get rich, (covetousness or love of money). It is this danger of greed or covetousness, which someone who possesses wealth or has the desire to do so is exposed to, that makes the Mission to embrace asceticism.

The following extract from the message reveals that the church also embraces the gospel of prosperity:

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed explanation of the factors, which have accounted for the rapid growth of the church, see, for example, Akoko R. (unpublished) 'An overview of Full Gospel Mission Cameroon and the factors accounting for its rapid growth.

<sup>2</sup> See, 'What Does the Bible Say? Our Position on Prosperity' by Reverend Knorr

For those who loyally pay their tithes and give sacrificially, He (God) gives the wonderful assurance, 'Try me now in this, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it'. Let us also understand that, if some Christians become rich, it may be due to God's special gifts to just them, because He has accorded them a 'ministry of giving'. As He can trust them for their faithfulness and liberality, He is giving them material possessions in greater abundance, so that they in turn can bless His church and others.

It can therefore be argued that the Mission does not out rightly want its followers to remain poor or that they should give up their riches when they want to follow God. It believes that if a person is able to overcome the temptations inherent in accumulation, he can accumulate as much as possible but if he cannot, he should stay in poverty in order to serve God better.

The message is less than a decade old and it should be noted that the Mission adopted complete asceticism from the beginning, with no compromise on accumulation but with the recent opening of the door to accumulation, the church as a body and its members have engaged in materialistic practices as any other group or person in the country. However, the transition in this church presents an interesting analysis because unlike the other groups such as the ZAOGA, it has been relatively very smooth, with no resistance from other members of the church and it has been one of the factors, which have attracted more people into the church. Secondly, unlike other groups, which either maintains complete asceticism or the doctrine of prosperity as an economic message, this church tries to strike a balance between the two options, though in practice, the latter dominates. Thirdly, being an attractive force and the fact that the church is the biggest Pentecostal group in the country, the transition could affect other Pentecostal groups (particularly the ascetic groups whose membership is dwindling because of complete asceticism), in that they too may want to copy it in order to be attractive. The aim of this chapter is to analyze this change from complete asceticism to a doctrine of prosperity, which has taken place within this church in Cameroon.

## Transition to prosperity

Asceticism, as practised by Full Gospel Mission, was based on the biblical stress on 'holiness' and on the passage *blessed are the poor for they shall inherit the kingdom of God* through which the church aggressively embraced poverty and a retreat from the symbols of material prosperity. It placed a lot of emphasis on perfection, strict personal ethics and biblical inerrancy. In this light, the ways of the 'world' were considered as the ways of sin, so 'believers' were exhorted to shun all unnecessary material and canal pleasures in compliance with the teachings. Strict dress codes were enforced. All the members could be observed

avoiding expensive dressing and material things even if they could afford them. It was unacceptable for a woman to wear a trouser, jewelry, or make-ups and they were always expected to cover their heads especially when in church or at prayer. Keeping very long hair and styling was also unacceptable. Men were to put on simple dresses; unflared trousers (despite the fashion of the time) and plain shoes (acceptable heel heights were specified).

Nde (1998) argues that the outward appearance of a woman was more affected by the ascetic doctrine, as they could easily be distinguished from other women through their heads, no make-ups or jewelry and simple dressing. What is certain is that, though this church had some wealthy or relatively prestigious members, wealth and fortune was not the basis for prestige or status in the church community, which remained remarkably egalitarian in terms of the rigid social barriers, which exist in the broader Cameroonian society. The basis for rising in the ranks of the church hierarchy was largely the demonstration of piety, denominational fidelity, and possession of 'spiritual power', rather than age or wealth.

Anyone who listened to their sermons at the time could easily recall that they were highly characterized by the condemnation of 'sin', which was believed to be deep-rooted in accumulation and in the quest to become rich. Practices such as lying, cheating, stealing, quarreling, gossiping, giving and taking of bribes, drinking alcohol, fornication, beating of spouse, losing of tempers or denying assistance to other members in need, were considered as 'sin'. Limited contact was allowed between members of different sexes. Marital fidelity was a central tenet and divorce was not permitted.

In compliance with the preaching, the Education Secretary of the church revealed to me in an interview that the church as a body abstained from accumulative practices such as engaging in business ventures. This contrasted with the mainline churches, which were highly engaged in business ventures in a bid to raise income for their activities. These practices made the society to believe that Full Gospel message was meant for the poor and frustrated, in fact the scum of the society (Nwanchan 2001).

The gospel of prosperity, as practised now, takes the form of not removing members or the church as a body from the avenues of accumulation. This has had a tremendous impact on members in that it has re-oriented their economic lifestyles from asceticism to accumulation. There are no restrictions on dressing, nor is wealth seen as ungodly; on the contrary, fine clothes, nice cars, foreign goods are common currency. The pastors themselves promote and foster this image.

On the part of the church, it has engaged in accumulative practices, which never used to be the case. Within the last decade, it has gone into many business

ventures in the areas of Education, Health, and Printing. I visited some of the establishments and each revealed an economic motive behind its creation.

From the interview with the Education Secretary of the Mission, the church runs 6 nursery and primary schools in the towns of Muyuka, Kumba, Tiko, Bai-Koke and Awing. These schools started after 1998 and according to the Education Secretary, there are prospects of opening more in many other towns in the country in the nearest future. In order to have qualified staff for these schools, a Teacher Training College was opened in Mbengwi in 2000. The College, which is bilingual, admits all, irrespective of denomination. The only admission requirement is the advanced level General Certificate of Education.

The Mission has a Technical College in Muyuka, which started in 1995. This school offers trade courses, which include Home Economics, Woodwork, Building and Construction, Electricity, Accounting and Secretary ship. Admission too is opened to all, irrespective of denomination (Nwancha 2001).

In 1998, a Secondary School was opened in Nkwen for both boys and girls, irrespective of denomination as well. Apart from the normal secondary school curriculum, the principal of the School revealed to me that it offers additional subjects in Medical Sciences, Computer and Industrial Chemistry.

In the area of health, it runs Health Centres in Garoua and Yaounde, which started in 1999 and 2000 respectively. According to the Secretary of the Medical Department, there are prospects of upgrading them to hospitals. However, before this time, there had been existing two other Health Centres that were indirectly linked to this Mission: one at Mbakeng (opened in 1975) and the other at Banteng (opened in 1980). The two health centers were not directly opened by the Mission but by some foreign Missionaries who were affiliated to the church. These were Reverend Daniel Roth for Mbakeng and Sister Dorothy Flick for Banteng. The Mission has however, taken over full control of all of them. The Mission's lack of interest in having full control over these Centers from the start was because of its original position in the running of social services. The opening of these institutions by some members of the church also indicates that some of its members, before the crisis, saw nothing wrong with the church running social services or engaging in business (Shu 2001).

In Bamenda, it has a Printing Press (Gospel Press), which went into operation in 1986, with the intention of printing exclusively gospel materials, which were distributed free or sold at moderate prices. But with the crisis, the Director of the press revealed to me that they now print work on commercial basis to people, irrespective of religion.

The Mission runs 5 Christian Literature Centers viz: Bamenda, Muyuka, Yaounde, Douala and Kumba. Each is stocked with Christian literature including audio and videocassettes, calendars, diaries, stickers, T-shirts, key holders and

almanacs for sale. Each has a music set that plays choral music at all time to attract the attention of by-passers. These centers started before the advent of the crisis and were meant for evangelism. Christian books and materials were sold cheap but now they compete with other Bookshops on prices. The Director of the Muyuka center revealed that their books are either internally printed or imported at subsidized rates from foreign partners (e.g. Kingsway in Britain) and they supply imported books to other Bookshops, for instance, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) chain of bookshops (Presbook), to sell on agreed profits, which are shared.

The decision to shift from complete asceticism to accumulation is crucial in the life of a church because it has to do with a doctrinal position in matters of faith. For this reason, only the highest decision-making organ of the church can do this. I met the Missionary founder of the Church, Reverend Werner Knorr, in his Bamenda residence in 2001 to know about the position of the church with regards to this development and he presented a document to me, which indicates the official position of the Mission on Prosperity. The document entitled *Full Gospel Mission: What does the Bible say? Our position on prosperity* was prepared and signed by the missionary founder himself. The document clearly brought out biblical passages defending prosperity and it equally encouraged members to accumulate. He told me that it was prepared in 1988 because the church authorities saw the necessity of not sticking to asceticism but also to a gospel that could prosper the church and its members. As the missionary founder of the church and the first Mission Superintendent, who from the beginning had played a big role in making the church to adopt asceticism, such a document coming from him was an indication that the church authorities sanctioned the shift from asceticism to prosperity. The period the document was prepared explains why the mission business enterprises were created only after this period. A majority of these was created after 1990. One thing that must be pointed out from the message is that the church does not completely turn its back to asceticism. Though a majority holds the idea of accumulation, those who might not support it are, with other biblical backings, allowed to remain with asceticism. For this reason, it is not a surprise to find some members of Full Gospel Mission still clinching to asceticism. This number, which consists of some elderly members, is minimal and it is likely that in the nearest future when most of them must have died, asceticism with the church would be something of the past. This definitely explains why there has been no resistance to the development. Maxwell (1998) has revealed a similar transition with the Zimbabwean Assembly of God, Africa (ZAOGA). Unlike the case of Full Gospel Mission, that of ZAOGA was not so smooth because it faced resistance from



some members of the church, particularly the older generation led by the early pastors of the church.

## Factors which influenced the adoption of the gospel of prosperity

The embracing of the prosperity gospel by the church, after many years of complete asceticism, could be attributed to the influence of some prosperity preachers and the Cameroon economic crisis.

### *The influence of prosperity preachers*

One of the greatest factors here has been the influence of prosperity preachers through their literature on the gospel of prosperity, which has always been widely available since the 1980s in Cameroon. This literature, is either in the form of tracts distributed freely by members of Pentecostal groups free to people or books published and sold at moderate prices in bookshops run by churches, including the various Full Gospel Mission Literature Centers in Cameroon and also during rallies, crusades or conferences. Examples of such works are those of USA Avazini John, E.W Kenyon, A.A. Allen, Oral Roberts, T.L Osborn, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, British Trevor Newport and Paul Yonggi Cho of South Korea.

Another factor is the influence of some prosperity preachers who have been visiting Cameroon and working closely with Full Gospel Mission. One of these Preachers has been Reinhardt Bonnke, the best-known Western crusader that has made much impact on the prosperity doctrine in Africa. Bonnke, born in Germany in 1940, acquired his pastoral training in the United Kingdom. He served as a pastor in North Germany before moving to settle in Lesotho as a pastor for the Apostolic Faith. In 1975, he created his crusade ministry, with headquarters in Johannesburg, South Africa. His first crusades with revivals were concentrated in Southern Africa but when he became more ambitious of making it a worldwide affair, he founded the Christ for all Nations (CFAN) and moved the headquarters to Frankfurt in Germany. By 1991, he was conducting about 18 crusades a year, 12 of them in Africa, the area of his major concern. His crusades are usually properly organized and highly attended. Though he is a Pentecostal, he tries to make his crusades nondenominational by involving the local churches in the organization, which gives much publicity to them. For example, in his 20-25 February 1990 crusade in Bamenda, Cameroon, over 65 local churches participated and over 250,000 people attended.

Besides these public rallies, or in conjunction with them, Bonnke has developed two other means of spreading his influence. One is 'Fire Conferences', which are special teaching seminars for all, and the other is 'Pastors Workshops',

which take place during every crusade and are normally meant for pastors of the churches involved in the crusade. He takes these seriously because he understands pastors are very instrumental in spreading his theology. In a bid to spread his theology of prosperity and also to become materially prosperous, around the edges of every crusade ground are his numerous stalls for selling Christian literature, tapes, CFAN T-shirts, bags and hats. These wares are often touted (sometimes at bargain rates) from the platform; even Bonnke himself during sermons will sometimes advertise his own books and cassettes. In some of his sermons, Bonnke does not belabor the prosperity gospel but uses expressions such as ‘God will make you prosper’, in the name of Jesus, I break the cycle of poverty’, ‘we open our purses and pockets right now and give; we shall cause you (God) to open your blessings on us’, which reflect the teachings of the gospel.

Bonnke has visited Cameroon twice for his CFAN crusades; from 21-26 February, 1989, he was in Kumba (the national headquarters of many Pentecostal churches in Cameroon and headquarters of the South West Region of Full Gospel Mission Cameroon.) and from 20-25 February, 1990 he was in Bamenda (the headquarters of the North West Region of Full Gospel Mission, which at that time was the national headquarters of Full Gospel Mission Cameroon). These crusades took place in the Anglophone part of the country and all the Pentecostal churches, which had existed in the region at the time, took active part. Mainline churches such as the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) and The Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) did not participate. Full Gospel Mission, being the biggest Pentecostal church in the country, played a key role in inviting him to Cameroon and in organizing the crusades.

Late Benson Idahosa of neighboring Nigeria is another figure that is believed to have helped shape the gospel of prosperity in Cameroon. Idahosa could be classified as the best-known Pentecostal leader Africa has ever produced. He was not only seen frequently on Pentecostal platforms in Africa but also in Europe and the United States of America. He was the founder of the multi-million Naira ‘Miracle Center’ in Benin City, Nigeria, where thousands of ‘believers’ go every week to ‘seek their own personal miracles’. The Idahosa Bible College in the city is run as part of the Center. This College has helped to train many of the Pentecostal pastors in Cameroon as well as other African countries.

Idahosa, before his death in 1999, visited Cameroon several times for evangelistic purposes. He accompanied Bonnke on the two occasions he visited Cameroon and during each crusade, he took active part and also presented a sermon. He held a three-day conference in Douala in May, 1993, which was attended by members of Full Gospel Mission. In the course of one of his sermons in Douala, Idahosa dwelled lengthily on the prosperity message. In the sermon,

he claimed that God had brought him so many clothes he did not know he could have, a car that even that of the then Nigeria President Babangida did not match ('when my car passes in Nigeria, people gape') and so much food, all as a reward of his faith. In one of the sessions in Douala, he invited the crowd to receive a special 'anointing', which he argued was going to cause God to change their lives as he did to him. He explained that before his anointing, he used to travel economy class, but afterwards always traveled first class; before the anointing, he and his wife had always had to go without food if they had guest but since then whenever a guest came, he could afford to kill a cow; after the anointing, he got a better car, with air-conditioning and chauffer, and expected to have a Mercedes 500 and a Concorde before November of that year. Before this anointing, he had a three-bedroom house, and at the time of the conference he had had a seven-bedroom house, but was expecting to have twelve bedrooms by the end of the year. All these indicated no doubt that Idahosa's agenda was fundraising. He told the crowd that God had told him to start the first Christian University in Cameroon and as such he asked the crowd whether they would not be happy to see the first Christian University in Cameroon brought by a Nigerian. After this, he gave his audience the chance to 'sow' and for thirty minutes, he lined up those who wanted to do so; first 10 thousand, then 5 thousand, then 2.5 thousand, then 1 thousand CFA. He kept on insisting that 'God will bless every seed sown', and 'I wish I were you, so that I could sow and expect a miracle'. After this, he invited everyone to come forward to buy a book he had written and a magazine 'for only 1 thousand CFA'. Many present took part in the exercise but right up to this moment nobody has heard anything about the University again (Gifford 1997).

Another great figure that cannot be left out when discussing the spread of the prosperity doctrine in Cameroon is Reverend Dr. Billy Lubansa of the Democratic Republic of Congo nationality. Fondly known amongst the Pentecostals in Cameroon as 'Super Papa Billy' he is the President-founder of the Flaming Fire of God Ministries International, which started in 1986 and is based in Kabwe Zambia with Liaison offices in Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Buea Cameroon. Reverend Billy Lubansa is an international Pentecostal conference speaker and organizer and he gives as his 'spiritual mentors' Ray McCauley, Reinhardt Bonnke, Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagen. He is also a diplomat who worked with the International Association of Pan African Institute for Development for many years before retiring to settle back in Zambia to full-time running of his Ministry. While working with the Institute in Zambia, he attended Bonnke's 1986 Fire Conference in Harare and there had an experience that led to his founding of his Flaming Fire Ministry. He was transferred to the Pan African Institute for

Development (West Africa) in Buea in 1990, from where he retired in 2001. While in Cameroon, Reverend Lubansa preferred working with other Pentecostal groups rather than establishing a branch of his own Ministry in Cameroon because he believed the well-established Apostolic and Full Gospel Missions churches would frustrate the plan. Compared with Zambia, he argued that the Pentecostals churches in Cameroon were dead. After he attended a Full Gospel church, he believed he got nothing and after attending an Apostolic Church, he was not also satisfied because he felt the sermon lasted for just ten minutes. Because of this, he revealed; *....then I saw why God brought me to Cameroon... My mandate was to get the local churches out of the doldrums.* He then started involving himself with the activities of the various Pentecostal churches, preaching in churches and organizing crusades for all with ‘signs and wonders’. Cameroonians were amazed with his performance and activities because they believed a black could not do these. Reverend Lubansa made no secret of the fact that he was trying to change the ecclesiastical face of Cameroon but did this with tact. For instance, he worked with other groups rather than establishing a branch of his own church in Cameroon.

With regards to his prosperity position, he complained that the people of Cameroon were never taught about giving thus:

At the offering, they give brown coins (5, 10, 25, CFA): ‘God would not mind’, the pastors used to tell them. I started breaking that teaching. I gave a seminar ‘Being delivered from the power of poverty’ (for which he used the books of Copeland). An Apostolic Church pastor told me that the missionaries had told them, ‘You don’t need education or big churches because you are going to heaven’. This was implanted in them. We have to uproot all those things. They used to preach ‘Blessed are the poor’. They must change to ‘Jesus came to bring abundant life, prosperity’. They taught that money was evil. We need to have it to spread the kingdom.

Lubansa used to accomplish this uprooting of the old teaching through his program on the Buea local radio station, invitations to speak at other Pentecostal gatherings or crusades. He also achieved this through his big ‘Church Growth’ or ‘Fire Conferences’ that were organized on regular basis at the jungle village of the nearby Botanic Garden in Limbe. These usually highly attended international conferences were meant to be nondenominational but were attended only by Pentecostal groups and with international Pentecostal speakers invited from all over the world.

He retired from the Pan African Institute for Development in 2003 and went back to Zambia to fully occupy himself in running his church. Though no more living in Cameroon, he comes in regularly from Zambia to organize his ‘fire conferences’ in Limbe.

Another person, who has had an imprint in the spread of the gospel of prosperity in Cameroon, is Nigerian Reverend Dr Tunde Joda. He is a medical

doctor and the founder of Christ Chapel International Churches, with headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. His church, which is amongst the most popular Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, has branches in Cameroon. Popular not only because of its relatively relaxed attitude to dressing and strict morality expressed by a retreat from 'worldly' concerns, but also the youthful and articulate personality of the founder. Tunde Joda led emotional and charismatic services, which gave rise to several new churches in the 1980s onwards, with similar doctrinal position on prosperity, the centrality of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, healing miracles and monetary rewards in Nigeria. Tunde Joda, who works closely with Billy Lubansa in organizing the fire conferences in Cameroon, pays regular visits to Cameroon for revival purposes and the running of his Ministry. His fortnightly publication entitled *Prosperity now*, is widely distributed and read in Cameroon. A copy is sold at a token of 1 hundred CFA, making it very affordable to many people. Each edition tackles a topical issue on the prosperity gospel. For instance, while that of October, 2000: Volume 1, Number 2 was entitled *Money Cometh to me now*, and that of January, 2000: Volume 2, Number 1 was on *Poverty or Prosperity: The choice is yours*, that of 2000: Volume 2, Number 7 was on *Opening your Faith account*. His general argument in the three editions is that the more a 'believer' gives out money for the service of the Lord, (literally, banking in faith) the more the Lord in the form of material prosperity rewards him.

When talking of Pentecostalism in Cameroon, one great national figure that has spearheaded its spread in the last decades is Zacharias Fomum (a Yaounde University 1 professor and son of a late Presbyterian minister). He defected from the Presbyterian Church at a time he was an elder in the Yaounde Presbyterian Church congregation 1978 and joined Full Gospel Mission. Immediately he joined Full Gospel Mission, he actively engaged in evangelistic outreach, which attracted many people to the church and about 1985, he founded his own church, the Christian Missionary Fellowship International (CMFI) with headquarters in Yaounde. Though he has his own church, he is considered in Pentecostal circle in Cameroon as an authority in matters of spirituality. His ideas on spiritual matters are usually taken to be the truth and for this reason most Pentecostal practices in Cameroon are tailored towards them.

Fomum's Ministry owns and runs the Christian Publishing House in Yaounde, which has a branch in Lagos, Nigeria. He has published over eighty books and many tracts which are sold or distributed free world wide on Christian literature, with a good number of them on issues relating to the gospel of prosperity. One of such books in which Fomum has espoused the prosperity doctrine is, *The Christian and Money: Banking in Heaven Today*, which was first published in

1988 and a fourth and latest edition in 1999. In the preface of the books, he writes:

In this book, the possibilities of banking in heaven are shown to the believer. All believers are carrying out banking. Some bank in earthly banks, others bank in their stomachs, others in clothes, cars, and the like, while some bank in heaven. We send this book out with prayer that it should stir the hearts of those who belong to the Lord to acquire permanent riches by investing in the Lord and in his gospel here and now.

Fomum begins this work, which is on the necessity of ‘giving’ to the Lord and the Lord’s work, by advising ‘believers’ to always, as a necessity, consecrate themselves and all their property before ‘giving’ the Lord’s share of these property. He argues that when ‘giving’ to the Lord, the ‘believer’ should copy the example of Jesus Christ, who gave His all and became poor for our sake, by ‘giving’ in the same way and to the same extent. In this light, he reveals that the measure you ‘give’ will be the measure the Lord will give back to you as a reward of giving. That is, if you give to God the best, the topmost, you will always receive from him the topmost. He also recommends in the work that ‘believers’ should use all of their abilities to make as much money as they possibly can and after making it, should ‘give’ it for the work of the Lord and to the poor and by doing this, they will not be trapped by the Lord. It should be noted that ‘giving’ in the book is in reference to money, hence he writes:

it is time to put all the money you have into the business of the Gospel and let it be used while the doors are open. Do not store it up in a will. Let it be used now.

Apart from accomplishing his spread of the doctrine through literature, Fomum also does it through his sermons in church and various crusades, which he organizes on a regular basis or others, which he is invited as guest preacher.

#### *The Cameroon economic crisis*

It is also very likely that the economic crisis, which is affecting the country, contributed much to the change. Before the Mission could embrace the gospel of prosperity, the economy of Cameroon was in a boom. Cameroon was regarded by most international financial institutions as a ‘middle income developing country and one of the economic success stories in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Gross National Product had increased from CFA 300 billion francs in 1970 to 2,000 billion in 1982. Also, with an average growth rate of 6 percent between 1977 and 1982, Cameroon’s economy was ranked one of Africa’s most credit-worthy nations, with a triple-A rating. Cameroon was also described as ‘the paradigm for Africa development’ and ‘an agricultural success story’ partly because of the administration’s encouragement of agricultural development rather than relying more exclusively on oil production as some African countries such as Nigeria and Gabon had done following petroleum’s discovery and exploitation. Western,

particularly French financial support was important in the socio-economic progress Cameroon experienced during this period. The foundation of French economic involvement in Cameroon was established in a series of financial and economic agreements between France and Ahmadou Ahidjo's government<sup>3</sup> in 1959 and renegotiated with only minor changes in 1973. These agreements allowed France to become heavily involved in providing financial and technical aid to almost every phase of the Ahidjo's administration. For example, in 1960, the first year of Cameroon's independence, French aid to Ahidjo's administration totaled a Francs equivalent of 50 million US dollars, representing 80 percent of total revenue collected by the government (Jua 1991, Konings 1996, Takougang and Krieger 1998).

As a result of the economic boom, the church, like other churches was rich because members were able to make substantial contributions for running it. In addition, more sources of funding from Western Missionary bodies were available to various churches as compared to what operates at this moment. These enabled churches to carry out their activities successfully. In addition to these sources, mainline churches in Cameroon engaged in business ventures in order to raise additional money for their activities. They engaged in business ventures in the areas of education, health, printing, agriculture etc. Full Gospel Mission, like other Pentecostal churches, did not engage in business ventures, which could provide the church additional income for its activities. The reason was simply because of its ascetic doctrine, which did not provide for accumulation. However, there was pressure on the church coming from the state government and even some of its members for it to engage in the provision of social services similar to those provided by mainline churches. The leaders of the church for long had resisted this because they believed it was going to be an impediment to church growth. In line with this, members were not encouraged to go into business ventures because the church feared that they could fall into the temptations of materialism and that could have a negative impact on faith and the church as a whole. While Full Gospel Mission was resisting the provision of social services, the mainline churches had long been involved in the provision of such services, most especially in the areas of health and education. Though considered social services, these institutions were and are still big sources of income to the central bodies of the churches. Institutions managed by the church were and are still highly valued by the public compared with those managed by the state for what is qualified as better services with the result being a consistently high demand for the services. This enables churches to raise much profit from the institutions. In addition, it used to be state policy when the

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<sup>3</sup> Ahmadou Ahidjo was the first president of independent Cameroon in 1960. He handed over power to his constitutional successor, Prime Minister Paul Biya in 1982.

economy was in a boom to make grants-in-aid to religious bodies for the running of some of these services. For instance, schools and hospitals, since they were carrying out services that the state would have been obliged to undertake in their absence. This state policy went further to enable these churches to make additional income from the institutions.

It could be argued that the availability of various sources of funding to Full Gospel Mission, contributed to its adopting an ascetic doctrine from the onset as opposed to the gospel of prosperity. With the economic crisis, contributions from members and external financial support to the Mission dropped drastically, and for it to survive, an alternative has been to embrace the gospel of prosperity, which could provide some income for its activities. An examination of its income generating enterprises reveals that most of them started during this period of the economic crisis in Cameroon.

It is very obvious that members of the church were unable to receive in concrete terms the expected rewards of asceticism in an economic-ridden country like Cameroon and they were willing and ready to get along with the doctrine of prosperity, which could enable them to fight the crisis. This willingness contributed in making the transition very smooth. As evidence that members were willing to embrace this gospel, many had started defecting to new Pentecostal groups (many coming in from Nigeria), which were coming in with the gospel of prosperity as their economic message. For instance, when Fomum defected from the Mission to found his Christian Missionary Fellowship International, which embraces the gospel of prosperity, many members of Full Gospel Mission defected to it. It could therefore be argued that apart from adopting this message as a strategy of raising finances for the church, its authorities must have also taken into consideration the needs to stop further defection, to bring back to its fold those who had done so and to convert more people.

## Presenting the message

The message of prosperity is passed on to members through many ways amongst which are: sermons during regular Sunday worships, rallies, media, material objects and the lifestyle of the leaders. Whenever an assembly has a project, which demands much money to accomplish, the theme of most of the sermons during the period would dwell on the gospel of prosperity and also when an announcement concerning the project is being made, members are often reminded of the gospel in a bid to persuade them to raise money relentlessly for the project. One such example is the library/rest house project of the Molyko assembly, which on one of the Sundays, the leaders of the assembly decided to



raise fund for the project. I was a participant in the worship service of that Sunday. The pastor's sermon was devoted to the gospel of prosperity. In this message, he reminded members that they only get rich by trusting in God and paying their tithes and that no one should expect financial success, if he or she does not fulfil his/her Christian obligation of giving for the service of the Lord. In line with the message, he reminded members of the importance of the library/rest house project for the growth of the church and the Molyko assembly in particular and therefore appealed to them to fulfil their Christian obligation of 'giving' to make the project succeed. During the announcement slot of that worship service, the elder of the church started by reminding members of the theme of the sermon that day before bringing out the strategy that was to be used in raising money for the project. He appealed to members to make pledges of at least 5 thousand CFA each for the project. A good number of members responded to the appeal and made various pledges. However, some who had a low income and could not pledge up to that amount were given the opportunity to pledge something lower. He started by appealing to those of them who could afford 4.5 thousand CFA to raise up their hands and some did. He did it for other amounts below that in descending order and eventually almost every member of the church made a pledge to pay an amount of money for the project within a period of two months.

The radio has been a powerful medium in disseminating the message, and this church always uses local radio stations for this aim. Within the last decade, a number of Pentecostal radio stations and TV channels have emerged in some towns in Cameroon as a result of the state's liberalization of the audio and visual media sectors. The advantage with the radio or TV is that a wider audience can be targeted. One of such stations is the Revival Gospel Radio in Buea, which is run by Pastor Tembi Alfred (a Full Gospel Mission pastor). In an interview with Pastor Tembi, the pastor indicated that one of his intentions of founding this station, is to be able to take the gospel of God right to wherever people, who do not have the opportunity of going to church are. For instance, in homes, offices, motor parks, markets and even in cars.

In a sermon, on this station on 27 July, 2003 during the Sunday weekly half-hour program on Full Gospel Mission (Full Gospel Half Hour), the elder of the Bolifamba assembly of the Mission, Nkweta Benjamin, decided to preach on the gospel of prosperity and his message was entitled 'Principles of Seed Faith'. In the message, he likens the growth in faith of a believer to a seed, which if sowed will produce more yields. He argues that only when we begin to 'sow our seeds in faith' properly, can we expect rewards from God. He believes that the proper way of sowing in God is by selecting the best seeds to plant and when this is done, the harvest too will be good. That is to say, we have to give to the Lord the

best we have and in a greater quantity, the return that will be much more than what we gave him. He further reveals this:

God wants to come to your rescue. He delights in obedience. Your giving proves that God opens the windows of heaven to you and causes the devourer to be rebuked. He invites people to verify his trustworthiness by their giving. I want to say that God's prosperity plans include tithing. Many people are handicapped by their own poverty and too often their poverty is caused by their own disobedience to the word of God. There are many ways of disobeying this word; one is robbing God. Those who withhold their tithes and offerings to the Lord are actually robbing him and as a consequence, are robbing themselves of the blessings of riches that the Lord can bestow upon them. When you break the law, the benevolent law of God cannot work on you. I want to say that nothing will keep a wise believer from tithing and giving, but he or she will never be found to tithe or give offerings just to get something in return. Rather the act arises from obedience and God always rewards obedience.

Tracts on the gospel of prosperity, printed by the Gospel Press Bamenda, are highly used to spread the message. The tracts are given to members of the church to either distribute to the general public freely everywhere or sold at affordable prices. Each tract is devoted to a particular theme of interest on the prosperity gospel, for example, one, which was entitled 'Truths about Money' argues that money is very important to a Christian and God, unlike Satan, wants all his followers to be rich. It argues that the devil can be much more effective in neutralizing your testimony if you are financially weak and impotent and as such God wants to arm you with all his spiritual armour, and with the finances you need to effectively bring the message of salvation to a dying world. It believes that in a spiritual warfare, money is one of the necessary tools to provide desperately needed Bibles for the entire world and it is as well important in evangelisation.

Material things are also used to spread the gospel. These include: inscriptions on pens, T-shirts, stickers, which are stuck on bibles, front doors, walls, briefcases, and handbags and in cars. Some of the inscriptions read: 'Every believer should give for God's work in order to receive His blessings', 'It is time to put all the money you have into the business of the gospel and let it be used while the doors are open. Do not store it up in a will. Let it be used now', 'Open a bank account for God now', 'God blesses in abundance so that those blessed may be able to give for every good work. God never blesses anyone so that he may hoard the riches'. As a strategy to spread the message, these things are usually sold at affordable prices to the public or even distributed freely. These items are made available for sale to the general public during rallies or in shops.

The lifestyles of some of the church leaders also help to spread the gospel. For instance, some live a life of affluence by owning expensive property such as cars, watches, houses and dressing gorgeously. They equally indulge in business ventures along with the church, which they argue is in compliance with the

gospel of prosperity. The tendency here is that when ordinary members see their leaders engaged in these, they have all reasons to believe that they are the right things for a Christian to do and therefore they try to emulate.

Reverend Ewome Paul and Dr Oben Pius are some of the church leaders whose lifestyles could be argued are helping to disseminate the message. Each of them seems to be successful in life and accumulation when compared to the general living condition of Cameroonians. I interviewed each of them to know what they make of the message with regards to their life history. Their stories and the analyses they make of them show that they believe strongly in the prosperity gospel. They each attest that they invest in God's work as stipulated in the gospel of prosperity and it is the fruit of the investment that they are reaping in all forms in their life. Each presents his life experiences in a bid to show the truth of the gospel and argues that anybody who leads a similar life will experience similar success.

*Reverend Ewome Paul (District pastor Buea)*

Reverend Ewome, popularly known as 'Pa', not only among his Christians, because of his age, (about 67 years) simplicity, fatherly and caring attitude towards all, irrespective of faith, is the District Pastor for Buea. Moreover, he has a jovial character, which has made many people to know him. He owns a nice enclosed villa in Muea and he is chauffeured-driven in a Mercedes car. He could always be seen neatly dressed in suits and some other admired African traditional dresses. I had a lengthy interview with him in his residence in Muea on a Wednesday morning.

He was converted from the Presbyterian Church to Full Gospel Mission in 1960 in his village Maumu during a rally, which had Reverend Knorr as the preacher. Reverend Ewome, who did commercial education, worked with the Cooperative movement as secretary and the Ekona Research Institute as accounts clerk and later the store keeper between 1963-1967. In 1967, he took part in a 3 months Bible training course organized by the Mission in Muyuka. After doing this course, he resigned from research and decided to go into full-time Pastoral Ministry on a salary of 3 thousand CFA, which he told me was far below what he was receiving with the Research Institute. In 1980, he attended the Full Gospel Mission Bible Institute in Bamenda and graduated with a Diploma in Theology. He has served the church in various capacities ranging from Local Pastor, District Pastor, Area Pastor, and Assistant Mission Secretary to Assistant Mission Superintendent.

Reverend Ewome's story to me on how God has been blessing him with prosperity from when he became 'born-again' is fascinating:

While in his first pastoral station at Bakundu Foe, he received a Christian tract, which after reading it, he subscribed to it. Within three weeks, instead of receiving copies of it, he got a letter in which the writer was telling him that God had revealed to him that he should give Reverend Ewome the necessary transportation assistance to enable him efficiently and effectively carry out his work in Cameroon. The writer of the letter then asked Reverend Ewome the number of kilometers from his station to the main city (Kumba) and what could be provided to him as a means of transportation. Reverend Ewome said some friends advised him to go in for a car but he refused and instead preferred a motorcycle. In a few weeks, he received a letter, which included a cheque that had enough money to buy and obtain the necessary legal documents for a heavy brand new motorcycle. He bought a motorcycle, which after two years had depreciated but through regular reports on its performance to his donor, he was sent money for another one. The old one was given out to another pastor. After three months of using the second motorcycle, he gave it for servicing. While testing it after repair, the mechanic collided with a big stone and it got bad almost beyond repair. He then made his report to his donor and he was told to instruct the mechanic to write to the donor what happened. The mechanic did and the donor wrote back telling Reverend Ewome to forgive the mechanic arguing that it was a result of his (Ewome) faith that the mechanic did not die in the accident. The donor gave him money for another motorcycle and advised him to repair the old one, sell it and use the money for himself though he repaired it but gave it free of charge to the Mission.

When the second motorcycle got bad, the Mission gave him another one that had been offered by an American Missionary. After using this one for a short time, a German Missionary who visited the Mission and saw his involvement in the work of God went back to his country and sent him a Honda motorcycle. He again repaired the old one and gave it to another Pastor.

Then in 1997, he visited Germany and two German friends bought him a Mazda car, which he used in Cameroon for sometime. Shortly after his return to Cameroon, a group of German youths, he ministered to them while in their country, contributed money, bought a Mercedes Benz 200 car and sent to him, which he uses now. Another German friend (Schneider) he met in Germany sent him 3 million CFA that was an offer from two other German friends for him to buy a stronger car. He however added some money to it and bought a four-wheel drive Toyota land cruiser, which he used while in Yaounde. When he was transferred to Buea, he left the land cruiser in Yaounde with his successor because, to him, it was offered for evangelization. Moreover he had other cars.

Reverend Ewome sees himself as a very successful person. Truly this is the case. He lives in his own house in Muea. It is a well-constructed and modern

compound, with very good modern furniture and garden. He has seven children who are performing very well in education with one pursuing further studies in Belgium. In Cameroon, only a few can afford to send their children or other relations to the West for further studies because of the financial cost involved but Reverend Ewome has been able to do this for his son. He has his driver, whom he has employed and pays from his pocket.

Reverend Ewome attributes his success in life to his complete compliance to the gospel of prosperity. He aptly puts it:

Though I left my highly paid job with research and accepted to do God's work with a meager reward of 3 thousand CFA, the Lord has multiplied it in a wonderful way that I cannot understand. I am a man with many children, a large house built by myself, an expensive car given to me by God's people and a faithful wife. I have been serving the Lord and doing all what he requires from me since 1961, just to name a few. I do not merit all these, it is just God's grace. If I use these things foolishly, or puff up as a great man, it becomes a sin and God will punish me.

Talking of serving the Lord for a long time and doing all what is required of him as a 'believer', Reverend Ewome definitely included his giving his tithes to the Lord in compliance with the gospel of prosperity and the reward being prosperity in all forms.

Though he strongly holds a spiritual reason, I believe his material success could be attributed to a combination of factors, which include:

Firstly Reverend Ewome is a hardworking man. Apart from his pastoral work, he likes and practises agriculture. In his enclosed yard, is a big farm with vegetable and assorted crops such as plantains, yams and cocoyams. He has other farms, which are located far from his home. He, including other members of his family, could be regularly seen working in these farms. The surplus yield from the farms is sold in some of the nearby markets. Farming pays a lot in this part of Cameroon because of the high demand for food by its increasing population and the buying of this food by *buyam selams* to sell in the big neighboring town of Douala and even neighboring Gabon and Nigeria. Though Reverend Ewome downplayed it, his success in accumulating must not undermine this aspect because when one observes the economic strength of many other farmers in the area, it indicates that farming pays.

Secondly, as a Pentecostal church pastor, his way of life has been oriented towards abstaining from certain practices, which Pentecostals take as vices. This includes: drinking, smoking, running after women, and attending and taking part in secular activities. These practices no doubt, contribute much in draining one's income and abstaining from these could be a contributory factor to his success in accumulating.

Thirdly, with Full Gospel Mission, the material success of a pastor is partially accounted for by the financial strength of his assembly. Each assembly provides

financial assistance to its pastor and as such, the more an assembly raises money, the more its pastor accumulates. The Molyko assembly, which is directly pastored by Reverend Ewome is the biggest and richest in the Buea District. The financial support he receives from the assembly is another good source of income to him. Other pastors who do not manage rich assemblies would definitely be lacking in accumulation, if they do not have good sources of income.

*Oben Pius (Elder, Molyko assembly)*

Oben, popularly called Elder Oben by members of the Molyko assembly because of the position he holds in the assembly, willingly accepted to allocate some of his valuable time for me to interview him in his Sand Pit neighborhood residence. He is a very soft-spoken, but firm gentleman of about 44 years old. It was difficult to contact him for this interview because of his tight schedule, which revolves around his church activities, business and University activities. He comes from Manyu Division, where he did his early primary and secondary education in Presbyterian institutions. He holds a Ph.D. in Environmental Science and he is full-time lecturer in the University of Buea. His wife, with whom he has two kids, holds a Ph.D. as well and teaches in the same Department of the University. Like Reverend Ewome, he owns and drives in one of the best Mercedes cars on the University campus. He could equally be seen gorgeously dressed at every time. In order to live this lifestyle, he engages himself in some business ventures through which income could be derived to augment his salary received from the civil service. His profile presents an interested case of someone who attributes his prosperity (business, academic, family) in live both to hard work and strong faith in the Lord Jesus.

Oben was brought up in a Presbyterian family and this explains his early upbringing in Presbyterian educational institutions. He used to be so active in church activities and at times headed movements within the Presbyterian Church such as the Young Presbyterians and Christian Youth Fellowship in his congregation.

When he passed his General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced level examination in 1981, he enrolled in the University of Yaounde in the Faculty of Science. While in Yaounde, Oben ‘gave his life to Christ’ as he puts it:

Deep in my mind, I realized while in Yaounde that the life I was living was dangerous for my salvation. It was not a life worth to continue because it was full of uncertainty. Though I was so active in the Presbyterian Church, the sort of things I was doing were not pleasing because of the lack of the Holy Spirit in me. I, just like others in the church, used to have girl friends, drink alcohol, discuss immoral things with my friends but my church leaders, though they preached against some of them, never saw the relevance of the practicality of the preaching. That made me suspicious of my leaders, whom I had considered as prophets. I then stopped going to church but some other people in Yaounde came and talked the gospel with me and I was moved. There was definitely something divine and supernatural in what

they preached to me because my eyes became opened. I then asked them when this gospel started because I had never heard it. They told me it started a long time ago and from then I 'gave my life to Christ'.

The reaction of his relations to this was so negative for about three years to a point that his mother almost left the village for Yaounde to attack those who had persuaded him to join Full Gospel Mission. The parents were particularly so furious because Oben was not progressing in studies at the Yaounde University, which they attributed to much time spent on religious activities, rather than studies. However, failing in the Yaounde University at the time was a general trend among anglophone students because of the bilingual nature of its program, which tilted more towards the advantage of francophones. Most anglophones used to be there on temporary basis while looking for admissions in some of the professional schools in the country or foreign Universities; most often in Britain, Nigeria and the United States of America. He revealed the following as the reactions of his parents when he took the decision to be 'born-again':

They were not pleased but later on, when they saw my life and realized it was not that of evil but a life of sincerity, they started questioning me and from my response, my father 'gave himself to the Lord Jesus' and died as a 'believer' in Christ. My mother, who was more unscrupulous, was very radical about it and was still angry but finally she 'gave her life to Christ Jesus' and was baptized by immersion. She is now a 'believer' in Full Gospel Mission. The same thing that happened to me, which was supernatural and divine, happened to them because, after much bitterness, they suddenly and independently accepted the Lord, without being forced to do so.

From the onset, his friends did not take him seriously. They thought it was a decision that was to be short-lived but that did not affect their friendship. Unfortunately for them, Oben was growing stronger and stronger in his faith. They realized he was no more interested in running after women, drinking alcohol, telling lies, fraud and immoral discussion but instead reproached them when any of these occurred. Most of the friends withdrew from his company because they could no longer get along with him.

For the reason that studies did not move well in Yaounde, Oben decided to withdraw from the University but with the intention of continuing elsewhere. He prayed to God to do something so that he could get admission in a good University and to become a good student. He applied for admission in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 1985 to read Zoology and got it. He finished his first degree in recorded time and with good results. He then enrolled for a Masters in Environmental Science, which he did in recorded time as well and advanced to the Ph.D. program. In this program, he was putting in between 10 to 15 hours everyday and the rest of the time for his religious activities. He finished his work in one and a half year, an unprecedented record in the Department. His supervisor was amazed with the performance but decided to delay the defence for another one and a half year. He then went through the program in three years.

When he returned to Cameroon, he was immediately recruited to teach in the University of Buea. Oben told me that his immediate recruitment in the University of Buea and that of the wife was not a surprise because, while still doing his Ph.D., 'God revealed' to him that a University was to be created in Buea and he and his wife were to be recruited as staff. They both graduated from the same Department in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

As a professional scholar, Oben is a consultant in the area of Fishery. He had been invited several times by officials of the Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Industries as well as Non-governmental Organizations that deal with fisheries to give talks to farmers on fishery and also as a resource person in seminars. Fish farmers invite him to design fishponds for them, on commercial basis. Also, he and his wife run a private hatchery behind their house under a common initiative group. They got a direct grant from the International Centre for Aquatic Research Management (ICARM) based in London, which has a Centre attached to the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Cameroon, to run this project. The project, the first of its kind in Cameroon, is moving very well and Oben told me that in the nearest future, he hopes to be the main supplier of fingerlings (young fish) to fish farmers in Cameroon.

Oben is very strong in his faith and he told me he fulfills all his religious obligations. He attributes his success in every aspect of life, first to his strong faith in the Lord. Like Reverend Ewome, he told me his faith in the God enables him to fulfill all his financial obligations to the Lord. He however does not rule out the part hard work has played in his success in live. He argues that God encourages his followers to be hard-working while serving him. God does not like a lazy person.

On faith, he pays his tithe (a tenth of his income) to the church every year bearing in mind that in compliance with the gospel of prosperity, God is going to multiply it in form of material and spiritual success. He makes his offerings when the need arises. He prays to God and reads his bible several times a day, and avoids places that can impact negatively on his faith. In all what he is doing, he has one goal: 'to prosper in the Kingdom of God'. This is the most serious thing, which as he puts it, he thinks of in his life:

Whatever I am doing I place my Lord first. Whatever I am doing, be it my job at the University or requesting for assistance from anywhere and I am told to stop calling the name of the Lord and preaching as a pre-condition for satisfying me, I will call off the thing at that moment.

On hard work, he reveals how he can lock up himself in a place for two weeks working untiringly. When he was doing his Ph.D., most of his time was spent in the laboratory. He never went for Christmas or New Year celebrations but preferred to use these periods for his work. Back in Buea, he teaches for many



hours (sometimes more than 200 extra hours in a session) and carries out many practical classes with his students. Coupled with these, are his church activities, hatchery and his documentation business centre, which pre-occupies him. He aptly puts it:

On Some days, I sleep for just three hours, for instance, most often after my church meetings in the evenings; we the leaders stay behind till about 12 midnight or 1 a.m. When I get home, I sleep for just about 3 hours and by 4 a.m., I am up to prepare for the next day. I do not eat after 4 p.m. because food takes a lot of energy and makes one to sleep. Since I work a lot at night, I would not want to take anything that would make me sleep. I learned this from another man of God, Zachary Fomum, who sleeps for just three hours a day and is one of the greatest scientists in Cameroon and the first Professor of organic chemistry in Africa. He prays for 6 hours a day and reads the bible 12 times a year.

As a lecturer in the University for about 4 years, he is expected to present at least six publications in two years time to move up to the rank of Associate Professor. He has already twelve publications, waiting for the time to come so that he puts in his application for promotion. He is quite optimistic that within the shortest possible time, he would rise to level of Professor because of hard work and the intervention of God. He cites Daniel, Meshack, Abednego and Moses in the Bible as examples of people whom God did it to them.

He attributes his ability to finish his Ph.D. program within a short time, to a combination of the above factors. He argues that this kind of strength in working, without being sick or broken down, is God's love for him. He revealed to me that sometimes when he is asleep, he gets something knocking behind him but when he wakes up, he sees nothing but gets in a mode of working. He believes the angels of God who want him to work do the knocking.

He believes that his success and that of his wife in getting employed in the University of Buea very fast, when compared to others, is nothing other than their strong faith in the Lord. He also believes that the success of the hatchery and the grant he received are nothing other than the intervention of the Lord. As he puts it:

the Lord conceived the plan and used the International Organization to provide funding.

As evidence that his success has to do with his faith, Oben revealed that success and prosperity never came his way when he was not a 'believer' but since he 'gave his life to Christ' and started giving to the Lord what belongs to Him, things have changed.

The above two cases (Reverend. Ewome and Elder Oben) reveal the experience of prosperity in all forms, material, spiritual and the family. An importance issue that can be underscored in the two cases is that in certain situations each of them argues that God used an intermediary to give him financial or material assistance. While Reverend Ewome holds that God used the author of a tract to supply him with motorcycles and Germans to supply him with

vehicles and cash, Elder Oben believes that God used an International Organization to give him financial assistance to run a project. This brings us to the conclusion that the Mission believes God does not necessarily come directly to assist the 'believer', rather he can use another person or other methods, which are subject to questioning in the eye of an 'unbeliever'. For instance, an 'unbeliever' or a critic of the doctrine will question how financial assistance from an organization, which is normal, should be considered a reward from God as a result of faith. Each funding organization sets out its own criteria for giving financial assistance and if these are met, the chances of obtaining would be high but if not, it would be low. In this case, it is likely that Elder Oben met the criteria set out by OCARM and therefore qualified for assistance and not necessarily the intervention of God.

Another important issue, which can be underscored in the two cases is that each claims a continuous upward mobility in prosperity and downplays failures in life. In a country like Cameroon, which has been affected by an economic crisis, almost everybody is experiencing economic hardship and to claim an upward economic mobility all the time may not be realistic. The continuous rise in the prices of basic commodities coupled with low salaries, both in the public and private sectors have made it difficult to always have a continuous upward financial prosperity. Continuous upward mobility in financial prosperity could be achieved in Cameroon, notwithstanding, but this could only be possible with people who use illegal methods such as embezzlement, bribery, money laundry etc to accumulate. As 'believers' it is unlikely that they get involved in any of these vices, which they strongly condemn thereby refuting their claims of continuous upward financial mobility.

## The reactions of the followers

Just like the church, members can actually be seen now translating the Gospel of prosperity into practice. They emulate what their leaders do in terms of the gospel. For instance, in dressing, it is commonplace to see the translators, the secretary, lessons readers, ushers and elders in every assembly gorgeously dressed during worship service because they know that they have to frequent the stage and for that reason their way of dressing should be an example for other Christians to emulate.

Since the gospel of prosperity does not emphasize a dressing code, members can be seen appearing gorgeously dressed, not only for ceremonies but also in daily appearance, with women putting on elaborate hairstyles and make-up and the men modern suits. It is not a surprise to see some of the women running beauty centers. For example, the Secretary of Full Gospel Church Molyko runs

the 'Front liners Beauty Center' in Molyko Buea, which started in 2001. This is a business center that takes care of women's bodies, heads and nails. In an interview with the proprietor, something which interest me was why she decided to go into beauty business when the popular belief is that Pentecostals consider any act of trying to make one beautiful as ungodly, her response was:

I know that these 'unbelievers' are making a mistake. God is a beautiful God. There is nothing in God that is in disorder. I believe that being with God, we need to keep our bodies clean. This does not imply 'masking' ourselves by trying to change our form or structure but just to take care of us. We have to take care of parts of our bodies such as legs, hands, hair and face. Most people do not have enough time to sit down and clean their toes, nails etc, which are the little things necessary for beauty.

By adopting body beauty practices, the ease with which Full Gospel women could be differentiated from sight in the past from other women (particularly those of the mainline churches, which do not place any restriction on this), is fading out.

It is common place to see members drive past with nice and expensive cars or see them parked at the church ground during church worships or any other occasion, which brings members together. As mentioned, the leaders themselves promote and foster this image, by possessing expensive and nice foreign goods and also appearing gorgeously dressed when leading the congregation, which is often interpreted as a sign of God's blessing.

For the rich members of the church, they too believe that the best they can do is to give to the church. This creates some kind of reciprocal relationship between the leader and his followers, through which the followers receive spiritual nourishment from the pastor and the followers through giving to the church and the pastor in turn reward the pastor. This reciprocal relation between patron and client continues, but is policed by the elements of doctrine that enforce ethical behavior. The relationships are further transformed in the sense that it is not the person helped who should be looked to for a service, but God who will bring the reward. Individuals who break the ethical codes either by taking advantage of the largesse without displaying a willingness to give or by using offers in a manipulative or extortionist way or denying them, are subject to the ill will of God. Unscrupulous or greedy pastors must however always bear in mind the fact that their legitimacy rests on keeping their accumulation in balance with the fortunes of their members and in ensuring that things continue to 'roll in circles'.

The attitude to material success has also enabled members to create new networks of accumulation. For instance, pastors have succeeded in using their positions to make international contacts, which have enabled them acquired wealth directly or make visits out of the country that provide them with money. This could be attending international religious conferences or bible training programs. For instance, the Haggai Bible Institute in Hawaii in the USA, which

offers short programs for pastors of Pentecostal churches, has often been used for these aims by some of the pastors of Full Gospel Mission. The more these pastors travel abroad, accumulate and wear fine things, so the congregation sees that as evidence that God rewards accordingly.

Members also display wealth, engaged in competitive business ventures in compliance with the gospel with ‘unbelievers’, both at national and international levels. Some of the businesses are carried out on sole proprietor basis while others are on partnership. They do this with the blessing of the church, which encourages them to be hard-working and to accumulate wealth, not only for themselves but also to help prosper the church. Some of them actually do the businesses with lots of financial successes. This could be attested with their standards of living, which are relatively better than that of the ordinary Cameroonian. Christopher (member of the Molyko assembly) is one of these successful business people.

### *Christopher*

Christopher, who is popularly called Prince, is about 48 years old. He is a builder and professional photographer in Buea. He was born in Menchum Division of the Northwest province but migrated to the Southwest province for greener pasture when his father died in 1976 and there was no one to sponsor him in secondary school. When he came to the Southwest, he worked with the tea estate in Tole, where he accumulated some money and enrolled in an artisan center in Tiko where he did building construction.

He worked briefly with some building construction companies in Buea, for instance, the one that constructed the University of Buea in 1984 (then called University Center). While working with the company, he bought a Camera and did photography as a hobby before ending up as a professional when he realized that it pays. Before going professional, he did some training with a professional photographer in Tiko on how to focus professional cameras, develop and print black and white pictures.

He has a photo studio in Molyko in which there are a number of apprentices and an annex in the same neighborhood, which is controlled by a young man he trained. Though a professional photographer, he still does building. Whenever he has a building contract, the most experienced apprentice controls the studio but he comes whenever he has time to supervise.

Christopher reveals that he is making it in photography despite the many photographers and amateurs in towns. He revealed thus:

I believe that God is able to make a way for his child because the bible says that God makes a way for his children. If God makes a way for his children, then he is the one that orders the steps of a righteous man. If I am living a righteous life, God will gather those things that belong to me and bring to me. That is why I can say I am succeeding in business because

God is the one that orders my steps. He brings my own customers and the job that I do also attracts customers to my business place. This is because I snap good pictures that people admire them and always love to come back to my place.

Though Christopher could not reveal his annual income, there are indications that he is making it. His house in his neighborhood is among the best and his children go to the expensive primary school. From the above quotation, he no doubt attributes the success to the intervention of God. He knows very well that paying his tithes as stipulated by the gospel of prosperity is one of the keys to success in business. As a 'child of God', just like Oben, he revealed that he does not cheat God in money (that is, pays all his tithes and regularly too) that is supposed to be given to him.

Women of the church too are not left out in businesses. Some of them get involved in small enterprises and they can actually be seen succeeding. Some go from office to office selling snacks, house decoration items prepared by themselves, cosmetics, jewelry etc. Some of them in the civil service, who do not have the opportunity to move from one office to another, keep business items in their offices where customers come for them. Others in the civil service occupy themselves with other commercial activities after official working hours. Below is the case of Frida, which exemplifies, a civil servant who is succeeding in combining her public service duty with a number of businesses, some of which are mentioned above. Just like Christopher, she seems to be succeeding in material accumulation.

### *Frida*

Frida is a secretary in the University of Buea and the head of the decoration committee of the Molyko assembly of Full Gospel Mission. She was born in Buea about 40 years ago where she did her primary education before proceeding to Bamenda to do technical education. After that, she did a course in clerical education in Buea, which earned her a Diploma in secretaryship. In 1995 she proceeded to Yaounde and did another course for one year in Medical laboratory because she believed it was easier picking up a job in the medical field though it was not the case. With the diploma in Secretaryship, she was employed in 1999 as a secretary in the University of Buea.

In addition to what she receives as a salary from the University, she is also engaged in some business activities. She has a computer at home, which she uses in doing work such as typing students' projects, articles, invitations cards and notices to people on commercial basis. She does these when she must have closed from the university and on weekends. She admitted that she makes much money (up to about 350 thousand CFA a year) from the computer, especially when final year university students have to type their dissertations and term papers. She also fries chips and groundnuts to sell. She does some of these in the

evenings or wakes up very early in the morning if she could not make it in the evening. In order to ease or increase sales, she leaves some of the items with her friends who work in some business centers in town for their customers to buy. In return, the friends receive an agreed percentage of money on the quantity they sell. She keeps the rest in her office in the University for staff and students to buy. Frida makes a reasonable amount of profits (she could not estimate the amount but believes it was reasonable) from the sales of these things. She revealed that she makes sure she pays one tenth of her monthly income to the church as expected of every 'believer'. She believes this is the secret of her success in whatever she embarks on.

The above cases present situations where members have been successful in material accumulation. Since the mid-eighties, Cameroon has been going through a serious economic crisis that has retarded businesses tremendously. Moreover, with its new tax code, many new taxes have been introduced on businesses and this has adversely affected many of them.<sup>4</sup> The general cry of business people is that business is not moving and that of the consumers is that life has become difficult because the prices of basic commodities keep on increasing. From this message, I expected every 'believer' to be prosperous like the above cases because they 'know the technicalities' of doing so despite the economic crisis but unfortunately my findings reveal that many, like most other Cameroonians still remain poor. The argument raised by most of those who did not achieve the expected prosperity was that the 'devil' was the one blocking their way. They explained that the 'devil' is always at work to make God's children to suffer so that they turn away from God and follow him. Despite the poverty, they however remained optimistic that they will eventually achieve the prosperity because God can always rescue his children from the hands of the 'devil'. By implication, they hold that there is a kind of war between God and the 'devil' over 'believers'. While God wants them to be prosperous, the 'devil' prefers that they suffer and God is always victorious. This expectation of a better future masterminded by God becomes now like a mechanism of adjusting to failures or poverty in life. Ogadima and Mary are examples of members who have not achieved this prosperity despite all efforts put in, but they still remain hopeful. I made a detailed case of each of them.

### *Ogadima*

Ogadima, of Nigerian origin, was born in Cameroon in 1967. He is a tall and dark complexion gentleman. He did his primary and secondary education in Buea and Limbe respectively. On completing secondary school and in the business spirit of an Ibo man, he preferred to do business rather than furthering his

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<sup>4</sup> See Cameroon Law No 2002/003 of April 2002 to institute the general tax code.

education. He went to Owerri in Nigeria where he stayed for three years with his uncle (a business man) trying to learn how to do business. His uncle was in drug business and while in Nigeria, Ogadima was helping him in selling the drugs (sometime hawking or in the store). On acquiring this experience, he decided to come back to Cameroon (he revealed to me that though a Nigerian, he prefers living in Cameroon where he was born and has many friends). When he returned to Cameroon, he got involved in trade between Nigeria and Cameroon. He was buying drugs and shoes from Nigeria and selling them in Cameroon. He traveled between the two countries by engine propelled transport canoes, which commute passengers and goods regularly between Tiko, Limbe or Idenau and Calabar in Nigeria. The capital he used in beginning the business was provided partly by his uncle he had served in Nigeria and his parents who still live in Cameroon. He revealed to me that he started with a meagre amount of about two hundred thousand francs. He started by supplying the drugs to various medicine stores in Fako division and later he opened his own medicine store in Buea Town where drugs that were not supplied were sold. With shoes, his younger brother was the one selling them in another shop in Buea and in some markets in Fako division. The business was flourishing and by 1998 he told me he could boast of about 5 million CFA. Ogadima revealed that the secret of this success was that he did not forget God when he was in the business. He made sure he gave a tenth of his income to God in form of tithes.

In 1999, Ogadima had the worst experience in his life. He revealed that he went to Nigeria, bought goods for about 3 million CFA and put in a cargo canoe, which capsized on the high sea and his goods could not be recovered. He revealed that some passengers who had boarded the capsized canoe died. He however thanked God for sparing his life by making him to board a passenger canoe during that trip. After this incident, Ogadima did not want to continue trading between Nigeria and Cameroon any longer because he did not want to risk using the little capital he had to continue in the same line of business.

Ogadima then embarked on sand business in Buea, which he does at the moment. He supplies sand to people and church bodies that have building projects to carry on. The sand, which is extracted from the Mungo River, is supplied in tippers. The business has not been very smooth because he does not have a tipper of his own. The Cost of hiring a tipper is high. Moreover most construction is done in the dry season, which renders him idle in the rainy season. Another problem he faces with the business is that there are many people involved in it in Buea thereby making it competitive. He revealed that the business has not been moving well and many people owe him. His prayer is that God should touch the hearts of these debtors so that they can pay his money. He also revealed that his brother dubbed him of about 1.5 million CFA and

disappeared to Gabon in 2001. He did not however revealed details on how he was dubbed but he seemed to have let it go because it concerned a relation. This compounded his financial difficulties.

Ogadima from all indications has a lot of financial difficulties at the moment. He gives a possible reason for his financial difficulties. He argues that it is possible that it is the work of the devil that is trying to push him away from God. He believes if this is correct, God who is more powerful than the devil would soon take control of him. In this state of hardship, he continues to pay his tithe regularly and has the hope that God will prosper him again. He argues that when a Christian finds himself in this state, it is good for him to strengthen his faith in God, by going closer to Him and doing what is expected of a 'believer'. A 'believer' should always be hopeful in life. If he loses hope and withdraws from God, he should expect the worst either in this world or the world beyond.

### *Mary*

Mary is a slim, chocolate complexioned lady of about 1.6 meter tall. She was born in 1977 in Buea. Her parents, who are retired from the CDC, come from the North West province. She did her primary and secondary education in Molyko Buea. She passed her General Certificate of education (GCE) advanced level in 1996 and immediately proceeded to the University of Yaounde 1 where she graduated after four years with a Bachelor of Arts in History. She got married to Isaiah (a secondary school teacher) in 2001 and they had two children but one died early that year.

Since Mary left secondary school, she has been struggling to get a job to no avail. She revealed that she has been applying unsuccessfully to work in many places. Some of the places she revealed to me were: the Cameroon Telecommunication Corporation (CAMTEL) and some mission and private colleges in Buea. CAMTEL rejected her application because employment has been suspended in the corporation because it is among the state corporations that have been advertised for privatisation. The Baptist, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian colleges, which she applied for a teaching position, rejected her because she is a Christian of a different denomination. For private colleges, most of them did not need the services of a history teacher. She even wrote and passed the written entrance examination into the Higher Teachers' Training College Yaounde in 2003 (employment into the civil service is guaranteed on graduating from this school) but failed the oral examination because she did not bribe those in charge of the examination. Bribing to pass a competitive examination into a professional school, which employment is guaranteed on graduation is normal in Cameroon. She revealed that though the money to bribe was not even available, she could not do such a thing if she had it because she is 'Born-again' and would



never do such an evil act. In 2004, she made another attempt to enter the school but failed the written part. Since then, she gave up writing the examination.

Mary has been trying to do small business such as buying and selling of dresses and jewellery for women but has had lots of difficulties such as not making profits and the inability of her debtors to pay her. Mary's parents are very poor and her younger ones look on her for financial assistance because they believe her husband, being a civil servant, has money. Her elder brother (a father of four children) is a highway bus driver but he is extremely very careless with money. Her parents cannot look on him for financial assistance because he spends most of his money on gambling and drinking. Unfortunately, her husband's pay package is very small to take care of his household, extended relations and those of Mary. This has made her to have a lot of financial difficulties.

Like Ogadima, Mary pays her tithes from the little money she can raise and she is very hopeful that God, who loves her, would redress the situation. She holds tight to her 'born-again' values and being almost jobless, she devotes most of her time on church activities. I asked her why she has been having these failures in life despite the love of God; her response, which was similar to that of Ogadima, was:

The bible says that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. Even though we are serving God, Satan is always there to make us unhappy. At times those failures come and it is only for you to be careful, watchful and prayerful. The bible says: watch out and pray, let us not fall into temptation and that the spirit is willing, the flesh is not. At times you can be weak but when you pray to the Lord, God answers. Also Satan is not sleeping; he is fighting that we should go away from the Lord. At times when Satan fights I have to pray to God to give me grace.

There were however, other people who, in addition to the above, gave other reasons to explain why some 'believers' remain poor, one of which is interestingly attributed to God and the other is that looking at the history of Christianity, God does not always reward a 'believer' with material prosperity. Duru and Johnson represent such cases.

*Duru*

Duru, a short and dark skin soft-spoken man, was born of Nigerian parents in 1969 in Buea. He was born a Roman Catholic but he later converted to Full Gospel Mission despite the disapproval of his relations. His highest qualification is the First School leaving Certificate, which he obtained in Buea. Like Ogadima, he went to live in Nigeria after completing school for business motive. While there, he was converted to the 'Born-again' faith in Nigeria after attending a crusade organised by the Assembly of God Church in 1986. He joined Full Gospel Mission when he returned to Cameroon and could not find the Assembly of God Church in Buea. He revealed that he decided to join Full Gospel Mission because its doctrines and practices are similar to those of the Assembly of God Church.

While in Nigeria, he did business in electronic and electrical materials. He had a store in which he stocked these things. Along the line, thieves broke into the store and stole the goods. Life became difficult for him in Nigeria and he decided to return to Cameroon to meet his parents, where he believed it was better. While in Cameroon, he expected assistance from his parents but they refused to give him because he joined the 'Born-again' movement against their wish. Unable to coup in Cameroon, he decided to go back to Nigeria where he was recruited in a construction company as a store manager. He told me he resigned from the company in 1997 because as store manager, he was exposed to a lot of temptations from other workers. For instance, he was hated by some of his superiors who had on several occasions wanted him to connive with them to rob the company. Moreover, he seems not to have been satisfied with his salary.

After this, he decided to return to Cameroon again and his parents at this time opted to give him financial assistance for business but he turned down the offer because he considered it as a strategy to tell him to quit Full Gospel Mission. Without enough money to do a reasonable business, he decided to do farming of pepper and Okro in a cheap piece of land he hired. He realised some profit from the farming and decided to open a shoe and clothes shop in Buea Town. When he realised that the business was profitable, he stopped farming and concentrated on going to Nigeria to buy the goods. In 1999, he returned from a business trip with goods, which were stolen from the store the evening of the day he displayed them. He has not actually had any reasonable thing doing after that. He lives in a one-room plank house and barely manages to pay his rents. Though all these misfortunes happened and have rendered him very poor, Duru told me that he does not feel frustrated because of his faith in God. He remains very strong in his faith and he has not given up all hopes to prosper again. He spends most of his time on his church activities. He believes that if the devil has not been the one working to put him down, his good God could have been the one doing it to test

his faith. If the former is correct, he believes the almighty God will override the devil but if it is the later, then his good God has a plan for him.

### *Johnson*

Johnson, a primary school teacher, was born in Bali of the northwest province in 1968. He did his primary education in his native Bali village and came to the Southwest province where he did his secondary and high school education in Limbe and Buea respectively. He proceeded to the Yaounde University after obtaining his GCE advanced level but was unable to go through the program because of financial difficulties. He then went back to his village in 1988 and was recruited as a contract teacher in the government primary school. In 1992, he wrote and passed the entrance examination into Teacher Training College Kumba where he obtained his grade one certificate. His first station as a trained teacher was Kouseri, North Cameroon. He worked in Kouseri for three years and was transferred to Tiko in the Southwest province. He taught in Tiko for three years and was transferred again to the Government Practising School Molyko. He is married to a hairdresser and they have three children.

As any other primary school teacher in Cameroon, Johnson's salary is not very encouraging. It cannot really take care of the entire family. His old mother, who lives with him, is a patient and this has compounded his problems because he needs to regularly take her for medical check up and treatment. Though his wife is a hairdresser, she seems to be having a lot of difficulties in the business. The Molyko neighbourhood is full of hair salons and this has made the business very competitive. Moreover, the hair salon is not among the most preferred in the neighborhood because they lack money to equip well. At a certain period, Johnson tried his hands at buying and selling of books in order to augment his income but the business stopped because he used the capital to solve other pressing issues. He lives in a rented two-bed room plank house. Any one who knows him will admit that he does not put on expensive things and he has very few dresses and shoes, which he wears repeatedly. In his house, where this interview was conducted, one finds very simple and old furniture. He revealed to me that he has been forced against his wish to send all his children to government schools because tuition is free. One is in secondary school and the others in primary school.

Even though not rich, Johnson reveals to me that he does not fail to pay his tithes in church as well as meeting other financial demands of the church when the means is available. His faith in God still remains 'unshakable'. Just like Ogadima, Mary and Duru, Johnson seems very contented with his poverty. Explaining why he remains poor despite his strong faith in God and regular

payment of tithes, which could have prospered him in form of riches, he revealed that:

The Lord Jesus did not come to make all his followers rich. He Himself was never rich in material things. He came to preach the gospel to the poor so that they might become rich spiritually. Spiritual richness is more important than material riches. Those who listen to the gospel and become materially rich are expected to share their riches with others who might only be spiritually rich. I am spiritually rich and I am happy with that. Bear in mind that poverty is not always a sign of God's disapproval or curse. The majority of believers in the past, right from the time of Jesus Christ were never rich. It did not mean that God had cursed them. He gave them spiritual riches.

Johnson's argument reveals that some of them give tithes with no expectation of getting out of poverty but rather as an obligation to God's work. The essential point to be underscored from all these cases of failure in material prosperity is that 'believers' who find themselves in this situation, do not withdraw from the Lord. They use other biblical passages to justify the situation.

## Conclusion

In this study I have attempted to bring out the various factors, which have pushed Full Gospel Mission Cameroon to open up to the gospel of prosperity, after a long time of complete asceticism. Though many factors have been given to account for embracing the gospel of prosperity, these were made easy by the economic crisis, which has rocked the country since the mid eighties. The church, as a body, at this time had become self-sustaining and highly needed money to run its activities and was therefore compelled to go into business ventures and also appeal for financial support from members. In this wise, only the gospel of prosperity could effectively be used to appeal to members to support the church financially. On the part of the members, the gospel was welcome because of the hardship ushered in by the economic crisis and the inability to receive, in concrete terms, the reward of asceticism as a solution to their economic woes. The gospel of prosperity in this wise, provided an opportunity to members to accumulate in a bid to overcome the crisis.

Asceticism made members of the church to keep distance from non-members and even their own family members who did not belong to the church because of what they argued was the incessant quest for materialism by the general public, which was unbiblical. It also made the general public to believe that Full Gospel Mission was meant not only for the poor but also for those who prefer to suffer in life. The effect of this on the church was that membership was growing at a very slow rate since many people did not like the ascetic practices and some of its members were either defecting to new Pentecostal churches or backsliding to the mainline churches. This smooth transition within the last decades has

undoubtedly been one of the factors, which have accounted for the rapid increase in membership within this period. This recent decision of not retreating from the world has enabled members to embrace the opportunities of the material world thereby bridging the gap that had existed between them and others on material wealth. For some members, this has provided a means of enabling them to make the best of rapid social change and for others it has provided them a code of conduct which guards them from falling into poverty and destitution. For all, the gospel has provided a pattern for coming to terms with, and benefiting from modernity's dominant values and institutions.

The coming in of new Pentecostal groups with the gospel of prosperity as the economic message, the eventual embracing of the gospel by the biggest Pentecostal church in Cameroon and the association of mainline churches to this gospel is significant. This is so because it could be the beginning of some kind of unity not only amongst the Pentecostal groups but the entire Christian church in Cameroon. Doctrinal differences have always been at the forefront of disunity amongst churches in Cameroon. Frequent cases of church officials opposing the doctrines of others either through sermons, the media and publications is common in Cameroon<sup>5</sup>. This lack of unity has also led to the inability of the Christian churches to put up a common front in fighting the ills of the society, especially the decaying political structures, resulting from poor governance.

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<sup>5</sup> For more on disunity amongst the Christian churches in Cameroon, see, for example, Dah, J.N (1988) One hundred years of Roman Catholiism in Cameroon (1890-1990), Titi Nwel (1995) The churches and the democratic upheavals in Cameroon 1982-1993, Gifford (1997) African Christianity: Its public role and Casterman J-B (2003) Responses against the Roman Catholi Church.