

**SYNOD MOTION PROPOSED AT THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FOURTH  
SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF ABA NGWA NORTH, AT ST. THOMAS CHURCH  
UMUAKPARA, OSISIOMA NGWA ARCHDEACONRY OF FRIDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER  
2017, BY REV. UDOCHUKWU AHAGHOTU (Ph.D, GDJ)**

**PRELIMINARY STATEMENT**

It will be a bunch of lies and hypocrisy if I claim that my heart never increased in its breathing rate, the moment I got the better of invitation to be the proposer of their year's synod motion. I read the letter a number of times to ascertain if actually it was addressed to me. When I finally confirmed from the CSS, I only prayed to God to help me out so that I may go about this task, and lift up the voice of thanksgiving.

**GREETING**

I feel so disappointed that better suitable words than the ones I knew already, decided ~to vacate their dwelling place at this very time I needed to use them to express my gratitude to our Lord Bishop, His Lordship, Rt. Revd. Nathan C.O. Kanu (PhD, JP Amb. Peace), and his wife, Mama Aba Ngwa North and President of the Women Ministry.-Princess Mrs. Odionyenfe Kanu (BSc, JP), for the' extension of their Episcopal love and care to me and my family. Moreso, for granting me this rare privilege of making my voice to be heard in this great assembly. All I have to say is, "thank you my Lord, and Mama". To all the clergy and delegates here present, I greet you from the depth of my heart

**THE SYNOD MOTION**

"It is a known, but troubling fact, that there has been a significant degree of change and distortion in the nature of delivery and content of the gospel of Christ which was believed and proclaimed by the New Testament church and delivered to the saints. The gospel of salvation of human souls from the slavery of sin through the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the hope of eternal life in Him; has been replaced with the prosperity gospel -the "gospel of the crown without the cross," "claim it and have it gospel," a faith that produces a relationship centered on the satisfaction of man's demands of blessing and fortune, thereby reducing God to a mere vending machine that must satisfy those demands or become irrelevant. This second session of the fourth synod of the Diocese of Aba Ngwa North therefore calls for a return to the faitl1 of our fathers that is

anchored on the redemption of our souls and the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The faith that prevails through the realities of suffering, sacrifice, and good work to the glory of God, and the blessing of the Church. The faith that believes that earthly blessing and fortunes are ad-ons that God gives, as when it pleases Him",

Before we can begin to talk about a Gospel that has encountered a significant change and distortion in its nature and content; it will be necessary to understand why there is even a gospel in the first place. This involves schooling our minds a little with what happened at the beginning that corrupted the nature of man, because the gospel is God's way to deal with man's fallen nature.

### **THE EVENT THAT NECESSITATED THE GOSPEL**

God created Adam and Eve, and gave them and their descendants, the ability to think, reason and plan. He also gave to them independent, free moral agency the capacity to choose and make decisions. Although Adam and Eve walked with God daily for a time, they ultimately chose to decide for themselves what was good and evil, as depicted by their taking of the "Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil":

Adam and Eve, under the sway of the serpent, Satan the devil, chose to disobey God. The consequence of their sin continues to this day-adversely affecting all of mankind. Two profound consequences resulted, which only God can resolve through His plan of redemption in Christ.

First, human nature became deceitful and hostile toward God and His laws and commandments; and death passed to all of the human family. (Rom. 8:17; 5:12).

Second, mankind is held captive to Satan's deceptive rule. Adam and Eve listened to Satan instead of God. From that time forward, all mankind has been under the sway and deception of Satan (Rev. 12:9) -Except for those who have chosen to yield to God's call.

Thus, as a result of God's judgment of their sin, these two major consequences came upon Adam and Eve and their descendants. And since mankind -enslaved to sin and death does not have ability to overcome Satan; God, in His great love proposed to redeem mankind from sin, death and Satan, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

At this juncture of man's fallen state, God chased them out of the garden not in hatred or abandonment; but in his loving kindness and hope for restoration. He carefully removed them and stationed the Cherubim to stop them from

going back to eat of that fruit of life again lest they remain in perpetual sinfulness (Gen 3:22). The alienation of man from God through human sin therefore necessitated a gospel of reconciliation,

### **THE GOSPEL THAT WAS CHANGED**

The "gospel" is a word of many meanings. Originally it referred to good news or to the reward paid for such tidings. It could mean the message spoken by Jesus.

The word gospel also applies to the four written records of Jesus earthly ministry (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

Within the context of this discussion, it is the good news preached about Jesus, or a proclamation that God had done something for man in Christ. It included all that Jesus was and said and did. It is the salvation from God found in the words and the actions of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Beck (2008:96) defines gospel simply as "the good-news about what Jesus Christ has done to reconcile sinners to God". Since there is no way fallen humanity can earn his way back to God, He came down in Christ to Sinful humans to save them from eternal separation from Him. It is in view of this basic understanding that the Gospel of Christ is regarded the most important discuss In Christian theology and doctrine. Any theological or ecclesiastical formulation therefore, that does not hing on this basic belief of God's revelation in Christ to redeem and restore fallen humanity to Himself is not Christian.

### **Men are required to repent.**

Jesus came with a message of repentance and urged men to turn to God lest they fall before the wrath to come, and invited them into the long awaited kingdom of God that was at hand. The doorway into the kingdom was to renounce one's sins. It means to turn from any malign influences, either of man or demons, and a turn to God so that God's forgiveness might lead to a new life. Repentance was not simply remorse for the past but a change in character. Entrance into the Kingdom was by individual decision rather than by national action.

### **Men are required to believe in the gospel.**

Jesus says, "...the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at and. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). To believe in the gospel means to have faith in the gospel. To commit oneself confidently to the good news, -the one whom God sent to bring all humanity back to Him, even Jesus the Christ. The Gospel was the final remedy for sin, God will not provide another. That Is why

he summons men everywhere to repent and believe in the offer given to them. John 3:16, declares -"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believer in Him should not perish but have everlasting life".

**Jesus empowered the Gospel:** Jesus made the gospel very powerful when he cemented the reconciliation and restoration process by His sinless life and miraculous activities that graced His earthly ministry; His atoning death, burial, resurrection, ascension and unfailing promise of His second coming. . In Acts chapter 2, on the Pentecost day, the Gospel message received divine auctions to function in the lives of the church. The power in the Word energized the disciples that they were able to do the very things they could not have done ordinarily.

**Jesus gave the gospel as a message of proclamation to the church.** The church, from its inception till the end of the age, would have no other message to proclaim; no other faith to believe, and defend, other than this one. The message contained in this Gospel include:

- ❖ That God created man in His image,
- ❖ That through the disobedience of that Adam all human race have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
- ❖ Since humanity is incapable to save himself, God came in the person of Jesus Christ to save him.
- ❖ That through the finished work of Christ on the cross humanity can be saved.
- ❖ That the world should accept Jesus a Saviour and Lord through repentance.
- ❖ That mankind should live righteously and serve the Lord God in faithfulness
- ❖ That, believers in Christ are ambassadors here on earth, and they are waiting the second coming of Jesus.
- ❖ That there will be judgment; sinners will consciously spend eternity in hell and believers in heaven.

### **THE EARLY CHRISTIANS AND THE GOSPEL**

Having received the commission and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the early Christians took advantage of every little opportunity and open door, to transmit the gospel to every nook and cranny of the then world, the enemies, resistance, threats, persecution, and death notwithstanding.

Without the aid of media, science and technology, and socio-political freedom as we have them today, the few members of the church were able to saturate Palestine and most part of Asia, Europe and Africa with the gospel of Christ and its values. They were accused of having, "turned the whole world upside down" (Acts 17:6). At a time, the human powers of their day rebuked and cautioned them saying;

“Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you' have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us... And when they had called for the Apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go” (Acts 5:28, 40).

Instead of retreating or retiring in desperation, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. "And daily in temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:41-42). The story of the early believers is thus the story of evangelism and missions in the early church. They set an example for all subsequent Christians that are clear, unmistakable and unswerving. They challenged commoners and kings alike. They did not become salaried ecclesiastics but often worked with their hands to support themselves, so that by any and all means, they might share the good news in Jesus. Most, like St. Paul, sought to preach Christ, "not building upon other men's foundations, but going to the regions beyond."

The Foxes Book of Martyrs by Marie G. Kings, provides sufficient understanding of the nature, contents, and demands of the gospel ministry into which we are called, and to defend. The volume tells us how men and women, and children earnestly "Contended for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. It explains through life experience how the believer's participation and association in the suffering and death of Christ for a better resurrection on the last day, is the only scale to weigh the genuineness and authenticity of our profession of the faith in Christ.

The Saints of old chose to suffer affliction for Christ's sake rather than enjoying the passing pleasures of sins, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than worldly treasures, for they focused their visions on that city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Many were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trials of mocking and scourging, and of chains and imprisonment. They swords, they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy (Heb. 11, 2Cor.12). Their blood fertilized the ground that caused the abundant

growth and expansion of the gospel, and the church as we have it today. Little wonder God was not ashamed to be called their God. Indeed, Kanu (2016:52), is right by maintaining that "the willingness and ability of the early church to stay with, and maintain the true and original faith and message once delivered to the saints, gave her the victory and sustained her through all challenges ...". Indeed, this is opposite of today's Christianity. What we have today is a church that is 10,000km in length and one-inch deep in their knowledge of God, and commitment to him. A church that is not ready and willing to be inconvenienced. A fast-food Christianity, where you go and take your blessings sharp-sharp. A church that has reduced her God to a mere ATM, where she can rush to and get her needs solved without much protocols or sacrifices of waiting. A church that has entered into a business venture with her Creator; and who must be ready to comply with the terms and conditions of the business, otherwise, there would be a break-up. Where is the present church heading to?

### **PROSPERITY GOSPEL AND DISTORTION OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST**

One of the most dangerous perversions of the gospel of Jesus Christ, like Jewish Legalism, Gnosticism, Asceticism, Antinomianism and Arianism, is called the Prosperity Gospel. It is an ideology with its roots from America, which has permeated the whole world, with Nigeria the highest hit of its gimmicks.

The prosperity gospel which is also called the "health and wealth gospel," "Name it, claim it gospel," "the gospel of crown without the cross," or "Gospel of greed," is one of the fastest growing emphasis within the contemporary church. Initially, it was only heard within the New Trend or New Wave churches, but it is quite frightening that today, the wave of this ideology has swept across the mainline churches, including the Anglican church.

The gospel focuses primarily on material possession, physical well-being and success in this life, which includes abundant financial resources, good health, clothing, housing, cars, and promotion at work, success in business as well as other endeavours of life. The false gospel asserts that God wants all Christians to be wealthy and healthy in this life; that health and wealth are automatic divine right of all Bible-believing Christians, and may be protected by faith as part of the package of salvation, since the atonement of Christ includes not just the removal of sin, but also the removal of sickness and poverty. This gospel claims that:

- The Abrahamic covenant is a means to material entitlement
- Jesus' atonement extends to the sin of material poverty.
- Christians give in order to gain material compensation from God.

- Prayer becomes a tool to force God to grant prosperity.

In the light of scripture, the prosperity gospel is fundamentally wrong. Jones (2013:36) says, "at bottom, It is a false gospel because of its faulty view of the relationship between God and man. Simply put, if the prosperity gospel is true, grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant, and man is the measure of all things." Whether they are talking about the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, giving, faith, or prayer, prosperity preachers turn the relationship between God and man into a 'God I give you, you give me' transaction. And God does not work that way with us. The funniest part of this gospel is that the Pastors or the "Man of God" and his family live in luxury while the people in the pews empty their accounts and live in the very poverty they are asked to escape.

The motion of this synod makes it necessary to stress more on three aspects of the flaws of prosperity Gospel, which makes it stand out properly as a distortion of the nature and content of the Gospel of Christ that saves us from sin.

**1. The misinterpretation of purpose of giving.**

Prosperity gospel deliberately fails to see all forms of giving to God, be it tithes or offerings, as an act of worship. Instead, it teaches that tithing, offerings, or donation to God is an investment. With this notion in mind people now give with wrong motives. Essentially, the motive of giving to God for the primary purpose of expecting special returns from God. The man who gives to God appears to be the one in charge. His measure of investment is now expected to dictate God's level of reward. The amount he slots into the vending machine determines what he expects as rewards. And if there is a delay or non-compliance, from the machine, he quarrels with it or rush to another machine. It suggests that man have the initiative and God the response. This contradicts the whole understanding of our salvation and worship being God's initiative and God's response. A similar danger of this misinterpretation in giving is that, we must have our rewards or inheritance here and now in material form. Ultimately, all that matters is the material prosperity here and now. The pursuit of this is contrary to Biblical faith and blurs our vision and understanding of God.

**2. The room for suffering.**

The prosperity gospel has no theology or Biblical explanation for challenges related to pain, sickness or anything related to suffering.

There is so much of this in the world and they extend to all the people. So, any Christian undergoing any of these today should not be seen as a sinner or having no faith. For reasons best known to Him, God has chosen not to keep out his servants from the normal difficulties and problems of life. There are several examples in scripture including heroes of faith like Joseph, Moses, Job, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul, Stephen and several others throughout the history of the church who never had it very easy. And none of you fathers and mothers in the Lord here present, can sincerely claim that this journey of faith has been so easy for him or her. It is not an easy road. From generation to generation people of God have suffered injustice, discrimination, troubles, illness etc, not because they lack faith or they committed evil but because God allows them to go through such experience. The fact is that followers of Jesus are not exempted from the common problems and troubles of life. Becoming so obsessive in denying or avoiding them can in fact be a lack of trust in God's sovereignty and loving kindness. So, "some choruses like, "me I no go suffer, I no go beg for bread because God of miracle na my papa" should be examined and evaluated.

### **3. Monetization of prayer.**

Prayer is no more a spiritual development of the believer; a medium of communication and fellowship with God. It is now a means of getting prosperity. Prosperity gospel preachers take the advantage of the vulnerable seekers to place large sum of money on prayers. This is a sample from one the Churches at Abayi Ariaria area:

- ❖ Prayer for divine wealth N300,000.
- ❖ For favour N75,000.
- ❖ Breaking of curses N50,000.
- ❖ Tithe 20%
- ❖ Prayers for breaking of ancestral curses in the church attract a fee of N50,000.
- ❖ Special prayers for God's favour, often done by selected prayer warriors, who are strict vegetarians goes for N75,000
- ❖ Fortification of a worshipper against misfortunes and accidents goes for N100,000.

## **CONCLUSION**

Having recognized and taken seriously the fact that the prosperity gospel:

1. Is primarily about money and that it contradicts both the life of Christ and the purpose for which He died on the cross;
2. Is a trap that ensnares the poor and the weak, and leads them away from the love of Christ;
3. Stands in contrast to the good news of the kingdom of God, which Jesus brought to mankind, believed, proclaimed and defended by the early Christians;
4. Is a tool in the hands of Satan to replace the true Gospel message from our pulpits with materialistic and social gospel messages. Scarcely would you enter into any church these days or listen to modern cable TV or Radio Preachers, and hear sermons on God's hatred on sin and wickedness, sinners in the hand of an angry God, impending judgment awaiting Sinners, the soon coming again of Jesus to judge the living and the dead, or the certainty and terrible nature of hell fire, the great commission etc.
5. Does not develop the Christian life of faith, trust, obedience, patience, long suffering, worship and anticipation for Lord's return to take us home.
6. Is a False gospel that substitutes a vision of present earthly happiness for a vision of the final restoration of heaven' and earth that the Bible anticipates.
7. A faith that produces a relationship that centers on the satisfaction of man's demands of blessing and fortune, thereby reducing God to a mere vending machine that satisfy those demands or become irrelevant.

Your Lordship, Mama Aba Ngwa North, the Legal luminaries of the Diocese, the clergy and respectful delegates, I therefore move the motion that the church should return to the faith of our fathers that is anchored on the redemption of our souls and the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord; the faith that prevails through the realities of suffering, sacrifice, and good work to the glory of God, and blessing of the church. The faith that believes that, earthly blessing and fortunes are additional which God gives, as and when it pleases Him.

Thank you.