

Understanding and Responding to the Prosperity Gospel in Africa

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Because this article (5,600 words, in word) is still looking for a publisher, I cannot paste it here. Please email me at jim@vulnerablemission.com for a copy. Here is the introduction only:

The prosperity Gospel is widely considered to be plaguing the African church. For Westerners ? replacing God with money is sacrilege. Many in Africa do not seem to see the problem in the same way. African Traditional Religion is pragmatic ? to a degree that it is hard for Westerners to grasp. In Africa religion is often engaged in so as to provide wealth and healing from various ailments. To be told that to do this is wrong, can be confusing to say the least. The orientation to the understanding of a religion as a means to prosperity sets the whole course of life for holistic Africans. Religion is not a gap to be filled at the edges of science as in the West. It has always been understood to be the source of prosperity.

The lifestyle of wealthy Westerners easily becomes the religious ritual of the African (Speckman 2007:18). People attend to he who has power ? of which financial power is generally a key part. Imitation is a part of how they hope to share in such power. A poor person (unless they master other means to power that I here call ?magical?) is likely to be despised; or at best, ignored. This ?upward?? orientation of African life, is not based on rational reason (as known in the West). Hence it does not of it-self lead to socio-economic development; but to dependency. An overcoming of this orientation is vital for the future of the African people, and is here suggested can be assisted by what we are calling ?vulnerable mission?.