

## **Jeremiah 6:13 and the Challenge of Prosperity Gospel in Contemporary Anglican Priesthood in Nigeria**

**Obi C. Chindo & Ikenna L. Umeanolue**

Department of Religion and Human Relations  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria  
alwaysobichindo@gmail.com; il.umeanolue@unizik.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

This study examined the challenge of prosperity gospel within the contemporary Anglican priesthood in Nigeria in the light of Jeremiah 6:13. In this Old Testament biblical text, prophet Jeremiah frowned at the level of greed found among the priests of his time which consequently led to their false dealing with God's people which manifested in the exploitation and imposition of levies. Prosperity gospel is a gospel of materialism and success. It is a gospel that insists that followers of Christ are meant to have material possessions and blessings of health and wealth, as their right and inheritance for being Christians and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds', through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings, hence the emphasis on material things and giving. The discussion focuses more on the priests of the Anglican extraction, who are called for the caring and curing of souls by preaching the gospel of Christ without bias. However, the sudden quest for wealth and material possessions by some Anglican priests, which is largely caused by heavy financial obligations from the bishops, has resulted to loss of respect for the priests, and loss of membership of the Anglican faithful among others. The study however, suggested that there should be a reduction of quota on churches while the welfare package for the priests is reviewed among other things. The study used exegetical method of biblical studies to interpret the text of Jeremiah 6:13 and apply the exegetical message in the context of the contemporary Anglican priesthood in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Jeremiah 6:13, Prosperity Gospel, Anglican, Priesthood.

### **Introduction**

Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has challenge of false doctrines and teachers in the contemporary society. Heretical doctrines have been adopted and expounded to gratify man's selfishness and insatiable appetite for material gains. One of such doctrines that is ravaging the moral fabric and integrity of the church is prosperity gospel. This teaching which was heralded by the Pentecostal Churches and which emphasizes materialism has now escalated and permeated even into the mainline orthodox churches. Being a doctrine that places highest value in material wellbeing and furtherance of material progress, it has done a great harm to the genuineness of the gospel the church professes hence the church has been labeled a scam. It is important to note that prosperity gospel is biblical, but its abuse, misinterpretation and misapplication for the purpose of exploitation using different manipulative gimmicks by 'those who are after their belly' is the reason for giving it a second thought.

Anglican priesthood is peculiar because of different processes and trainings as well as years of service a minister puts in either as a church teacher or catechist before he is considered for ordination. More so, the theological trainings of the postulants in church liturgy and doctrines, including heresies and false teachings are other peculiarities that make Anglican priesthood different. This is to say that Anglican priests are trained to be theologically sound, liturgically good and doctrinally balanced. In other words, they are trained to be responsible, disciplined and contented against different waves of doctrines and heresies that will protrude in the course of their service to God. Despite these attempts to preserve the originality of the gospel and the genuineness of the Anglican priesthood, there are still traceable elements of falsehood and greed among them, one of which is manifested through the prosperity gospel challenge. Thus, the Anglican priesthood is gradually competing with the Pentecostal ministry in terms of attitude to materialism and amassing of wealth, which unfortunately has a lot of implications on the ministry as a holy institution.

Jeremiah 6:13 calls out the religious leaders, prophets and priests precisely those who have left what they are called to do in pursuit of selfish interest. The prophet makes it clear that the underlining factor

for engaging in this kind of spurious teaching is greed (עָצָר) which makes even the priests and prophets to deal falsely (רָקַץ) with the people. From the foregoing, one can deduce that the gospel of prosperity sways the Anglican priesthood simply because of greed for dishonest gain. Greed is one of the major themes in the Old Testament which Yahweh constantly warned the Israelites against (Gen 37:26; Ex 18:21; Judges 5:19; Job 22:3; Ps 119:36; Pr. 28:16). While prophet Jeremiah decried the religious leaders of Israel, this work concentrates on Anglican priests in the Church of Nigeria especially in Diocese on the Niger. It aims at spelling out different challenges this strange gospel has posed to this Anglican traditional holy institution and at the same time proffer solution on how to curtail the excesses from further escalation. However, suggestions will be made to the effect of restoring sanity, discipline and contentment in the Anglican Holy Order.

### **Conceptualizing Prosperity Gospel**

Prosperity gospel otherwise known as ‘Prosperity Theology’, ‘Word of Faith’, ‘Health and Wealth’, ‘Name It and Claim It’, ‘Seed Faith Movement’, ‘Blab It and Grab It’ and ‘Prosperity Preaching’, is a global phenomenon that has its origin in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively. Apart from being a global phenomenon, it has become a controversial concept in Christianity due to over emphasis. Prosperity gospel as a concept is biblical but placing emphasis on it above other doctrines and teachings of the church is heretical hence the need for balance. Prosperity gospel from all indication is an emotional and sentimental gospel that appeals to the curiosity of those who want to make merchandise of the gospel by harvesting where they did not sow. Prosperity gospel is a gospel of materialism and success. It is a gospel that insists that followers of Christ are meant to have material possessions and blessings of health and wealth, as their right and inheritance for being Christians and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’, through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings, hence the emphasis on material things and giving. Prosperity gospel therefore is both anthropocentric and humanistic in nature for it promotes the interest of man. However, Osisioma (2012) admits that a gospel that lays so much emphasis on carnal might and material success does not meet the standards of the biblical gospel.

Prosperity gospel by implication places emphasis on giving, success, wealth, faith, physical well-being and possessions as the basics of the Christian faith. Mumford cited in Nwaomah (2020) agrees that prosperity gospel is a Christian theology whose signature teaching is that God wants believers to be rich and enjoy good physical health. In the words of Udechukwu (2021), “Prosperity gospel suggests that God has met all the needs of human beings in the suffering and death of Christ, therefore, every Christian should share the victory of Christ over sin, sickness, and poverty” (p. 271). According to the believers in prosperity gospel, poverty and sickness are not Christian virtues hence Christ finished with them on the cross by his death so we can enjoy the riches of his death. With this, one wonders if God’s blessings are limited to earthly riches. Thus, does God base his blessings solely on material things and on our ability to give to him? Again, one wonders if failure to give is the reason why many Christians who are suffering are still suffering. This becomes an issue for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. In response to the above, Gbote and Kgatla (2014) write:

Contrary to the belief within the prosperity gospel that suffering, depression, illness and destitution originate from Satan, as they teach, human kind’s suffering is not necessarily seen to be coming from Satan. Jesus Christ taught his disciples that the problems of suffering were not always comprehensible as he said: ‘If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you ... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also’ (Jn. 15:19-20). Suffering is not always as a result of human action or sin. It is also true with the notion of wealth. (p. 9).

They further argued that the notion that wealth comes from God and poverty comes from Satan is an extreme theology that contradicts Jesus’ and Paul’s teachings in Matthew 16:25 and 1 Timothy 6:10 that our lives are in the hands of God and the love of money leads many people abandoning their faith.

According to Adamo (2021), prosperity gospel refers to the genre of preaching that emphasizes positive confession, divine physical healing, divine material success as necessary gifts, and blessing from God.

In other words, it is the spiritualization of materiality and celebration of the abundance, which comes from God as a result of divine promise from him. Prosperity gospel demeans the spirituality of the church and drains the faith of the faithful in God. It also rubs her of vital Christian virtues that form the fabrics of the Christian faith like patience, perseverance, suffering and endurance. It is unfortunate that many of the Christian religious leaders promote this teaching for their own personal and self-interest. Thus, flaunting of wealth and material things has become a measure for success in Christianity. Clement (2019) laments:

The glamour and flaunting of wealth by some of these leaders in Nigeria have made others among them to become desperate as well as equate success in service to God to mean status and much acquisition of material things. They take advantage of gullible miracle seekers, who will do anything just to have respite from their troubles. The extent some religious leaders go to, in order to satisfy their curious followers and rip them of their monies is dastardly. (p. 51).

According to Umeanolue (2017), the manipulation of Christian religion and the gospel for financial and other materialistic motives is one of the roots of evil in the contemporary Nigerian society. Nwaomah (2020) observes that the preachers of prosperity gospel are themselves the living examples of their message of divine prosperity. Most live extravagantly, with luxurious cars, private jets, mansions with gold-plated fixtures, expensive designer clothing, vacationing in exotic places, and so on. Their lavish lifestyle reminds their followers of the power of faith that lays claim to hidden spiritual realities and translates them into material realities. Prosperity gospel could lead to crimes and fraudulent activities among the young people in that the extravagant lifestyle of these prosperity preachers is a negative inspiration to the young people. Nwaomah (2020) further observes that the extravagant lifestyle associated with the prosperity teaching leads some of them into financial stress. This in turn often leads to manipulation, fraudulent activities, embezzlement of church funds, or literally begging audience for money. For Nwaomah, “Members of the prosperity churches become vulnerable to fraud, false teaching, false faith and expectations, and even loss of faith when it seems that God has not honoured their faith” (p. 11). This is indeed not healthy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity and must be tackled from further escalation.

### **Exegetical Analysis of Jeremiah 6:13**

The text of Jeremiah 6:13 reads כִּי מִקְטָנָם וְעַד-גְּדֹלָם כָּל־בּוֹצֵעַ בָּצַע וּמִנְבִּיאַי וְעַד-כֹּהֵן כָּל־עֹשֶׂה שָׂקֶר (For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from the prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely). Prophet Jeremiah decried the prophets and priests of his time for two grievous offences: greed/covetousness and falsehood/deception (Peterson, 1992). The prophets and priests are greedy for gain hence they use deception to extort the people of their hard-earned money. The Hebrew root word used for greed is בָּצַע which means ‘to break off’ or ‘to cut off’ which is a verbal form of the noun בָּצַע meaning ‘gain made by violence’, ‘unjust gain or profit’ which consequently connotes robbery or extortion. It suggests that the religious leaders of Jeremiah’s time were making gains or profits by violent means/extortion as in Ezekiel 22:12 by use of falsehood and deceptive words. Covetousness was a sin that abounded very much among the people at that time (Isa 57:17), hence the prophet’s outburst on the religious leaders for idolatry by making money their god (cf. Col. 3:5). The undertone of their covetousness is their heart of idolatry, for every act of greed is a sign of idolatry.

The Old Testament contains related teaching, especially in Jewish interpretation of the Song of Moses, where becoming rich and powerful leads God’s people to forget God and finally to outright idolatry (see Deut. 31:20; 32:15ff). Such teaching may well be of interest in understanding how a Jew could arrive at the conclusion that greed is idolatry. Henry (2008) notes that for this iniquity, among others, God was angry with them, and brought one judgment after another upon them, and their destruction at last by the Chaldeans. God resented it, took it very ill that a people who were devoted to himself, and portioned in himself, should be so entirely given up to the world and choose that for their portion. Henry further notes that covetousness is an iniquity that is very displeasing to the God of heaven. He hates it, and looks upon it with jealousy, because it sets up a rival with him in the soul. Worthy of note is that they were carried away by their love for material gains (v. 13) hence, from the least of them even to the greatest, - old and young, high and low, those of all ranks and hierarchies, - everyone is given to

covetousness (עָצָוָה). That is to say, they are all greedy of filthy lucre, all for what they can get, whether right or wrong; and this made them oppressive and violent (v. 6, 7), for of those evils, as well as others, the love of money is the bitter root.

The prophet also decried them for dealing falsely with the people. The Hebrew word translated falsehood is רִשְׁוּאָה which means ‘deception’, ‘disappointment’, ‘falsehood’. This implies that the religious leaders because of their greed and love for money, gave false prophecies to the people, prophecies that deceive and disappoint; so unreliable that it can neither build nor establish people in the faith to do the will of Yahweh. According to Henry (2008), the prophet condemns the false prophets who preached plausibly, for therein they flattered people and dealt unfaithfully (v. 13, 14). Thus, the priest and the prophet, who should be their watchmen and monitors, have dealt falsely, have not been true to their trust and have not told the people their faults and the danger they were in; they should have been their physicians, but they murdered their patients by letting them have their will, by giving them everything they had in mind to, and flattering them into an opinion that they were in no danger. The driving force for which they led people into deception and falsehood (רִשְׁוּאָה) was greed (עָצָוָה). The prophet painted a picture of religious leaders who are not just violent but are fraudulent, who can prophesy falsely and are liars (Jer. 14:14). To deal falsely as the religious leaders were accused by Jeremiah is to give false testimonies (רִשְׁוּאָה) as in court so as to win a case as in Exodus 20:16. Their greed for unjust gains made them to prophesy lies against the people which was the major concern of prophet Jeremiah.

### **Contemporary Anglican Priesthood and Prosperity Gospel**

From the backdrop of Jeremiah 6:13, it is obvious that there is more to prosperity gospel than meets the eyes. The major highlights of the text are its emphasis on greed and deception as dual characteristics of the religious leaders. First, prosperity gospel is sometimes a gospel of greed. Some of the preachers of prosperity gospel have a pronounced interest in materialism and are greedy for gain which is consequently interpreted as idolatry. Thomas Aquinas cited by Rosner (2007) affirms that greed has to be compared to idolatry because of certain similitude which greed has with idolatry. According to him, “Through idolatry someone subjects himself to an external creature through an act of divine cult. The greedy however subjects himself to an external creature through desiring it immoderately for one’s own use and not for divine cult” (p. 24). Greed is idolatry because it concerns the veneration of the god of money and turns people into the slave of their addictions, always to have more. Some Anglican priests project acquisitiveness and personal satisfaction as objective goods to be praised and served. They hide under the said prosperity gospel to exhibit their greedy nature. They in a bid to compete with some Pentecostal pastors in material acquisition and copy their method of ministry that is embedded in greed, engage in all manner of ungodly activities like, selling at a very high cost what they call ‘special olive oil’ that is supposed to be bought in the super markets at a very low cost, thereby robbing their members in a broad day light. Some use their privileged positions to make money by asking their members who came for counselling to pay for consultation or registration fee before they could see them.

Second, prosperity gospel is often a gospel that promotes unjust gain. Preachers of prosperity gospel are not concerned how people make their money but how much one brings to them. The honour that is accorded to the rich irrespective of how they made their money, makes many young people to desire to make money at all cost. This has made a lot of young people to be involved in all forms of indecent approach to money making ranging from ritualism to fraud popularly known as *Yahoo Yahoo* and *Yahoo plus* so as to be recognized in the church. Obviously, knighthood in the Anglican church which is supposed to be for ‘Defenders of Faith’ has been unjustly reserved for the rich alone who can afford the cost. This sends the wrong message to the young people that the church recognizes only the rich, hence they want to make money by all means. Some Anglican priests do not promote the principle of hard work and the discipline of patience that go with prosperity. They tell their listeners how God is interested to make them rich but fail to equally tell them how the same God desires sanity and moral uprightness in their processes of becoming prosperous. There are cases where some Anglican priests were sighted in romance with popular Anambra native doctor all for unjust gain. There are also cases of young people going for *Oke Ite* (a pot of charm consisting of heads of different animals and human

parts) to enable them succeed in swindling their *Mgbada* (a derogatory coded name used to designate victims of *Yahoo Yahoo*).

The most unfortunate thing is that when they make this evil money, they bring it to the church and receive blessings from their supposed spiritual fathers. The very painful truth is that this evil ravaging our society today is greatly promoted and championed by these prosperity gospel preachers. The prosperity gospel preachers have proven beyond reasonable doubt that they are in the ministry not to pastor but to do business, as they readily use their business skills to extort their members of their hard-earned money. They have also made it almost impossible to receive any pastoral care or church service without a price tag. Okafor (2008) laments that in some churches and prayer ministries, consultation fees are paid before one is allowed to see the Pastor, Evangelist or the Visioner. According to him, “The amount paid varies, depending on the choice of the individual. For instance, the amount paid for emergency consultation is higher than the amount paid for ordinary consultation” (p. 94). This, among many, is one of the ways the supposed men of God are making and encouraging unjust gain through prosperity preaching. Third, prosperity gospel in some cases is a gospel of deception hence heretical. Some Anglican priests are gradually teaching heresy in the name of prosperity gospel just to have their ways into people’s pockets. For instance, it is appalling to hear from an Anglican priest who attended a theological training telling his congregation that how much they give determines how much God will bless them. Some teach that sowing seed more especially in ‘dry seasons’ will make one richer. These are simply heresies that have no biblical backups. They don’t teach their members that God can still bless one without sowing seed of faith. These Anglican priests turned preachers of prosperity gospel are simply deceiving their members because prosperity can neither be claimed by faith nor gotten by positive confession. Some priests will go to the extent of conniving with a guest preacher and releasing the information of some of her members to be given as word of knowledge so as to collect money from them. In some other cases, some of the guest preachers give false testimonies of what never happened. Perhaps, how God multiplied to him the money he sowed as a seed some time ago, and so they stand on that to tell people to come and sow a seed of faith for their own miracle and testimony. Prosperity gospel that relegates hard work, diligence, discipline, patience, faithfulness, perseverance in the process of prosperity is a deceit. Prosperity gospel that negates uprightness and moral soundness but rather promotes conscienceless pursuit of wealth is against the nuggets of Christian teachings and discipleship. Many people have been deceived to believe that shouting the loudest Amen and sowing a seed at the feet of the ‘man of God’ will make you prosper. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021, a story was reported by Sahara Reporters Newspaper titled, “Nigerian man burns church over alleged failed prophecies”. It was reported that the 28-year-old Oluwatosin Adegoke was said to have got tired of the church’s purported deceit over false prophecies by the owner of the church and burnt down the church. When people are fed with deception, even their deceivers become victims of their gross brutality. It is deception to tell people they will become prosperous by shouting a louder Amen and without any tangible business they are engaged in. This is the reason laziness abound amongst young people who go about sowing seeds and shouting Amen so as to become prosperous. Any prosperity gospel that negates the principle of hard work and gleaning process portend danger to Christianity. Obviously the preachers of prosperity gospel are not just extortioners but robbers. Threatening people to give or they face the consequences of not giving is robbery. These are all part of the prophecies Jeremiah prophesied against the religious leaders of his time.

### **Effects of Prosperity Gospel in the Contemporary Anglican Priesthood**

It will be the highest level of irresponsibility to pretend that the prosperity gospel has no implication on the Anglican church and her priesthood. A careful observation and a sketchy survey in most Anglican churches more especially in Southeast reveal that serious harm has been done to the Anglican Ordained ministry by virtue of promoting the prosperity gospel against the holistic approach to the gospel of salvation. From every indication, it is obvious that the effect of this prosperity gospel cannot be exhausted. However, five vital areas where this gospel has gravely affected will be discussed hereunder as follows:

### **i. Loss of Respect for the Anglican Priests**

Many Anglican faithful do not have regard for their priests largely because of their attitude to money. It is hard for an Anglican priest to put a call across to her members especially the rich ones without being embarrassed by one or two persons who must have tried to avoid his calls having suspected he may be calling to ask for money. In one occasion, I was discussing with one of my parishioners when his priest in the village called him. Before he picked the call, he told me he was calling him because of Archdeaconry Women's Conference their church in the village will host that year. He complained of his tiredness of his calls knowing he was calling to solicit for financial help. For him, his priest is as good as a beggar and that's all he knows him for. An average Anglican cannot imagine his priest calling him to know how he's fairing in business and in general welfare. Again, how the members discuss matters concerning their priests in the public and in the market square is another eyesore in their disrespectfulness. It is in such circles you will hear what you have never heard about the priest in that parish. The bishop on the Niger, Rt Rev'd Owen Nwokolo frowns at the manner priests are ill-manneredly spoken of and begs the church not to speak evil of their priests thus:

It is not expected that you publicly speak evil of your Priest. Even if he has done wrong, the Lord who has called him will judge him, not you. You can only report him to appropriate authorities. But it is not right that you make him a point of discussion in groups, market places or in social media. When you publicly speak evil of your Priest, you are indirectly tarnishing the image of God and the Church. One who loves God and the Church should not engage in such reckless lifestyle. (p. 80).

When the members see their priests as money mongers rather than the preachers of the gospel, besides being a call for negligence, it is a danger and a threat to the institution of priesthood in the Anglican Communion.

### **ii. Loss of Interest in the Things of God**

Another important implication is that many people are losing interest in the things of God. it is unfortunate that many young people more especially use Sunday mornings for various exercises ranging from early morning jogging to playing football in the streets when they are supposed to be in the church. This is because the priests through their attitude to wealth and materialism have made them lose interest in the church and her activities. The normal slogans that come from such people include: '*uka di n'obi*', '*church is a scam*', '*church these days is all about money*', '*na people wey get money dey go church*' and things like that. Losing interest in the things of God includes refusal to identify with every church events and to respect their beliefs and practices. That's why there are a lot of young people who are married traditionally but refuse to go for church wedding because they no longer believe in anything church. Some of them felt duped with God's name after doing all manner of things they thought could make them prosper. Many were severally deceived with fake prophecies and seed sowing after which they became poorer instead of the supposed prosperity. By this, they felt betrayed and the only option for such people is to become cold to anything that has to do with God and the church.

### **iii. Loss of Members to Other Churches**

It is no longer a new thing that many people have left and are still leaving the Anglican church to other churches. This is the practical aspect to loss of interest in the things of God. the truth is that many pews in the Anglican church are empty both in the rural and urban are empty. The church is fast losing her members because she feeds on the sheep she is supposed to feed. Many of our young people who could not endure their experiences, left the communion after several attempts to raise objection to the status quo. While some left for other churches, some others left without joining another church. Surprisingly, even some Anglican clergy children no longer attend Anglican church in their various schools and places of abode. Sometimes what is seen in some churches is a situation where sermon is given in less than half an hour whereas the priest uses more than one hour to talk about money. Such cannot edify the spirituality of the church hence those who are leaving are leaving on the ground that their spiritual lives are neglected while material things are magnified.

#### **iv. Verbal attacks on the Church and Her Ministers**

Perhaps one of the most difficult things to do in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is to admit you're a priest. There is a deliberate attack on the church of Christ and on her ministers. Obviously, the opportunity for the attack was created by some priests who are not sensitive to the dangers of abandoning the saving faith and rallying around to serve the table. It is a known thing that any matter that involves the church or pastors becomes trending on social media. People are ready to rain abuses on the ministers of the gospel, after all, they're neither at gain nor at loss. No matter of national concern will successfully be discussed without a verbal abuse on the failure of the church and her ministers.

#### **v. Return to Idolatry and Syncretism**

There is a wave of cultural rebirth in Nigeria and Africa generally in which many people have taken the position that Christianity is a white man's religion. The Anglican Church has lost a good number of her youths to idolatry. Apart from the youths, many who were once highly profiled, belonging to different church's organizations and are communicants, eventually left the church when they felt they can no longer endure the excesses of their priests. Some will make sarcastic comments like, "if going to church is for this Rev'd Canon or Archdeacon, I'll rather be a traditional worshipper". Many obviously decided to return to the religion of their forefathers because of the attitude of certain priests and instead of being deceived by what they labelled 'the white man's religion'. This is a serious blow on the church.

#### **vi. High Rate of Crime in the Society**

The high rate of crime in the society must not be neglected when discussing the implication of prosperity gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When the young people see how the rich are honoured without any concern on how they made their money, they desire to make money by all means. One cannot successfully divorce the high rate of crime in our society from the prosperity gospel dished from various pulpits and the attitude to material things of her ministers. The get rich quick syndrome that is pervading the entire society is simply the failure of the church to emphasize sound doctrines and morality above prosperity gospel.

#### **Jeremiah 6:13 and Prosperity Gospel in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Anglican Priesthood**

The import of Jeremiah 6:13 on the 21<sup>st</sup> century Anglican priesthood cannot be overemphasized. Anglican priesthood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become both critical and challenging more especially in the spate of failing economy, underdevelopment and unemployment. It is sad to note that many graduates have no employment opportunity readily available for them after their one-year mandatory national youth service. To worsen the situation, greater percentage of the youths who are graduates are devoid of any special entrepreneurial skill with which they can develop and keep themselves busy while they wait for the supposed government work. This simply adds to the level of unemployment existing among young people. It is therefore sad to note that unemployment is a major factor for many people's choice of priesthood in the Anglican Communion. It is indeed a sad reality. Diara, Onukwufor and Uroko (2020) buttress this point that it is very important to note that the increase in the commercialization of religion, especially of Christianity, is caused by the unemployment among the youth. Unemployment is also a major contributing factor to the commercialization of churches in Nigeria. Nwangana (2017) underscores the fact that after a long search for gainful employment, many frustrated people resorted to pastoral work without genuinely being called by God. Some of them who possess oratory and communication skills open ministries, which later metamorphosed into full churches. This situation has led to the proliferation of churches, which apparently fan the embers of church commercialization. Furthermore, some people who apply for the Anglican ordained ministry are some who have been businessmen, but for one reason or the other are facing some business challenges which they eventually interpreted as God's call into the Holy Order. More so, some who are secular employees in different government and private institutions but realize their call into the Holy Order are equally admitted and eventually ordained.

Jeremiah 6:13 frowns at the rate at which some Anglican priests are 'greedy for unjust gains' (Coulibaly, 2006). The competition to drive the best car, own houses/estates, have become excessively outrageous. In order to meet up in the competition, many have become victims of embezzlement and

mismanagement of church funds. The 'least' as used by Jeremiah could be likened to the clergymen in their different orders and hierarchies while the 'greatest' could be likened to the bishops and archbishops, all of whom Jeremiah accused of being greedy for unjust gains. This greed for unjust gains is obvious in so many activities and occasions organized by the church. For instance, some Anglican churches organize award giving ceremonies with the sole purpose to raise money. In selecting the awardees, a poor woman who has been coming for church cleaning every Saturday with all her commitment very visible to the entire congregation will be neglected because her children do not have money and therefore no award will be conferred on her. However, another woman who is not a dedicated Anglican and who does not even attend Anglican church in the city where she resides will be conferred with the award of 'Ezinne' or 'Mother of Faith' simply because her child(ren) has/have money. Nobody cares if the woman is diabolic or how her children made their money, the concern of the church is the money they will collect from her children.

Knighthood which is supposed to be for the defence of faith has been hijacked and reserved for the rich alone. You can hardly be a defender of faith (knight) if you are not wealthy. Even if you are a fraudulent person, ritualist or confirmed member of secret cult, as long as you have money, you will be made a knight. That is why in the Anglican Church, there are people who do not know Christ, who do not care what the word of God is saying, but they are at the helms of the church's affairs as members of the Parochial Church Committee (PCC) and other management boards of the church. The priests will be afraid to confront them because they make unjust gains from these men. This greed for unjust gains is also seen at the burial services of the rich or their relatives. One may count a good number of bishops and archbishops who attended such burials because of 'brown envelop', but such is not obtainable in the burial services of a poor member who is very committed in the faith and in his/her services to the church.

Moreover, when one loses a loved one, wants to wed or wants to come for baptism, one is always meant to pay some exorbitant charges before the church can identify with one. Chimamanda Adichie, an African novelist of Anambra origin, who is a Roman Catholic faithful narrated her ordeal in the hands of her priest and the exorbitant charges she was meant to pay when she was planning her mother's burial. This is indeed a challenge to Christendom. During the aforementioned events, the concern of the church is usually about clearance which consequently is about money. One has to do clearance before burying a loved one, do clearance before wedding and do clearance before baptism in a church you have attended from birth. Okafor (2008) laments that:

Some churches have turned wedding into a forum for making money. Some churches demand for certain fee to be paid by the would be couple before they are joined together. They demand crates of mineral, food items and meat for priests or pastors that will perform the solemnization of marriages. Special offerings are also made during wedding and the money goes to church. (p. 92).

What incentive does one receive for being a member of the Anglican Church if not to identify and sympathize with the bereaved while we rejoice and encourage those who are coming for wedding or baptism? Virtually every pastoral help one can receive from his/her priest has been monetized thereby making money to be at the center stage of many altars in the Anglican church.

Jeremiah 6:13 also calls out priests who deal falsely. Many Anglican priests today have joined some Pentecostal pastors in duping their members by selling 'back to sender oil', 'anti poison', 'special olive oil' and 'healing water' at a very high cost, which are all false dealings with the people. Diara, Onukwufor and Uroko (2020) give a detailed explanation of the activities of these priests thus:

These priests do this through seed sowing. The manipulation of the gospel is played out in several ways by these business-minded gospel preachers. People are made to believe that what brings them prosperity is not their hard work but the level of the seeds sown (Olawole 2005). While some of these preachers assure the members that these seeds are for the expansion of God's kingdom and for evangelism, they end up using them to enrich their pockets. The truth is also being twisted to suit the ears of the people so that they can be willing to bring out their

money just as was found during the days of the prophets in the Old Testament. The congregation is also deceived by way of divination where the so-called prophets make predictions for the future and make attempts to uncover the past. (p. 4).

Furthermore, Clement (2019) agrees with Diara, Onukwufor and Uroko (2020) that all this demonstration of folly is to impress the ignorant crowd, tilt their faith and pass off as a 'great servant of God'. There are other fraudulent acts some Anglican priests are involved in like stage-managing miracles, secretly obtaining people's information before coming to preach and arranging false testimonies for personal fame. Many Anglican priests invite their colleagues to preach in their church having intimated them on the need to raise money as the essence of their preaching. Some of these priests who must not fail in their given assignment on arrival resort to different kinds of abracadabra which culminates in sharing false testimonies that did not happen anywhere and even telling lies so as to collect money from people. There is a case where a priest used the names of birthday celebrants in the church's bulletin to claim special word of knowledge for those people. This is falsehood and deception in the highest order which Jeremiah frowned at. Umeanolue (2021) laments that the commercialization of religious ministry is a lamentable reality in the contemporary Nigerian society, thus: "It has reached alarming levels in the Nigerian society. In many contexts, blessings are graded according to the amount one brings" (p. 27). Thus, the flamboyant display of materialism by some Nigerian Anglican priests in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is another source of attraction for those who join the Anglican ordained ministry.

#### **Possible Ways of Tackling the Effects of Prosperity Gospel within the Anglican Priesthood**

The leadership of the Anglican church must rise to responsibility to curtail the damaging effects of prosperity gospel on the priests in particular and the Anglican Church in general. If the implications discussed above will not degenerate to having some of the parishes and churches shut down due to lack of worshippers, then an urgent approach to the devastating effects of this menace must be tackled headlong as suggested below:

##### **a. Reduction of Diocesan Quota and Levy on Churches**

There is too much financial obligation and demands from the churches. Many churches are groaning and bleeding at the same time due to heavy financial burden on them. Some complained to the bishop but were either neglected or promised reduction; while some did not for fear of being labelled lazy and consequently denied preferment. Owing to this, many churches are owing much debts to the diocese while some churches are owing their members. It is very absurd for a church to borrow money from her members or for a priest to forfeit his salaries in order to pay a diocesan quota. Asaju (2021), the bishop theologian of the Church of Nigeria and the bishop of Ilesha Anglican diocese agrees that desperation for wealth may blind leaders from seeing the suffering of the clergy and laity at the parish level, who struggle to raise funds for the church in spite of growing poverty in the land and therefore suggests that transfers should be inspired by God, not done as a punitive measure. Speaking further on the rate at which money is levied on churches in assessments, methods of fund generation and the danger these portend for the future of the church, Bishop Asaju says:

May we cast a little attention to Assessment methods of funds generation in the Anglican Church? Is it still the best practice to set targets of funds for our priests to strive to get, when we do not know what the future portends? Pastors may be forced to compromise their message as a result. Can we examine methods of other churches or devise better one ourselves, so that like the Early Church, Ministers can give their primary attention to prayer and ministry of the Word of God; not serving tables. Assessment debt and financial levies often drive many members away from the church. (p. 3).

This should be stopped, reduced or cancelled as the case may be. Dioceses should embark on investment strategies to help their priests focus on the ministry of the Word and Prayer.

##### **b. Ecclesiastical Discipline for Erring Priests**

In most cases, some of these priests that are involved in this kind of ministry usually pay a special homage to the bishop so that the bishop will have to support them. There is a case where a priest who was into all manner of abracadabra disclosed how his bishop and some senior archdeacons normally

get their share from his 'prosperity gospel ministry', this therefore made it difficult to discipline him as supposed. This is because he was partnering with the bishop that should have facilitated his disciplinary measures. Priests who are discovered to be heretical in their teachings should be disciplined according to the constitution of the Church of Nigeria. This will restore sanity and serve as a deterrent to others.

### **c. Enhancement of the Priests' Welfare**

Many priests in the Anglican church in Nigeria especially those that belong to the missionary dioceses are not paid while some who are paid are underpaid. This implies that these priests are working without any hope of survival at sight except the little support they may be getting from their congregation. In such a situation, one can be tempted to veer off the right gospel message and adopt the trending message so as to meet up with his financial obligations. It is obvious that many who switched over to prosperity gospel did so on the account of finding greener pasture. The national church of the Anglican Communion in Nigeria must as a matter of urgency review the salary scale of her priests and make an alternative plan to pay the priests in the dioceses that cannot afford their salaries. This will minimize the rate at which Anglican priests solicit their congregation for financial support. According to Umeanolue (2017):

The problem in many parts of Nigeria is that there is little official arrangement for the adequate maintenance of religious leaders and workers. This makes them to depend entirely on the goodwill of the people. In some situations, missionary groups are constrained to turn their missionary work primarily as a means of making money. This comes in different guises. If one goes on mission mainly in order to raise funds and make money, even if for the most holy of projects, there is cause for grave concern. (p. 84).

Umeanolue however advises that one has to acknowledge the fact that priests, pastors, prophets and other religious workers are entitled to adequate support for their ministry, but the ministry is never to be perceived as a business transaction. There is need to celebrate and recognize the value and the faithfulness of the pastors in small and rural churches. Those that are mission minded and have been able to engage in an overt evangelical hunt for souls should be rewarded. However, in doing so we must also recognize the financial struggles of the small church pastors and financially difficult it is for them to meet up with their financial obligations.

### **Conclusion**

Jeremiah 6:13 is a confrontational assessment of the religious leaders in the context of the Anglican ordained ministry. There are things not right with the contemporary Anglican priesthood in Nigeria vis-à-vis material pursuit of wealth for financial gain. In doing this, the task of priesthood was relegated while attention is diverted to ephemerals. Greed, avarice and lack of contentment all contributed to overemphasis on prosperity gospel which further leads to exploitation of the people and commercialization of the gospel. Prosperity gospel is not without the message of salvation as the gospel of salvation is a comprehensive package that encapsulates the prosperity gospel. The Anglican priesthood is known for sound and balanced approach in presentation of the gospel of salvation. The Anglican Church in Nigeria should return to the Evangelical Church they are known for, forfeiting the quest for wealth amassment. The Anglican priests should remain true to their calling, above all things, proclaim by word and deed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and fashion their lives in accordance with its precepts.

### **References**

- Adamo, D.T. (2021). The African background of the prosperity gospel. *Theologia Viatorum*. 45. 1. 1-10.
- Asaju, D. (2021). Contemporary challenges confronting the Church in the 21st century. Lecture delivered at the Annual Conference of Chancellors and Registrars of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), held at Basilica of Grace, Gudu, Abuja on 4th August 2021.
- Clement, T. O. (2019). John 2:13-17 and its Implications for Church Commercialisation in Nigeria. *European Journal of Educational & Social Sciences*. 4. 1. 47-54.

- Coulibaly, I. (2006). Jeremiah. In T. Adeyemo (Ed.). *Africa Bible commentary: A one-volume commentary written by 70 African scholars* (pp. 879-950). Nairobi: WordAlive.
- Cozzens, D. B. (2000). *The changing face of the priesthood: A reflection on the priest's crisis of soul*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press.
- Diara, B., Onukwufor, M. &Uroko, F. (2020). The structural advancement of religious communities and the commercialisation of the Christian religion in Nigeria. *TheologiaViatorum*. 44. 1. 1-6.
- Gbote, E.Z.M. & Kgatla, S.T. (2014). Prosperity gospel: A missiological assessment. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. 70. 1. 1-10.
- Guthrie, D. (1994). The pastoral letters. In D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Mortyer & G.J. Wenham (Eds.). *New Bible commentary* (pp. 1292-1315). England: Inter-varsity.
- Henry, M. (2008). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible*. New York: Hendrickson.
- Iorg, J. (2008). *Is God calling me?* Nashville: B & H.
- Peterson, J. (1992). Jeremiah. In M. Black and H.H. Rowley (Eds.). *Peake's commentary on the Bible* (pp. 537-562). London: Routledge.
- Nmah, P. E. (2009). *Priests and prophets: A socio-ethical reflection*. Enugu: Rabboni.
- Nwaomah, S. M. (2020). Overview of prosperity gospel. In D.K. Bediako (Ed.). *Prosperity Gospel: A biblical-theological evaluation*(pp. 3-18). Accra: Advent Press.
- Okafor, V. E. (2008). Prayer as a technique for making money: Citizenship education as a solution to this problem. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. 1. 1. 89-99.
- Osioma, B.C. (2012). *This strange gospel*.Awka: Beecem.
- Rosner, B. S. (2007). *Greed as idolatry: The origin and meaning of a Pauline metaphor*. Michigan: Grand Rapids.
- The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). (2007). *The Book of Common Prayer*. China: Nanjing Amity.
- Udechukwu, J.I. (2021). Exploring the intersectionality of culture, sacrificial offering, and exploitative prosperity gospel rhetoric in Africa. *Church, Communication and Culture*. 6. 2. 267-284.
- Umeanolue, I.L. (2017). Exegetical study of Micah 3:5-12 and the challenge of material pursuit in religious leadership in Nigeria. *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*. 20-31.